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June 18, 2015

Council of the City of Los Angeles
Planning and Land Use Management Committee
200 North Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: **Proposed Ordinance Revising the Citywide Sign Regulations
Council Files 08-2020, 11-0724, 11-1705, 12-1611**

Honorable Members of the Planning and Land Use Management (PLUM) Committee:

This report responds to the instructions the PLUM Committee made at its meeting of December 16, 2014. In consultation with the City Attorney and the Department of Building and Safety, the Planning Department has revised the sign ordinance that the City Attorney transmitted to Council on October 17, 2013. In addition, the Department has drafted responses to various report back items requested by PLUM.

Before Council can adopt any land use ordinance, Charter Section 558 (b) (2) requires that the City Planning Commission (CPC) first consider the matter. Due to this requirement, two versions of the sign ordinance have been drafted. Version A includes provisions that PLUM requested, but that the CPC did not consider as part of its action of March 26, 2009. Version B only includes provisions that the CPC originally considered. In order for Council to adopt Version A, a further report and recommendation from the CPC is required. Council may adopt Version B without further report or recommendation from the CPC.

Versions A and B

Both Versions A and B include new language responsive to the following amendments that PLUM requested:

Signage takedown ratio. The existing language concerning provision of community benefits when a Tier 1 Sign District is approved has been revised. Community benefits are still required, but may not substitute for any portion of the required takedown of existing off-site signs. In addition, the takedown ratio for new off-site signs with a digital display is now double that of new, static off-site signs. For static off-site signs, more than one square foot of existing off-site signage must be taken down for every one square foot of new static off-site signage. For off-site signs with a digital display, more than two square feet of existing off-site signage must be taken down for every one square foot of new off-site signage with a digital display.

On-site signs with a digital display. On-site signs with a digital display are prohibited citywide, unless specifically permitted as part of a Tier 1 or Tier 2 sign district, other supplemental use district, or specific plan. The citywide sign regulations currently allow any on-site sign to include a digital display.

Arenas and stadiums. The Council may establish a Tier 1 sign district for any arena or stadium citywide that has a minimum seating capacity of 20,000 regardless of its underlying zone. The current draft stipulates a 50,000 seat minimum.

Access and on-site signage. New language has been added clarifying the intent of the City's ban on new off-site signs. Signage on one lot advertising a business on the immediately adjoining lot is still considered on-site, subject to certain restrictions enforced by the Department of Building and Safety.

Sign District Grandfathering. The grandfathering date for initiated or applied for sign districts has been updated from December 6, 2011, to December 16, 2014. Grandfathered sign districts are not required to comply with the new size and locational restrictions. However, they would still have to comply with the new takedown and community benefits requirements.

Version A Only

The following regulations are included in Version A (but not B) since the CPC had not previously considered them. In order for Council to adopt Version A, the CPC must first weigh in.

On-site relocation. The City's current ban on new off-site signage also applies to alterations of existing off-site signs. As such, relocating an existing sign from one spot to another spot on the same lot is prohibited. The sign's nonconforming rights are lost. Version A includes regulations granting the Zoning Administrator authority to approve on-site relocation.

Amnesty for existing off-site signs. The Department's report to PLUM dated March 4, 2014 included recommendations on how to treat a limited number of existing off-site signs that either (a) have no permit; or (b) have a permit, but do not comply with all of its requirements. PLUM directed staff to grandfather both groups of signs by granting them all legal conforming status. Such action shields these signs from enforcement action including assessment of heightened civil penalties. Amnesty only applies to the signs listed in either Exhibit A or B, as included in the Council File.

Historic façade sign adjustments. The sign adjustment procedure has been expanded to provide the Director of Planning with the authority to adjust a limited number of design standards regulating digital display signs on historic facades. The new procedure only applies to sign districts established prior to the date the new citywide sign regulations will take effect.

Pre-1986 mural signs. The City granted permits for a specified number of mural signs painted by noted muralist Barry Blue as part of the 1984 Summer Olympics. The permits require hand-painting. A new regulation included in Version A permits vinyl installations so long as all other provisions of the pre-1986 permits are adhered to, and only for the mural signs listed in Exhibit C, as included in the Council File.

Other Requested Amendments

The PLUM committee requested the Department to draft “reasonable sign adjustment” procedures. Section 14.4.22 of the current sign ordinance draft includes sign adjustment procedures that in the Department’s view are reasonable.

Pursuant to a letter from Councilmember Mitch O’Farrell, PLUM requested an amendment to allow solid panel rooftop digital signs through a sign adjustment procedure. The procedure would apply to the existing Hollywood Sign District, which currently prohibits solid panel rooftop digital signs. An adjustment is not an appropriate mechanism for permitting a banned sign type. Adjustments are intended to allow a decision-maker to vary design, size and area standards for permitted sign types. If the Council wishes to reverse policy and allow solid panel rooftop digital signs, then this should be done legislatively by amending the Hollywood Sign District.

Report Back on Other Items

The PLUM committee requested a report back on the Department’s letter of October 10, 2013 on three policy options relative to digital off-site signs: (1) a continuation of the current regulatory system; (2) a public option; and (3) a public/private option. PLUM expressed its preference for the third option and also requested additional study items, including relocation agreements, a conditional use permit, standards and conditions, takedown requirements, community benefits, a citywide cap, and locational restrictions which are contained in a related CLA/Planning Department report dated June 18, 2015.

The Department had previously requested full funding of a Sign Unit to carry out future revisions to the citywide sign regulations. Our budget currently includes position authorities for new staff but no funding except for \$400,000 in contractual services. To carry out this work program an estimated two to three years, plus full funding for the Sign Unit, is necessary.

For further information please contact me at (213) 978-1271 or Tom Rothmann of my staff at (213) 978-1891

Sincerely,



Michael J. LoGrande
Director of Planning