

Craig Lawson & Co., LLC
Land Use Consultants

December 5, 2011

Honorable Ed P. Reyes
Councilmember, First District
Chair, Planning and Land Use Management Committee
200 North Spring Street, Room 410
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Date: 12/5/11
Submitted in PLUM Committee
Council File No: 08-2020, 11-1705
Item No.: 1
Deputy: Comer from Public

RE: Council File No. 08-2020; 11-1705
PLUM Committee Special Hearing: December 5, 2011
Proposed Ordinance Revising the Citywide Sign Regulations

Dear Chairman Reyes and Members of the PLUM Committee:

I am writing as a representative of the property owners who have applied for the Figueroa and Olympic Signage Supplemental Use District ("Figueroa & Olympic Sign District"), which encompasses the city block bounded by Figueroa Street, Olympic Boulevard, Flower Street, and 9th Street in downtown Los Angeles, across the street from LA Live. As you may know, the Figueroa & Olympic Sign District was applied for and accepted by the L.A. City Planning Department for consideration in February of 2007, and was approved by the L.A. City Planning Commission on December 11, 2008. It was recommended for approval by your Committee on February 10, 2009, and the final draft of the ordinance is expected to return to your Committee (for the second time) in the near future.

As you consider the Proposed Citywide Sign Ordinance, please be aware that Staff continues to propose a significant change to the Sign District "Grandfathering" Provisions which will affect all pending Sign Districts, including the pending Figueroa and Olympic Sign District. This change, which can be found in Section 14 of the Proposed Citywide Sign Ordinance (see Page 49, under "Initiated or Applied for Sign Districts"), as attached to the City Planning Department's November 21, 2011 report, would:

1. Require pending Sign Districts to make two additional findings supported by Sign Reduction and/or Community Benefits Program, originating out of the legal decision in *World Wide Rush v. City of Los Angeles*, and
2. Require applicants for pending Sign Districts to pay the current application fee for Supplemental Use Districts.

Both of these requirements are onerous and would severely impact the Figueroa and Olympic Sign District proposal, which is one of the only two Sign District proposals the City Planning Commission approved for grandfathering more than two years ago.

Sign Reduction

We support the "Grandfathering" Provisions of the Proposed Citywide Sign Ordinance as well as the concept of requiring Sign Reduction and/or Community Benefits in order to make the required findings. In fact, the pending Figueroa & Olympic Sign District satisfies both the Sign Reduction

requirement and the alternative Community Benefits requirement. Over 18,000 square feet of previously existing, legally-permitted off-site signage has already been removed from the properties within the proposed Figueroa & Olympic Sign District (in connection with the development of the property within the proposed Sign District), and the new proposed signage will result in a net reduction of signage as compared to the signs previously existing on the property. In addition, the property owners have provided a number of Community Benefits in connection with the recent, pending, and proposed developments within the proposed Figueroa & Olympic Sign District.

However, we are very concerned with the recommended language in the Proposed Citywide Sign Ordinance, as currently written, as it would be in conflict with the provisions of the pending Figueroa and Olympic Sign District Ordinance. For example, the Citywide Sign Ordinance would require that the Sign Reduction requirement “only be met through the demolition of existing, legally permitted off-site signs, including nonconforming off-site signs, in existence as of the effective date of the ordinance establishing the Sign District.” (Emphasis added; see Section 13.11.C.1.d. on Page 6 of the Proposed Citywide Sign Ordinance, under “Sign Reduction and Community Benefits”). As mentioned above, the legally permitted off-site signs which previously existed on the proposed Figueroa & Olympic Sign District property have already been removed. While the existence of these signs was fully documented through photographic evidence prior to their removal, all signs have been removed from the site to make room for the new buildings that have been developed on the site in recent years (construction began in 2005). Efforts to gain approval of the Figueroa & Olympic Sign District preceded this construction, and the developments were designed to include the proposed signage. It has always been the intent for the Figueroa & Olympic Sign District to receive credit for these signs that have been removed.

It is important to take into account that although this signage has already been removed from the Figueroa & Olympic Sign District property, the removal of the signs, together with the Community Benefits provided, meets the intent of these findings. The intent of the findings is to show evidence that signage impacts on aesthetics and traffic safety have been counterbalanced by improvements in terms of aesthetics, blight reduction, or traffic safety. Not allowing these signs to qualify for the required Sign Reduction Credit, simply because they no longer “exist”, would be unfair and would create an unforeseen hardship for the property owners.

Therefore, we respectfully request that the language in proposed Section 13.11.C.1.d. on Page 6 of the Proposed Citywide Sign Ordinance be amended with the addition of the following language at the end of this Section for your consideration:

d. However, the sign reduction requirement established by this subsection may also be met through photographic and/or other documented evidence verifying that legally permitted off-site signs previously existed on, and have already been removed from, the property on which the Sign District shall be established.

We feel that the above language would capture the uniqueness of the Figueroa & Olympic Sign District without exempting it altogether from the Sign Reduction requirement.

Furthermore, the sign reduction credits procedures, added by Staff under Section 13.11.C.1.c on Page 5 of the Proposed Citywide Sign Ordinance, would also be in conflict with the procedures identified in the pending Figueroa and Olympic Sign District Ordinance. We request that the Figueroa and Olympic Sign District Ordinance be exempt from the sign reduction credit procedures of the Proposed Citywide Sign Ordinance to ensure consistency between the two ordinances.

Application Fee

We also urge you to remove the requirement for pending Sign Districts to pay the current Supplemental Use District application fee, as proposed by Staff in Section 14 on Page 49 of the Proposed Citywide Sign Ordinance. The current application fee for SUD's is \$119,676, plus City surcharges (per LAMC Section 19.01.A). It is unfair and burdensome for a Sign District application that was submitted more than 4 years ago to retroactively have to pay a fee of this magnitude being imposed after the fact.

Indeed, the Figueroa and Olympic Sign District is a unique District that has been pending since 2007. It is a Sign District the City Planning Commission approved before the revision of the Citywide Sign Ordinance commenced, and, again, is one of only two Sign Districts the City Planning Commission approved for grandfathering against the Citywide Sign Ordinance Revision in 2009. Therefore, it should be set apart from other pending Sign Districts.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments. We urge your Committee to postpone any action on the Proposed Citywide Sign Ordinance to allow Staff more time to resolve this concern and other concerns with the proposed Ordinance in general.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Craig Lawson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "L".

Craig Lawson, President

cc. Honorable Jose Huizar, Council District 14
Honorable Paul Krekorian, Council District 2
Marie Rumsey, Office of Councilmember Jan Perry, Council District 9
Sharon Gin, Office of the City Clerk
Alan Bell, Department of City Planning
Daisy Mo, Department of City Planning