

AIA Los Angeles

Date: 9-9-08

A Chapter of the American Institute of Architects

Submitted in PLUM Committee

Council File No: 08-2020

Item No.: 2

Deputy: P. Latture

_____ Committee

File No: _____



September 9, 2008

Honorable Ed Reyes
Chair, Planning and Land Use Management Committee
Los Angeles City Council
200 North Spring Street, Room 410
Los Angeles, California 90012

Re: Sign Ordinance Revision (Council File 08-2020)

Dear Councilmember Reyes:

The Los Angeles Chapter of the American Institute of Architects ("AIA/LA") wishes to be on record in SUPPORT of the subject Motion made by five of your Council colleagues and seconded by you.

We also urge that the City of Los Angeles **adopt an interim control ordinance that prohibits the erection of any new off-site signs within the City of Los Angeles . . . except in "signage supplemental use" districts and "creative signage" districts already approved and adopted *before* the date the Motion was presented to the Council (on July 29, 2008).**

AIA/LA believes that, during the interim control period, the City should solicit recommendations from a panel of citizens and professionals. Those recommendations should then be utilized to debate and adopt a Citywide policy that consistently regulates off-site signs.

At present, City of Los Angeles policy with regard to off-site signage or billboards is inconsistent. Even as the City struggles to identify and regulate existing off-site signage, the City moves forward with spot-zoning type "creative signage" districts and "signage supplemental use" districts that add new off-site signs. New digital billboards raise the wrath of neighborhoods throughout the City. Taking the time to review existing policies and develop new ordinances will lead to a consistent Los Angeles approach where off-site signage is controlled and the benefits of such control accrue to the people of Los Angeles.

For example, there are at least three additional supplemental-use signage districts now being proposed in Los Angeles. On the one hand, the City seeks funds from these new billboard districts to realize important community-based projects. But, on the other hand, the off-site signage companies turn around and seek to justify overturning citywide ordinances limiting billboards by pointing to the adoption of these very districts.

In the past, Los Angeles has adopted ordinances to limit billboards along freeways. Recent agreements allow for the erection of more signage and digital billboards along these byways. Digital billboards are now the source of both safety and welfare complaints. Communities are concerned that these signs are hazardous to drivers and intrusive to residential neighborhoods. At the same time there is little understanding regarding just how much revenue such off-site signs generate to their owners and how much funding and consequent benefits the

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City should fairly realize from these signs. **The City is allowing the use of its visual bandwidth without understanding how much that bandwidth is worth.**

Because more off-site signs and sign districts are being proposed every day; because there are serious questions about traffic safety associated with digital billboards; because digital billboards are brighter and more intrusive at night than some policy makes may have anticipated; because the City may not realize maximum revenue value from new or existing billboards; because it is a long term City objective to reduce the number of billboards; because some of Los Angeles' most precious assets are its scenery and viewscapes; because visual blight contributes to economic blight; and because AIA/LA knows that other cities do successfully limit and/or prohibit billboards and off-site signs, AIA/LA believes that:

Now is the time to pause.

Now is the time to consider what citywide signage policies make sense.

Now is the time to develop new ordinances that both reflect community values and beautify Los Angeles to the benefit of all who are attracted to live, work and visit this City.

AIA/LA believes that the City will can create the needed period of time to study, debate and determine new approaches to this issue . . . simply by adopting an interim control ordinance that prohibits the erection of new billboards.

As noted above, AIA/LA recommends that the City establish a citizen and professional study group to make recommendations with regard to off-site signage policies. AIA/LA further recommends that this group be staffed by the Department of City Planning and other City departments as appropriate in order to facilitate supportable recommendations that can be considered for adoption by the City Council.

AIA/LA stands ready to lend its expertise and assistance, and the expertise of its members, to such a study group and in subsequently working to implement the group's recommendations.

Very truly yours,



Martha Welborne, FAIA
President
AIA Los Angeles

cc: Members, City Council
Directors, AIA/LA
S. Gail Goldberg, AICP,
Director of Planning