

San Jose Sign Code Update  
Series IV Meeting Notes  
July 8, 2009

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***Sign Industry Focus Group***

***7/8/09; 10:30***

***4 attendees (1 sign designer and 3 billboard industry representatives)***

**STATIC BILLBOARDS**

Strategy 1 – Current regulations	0
Strategy 2 – Large on-site advertising in central area of downtown core	0
Strategy 3 – Billboards in central area of downtown core	1
Strategy 4 – Billboards in central area of downtown core + SR-87 in downtown core	3

- If the overall goal is to maintain the number of billboards, strategy 4 may help that.
- Promoting the airport is an important thing along 87.
- I picked 3 because it's kind of the closest, but I would rather see billboards along 87, but not in the downtown corridor, so I would pick option "5". I would limit them in the downtown core and limit specific placement – how many you can see at the same time. I'd rather not see a McDonald's ad, but some ads about an event in the downtown. My strategy really isn't on here.
- I think what would happen under number 4 is that the City would get the most bang for its buck – We'd choose to be on 87 versus downtown where there is a tree canopy. *Would you locate new billboards Downtown if there were no trees?* No; there's not enough traffic. Over time, we'd relocate our signs to more valuable freeway locations and the City would be able to do what it wants to do with the downtown.
- Most of the freeways here in San Jose are landscaped, so the opportunity to build along the freeways is extremely difficult. I'd like to expand billboards along 87 and other freeways in San Jose. You're limiting the opportunities to remove billboards from surface streets and putting them onto the freeways because you're only allowing them on 87.

**PROGRAMMABLE ELECTRONIC BILLBOARDS (LED)**

Strategy 1 – current prohibition	0
Strategy 2 – central area; on-site messages only	0
Strategy 3 – central area; on- and off-site messages	1
Strategy 4 – central area + along SR-87	3

- I'd like option 5 again – limitations in the core and if any, along SR87. I don't want to see the core area get cluttered, that's my concern.
- I would add to the potential height. You may come up with three potential sites along 87, but some spots are elevated, so 50 feet maximum elevation may not work. Bottom of billboard should be about 15' above the freeway. You may need 55' or 60'.
- Has anyone looked at an area map, or done some research along 87? On the west side, there is proximity to residential. Are there industrial parks – there is some residential and mostly commercial? There needs to be suitable properties for us to relocate to.

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- We have to work within the state regulations, too, and if you deal with all the requirements, you may find only 3 locations that you can put up a sign. On an elevated freeway, you're already at a minimum 55' from the street level to top of the sign.
- Are we interpreting this correctly that the City would like to offer flexibility in its code? *We don't know yet what the City Council will decide. We're getting feedback from the public on the available options.*
- It's not like 20 signs are going to pop up all over the place.
- Maybe you can say that if it's an elevated freeway, you can write it into the regulations that allow for this. Make the limit from the top of the freeway, not from street level.
- You can always cap it, as well. There's a west Sacramento hotel association sign, where 50/80 meet. It's really tall; overall the height of the sign has got to be 70 or 80 feet and viewable from a flyover. But because it is near a railroad or industrial, it doesn't bother anyone. In San Jose, there may be similar spots where we can do this, but because of this height limitation, we can't put a sign up there.
- You are not going to see the center of downtown with giant signs – it's not practical. The amount of money that a sign like that would generate, versus the cost of the structure, it doesn't make economic sense.
- Our inventory of LED signs – other than in Los Angeles where there is huge amount of traffic – all of these types of signs are along freeways.
- The arena is a good example – if there was a retail development or something – that type of thing would attract some bigger retailers and allow them to advertise. One of the key components – pedestrian, but there is a center corner that has some electronic signage. It attracts people in to the area. Glendale has a sports complex with this type of signage. You can restrict it to retail development or re-development. I would be careful about completely prohibiting it because you may be passing up a huge retail opportunity.
- You can do a downtown sign district.
- Instead of thinking of strategies like electronic signage to make the downtown area vibrant, I'd be thinking of things like making it more pedestrian. LED signage is not the way to make downtown more vibrant – more upper scale and artsy signs, that make it seem more like a destination like an art colony. It would hopefully pull in small retail shops – higher end shops – and maybe at some point, we could have some digital signage that could talk about downtown.
- Does Santana Row have some exemptions? *They have similar signage regulations as the Downtown.*

PROGRAMMABLE ELECTRONIC SIGNS

Strategy 1 – Current regulations	1
Strategy 2 – Assembly uses	1
Strategy 3 – Major commercial streets	1
Strategy 4 – Large occupancy frontages in downtown	1

- Soccer stadium signage – off-site advertising? It doesn't make sense unless it is facing a freeway.
- It would also depend upon how many events are taking place.
- The value of Oracle, is that it's along 880.
- There may be a market for a static billboard. Electronic signs are very expensive.
- It's not fair to focus signage on only large occupancy frontages – that isn't fair to smaller businesses – it is useful to smaller businesses like a theater, restaurants, etc. That seems very restrictive to me; it seems like only a bigger tenant that could use this.

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- *We haven't seen a lot of examples of attached digital signs. I'm thinking of a few in SF, like UPS has one next to 101 and they have a programmable sign. They're not really large, but you don't see them oriented towards surface streets. I don't know if that has to do with expense factor or local regulations. The ones I'm thinking of specifically are more for the entertainment industry.*
- I think that is where they are the most useful – a theater or a school that has an activity coming up – just a business or a shop is not going to want to spend the money to advertise this way. It wouldn't make sense cost-wise.
- If you have this in shops, it can look really bad. I would limit this to informational, service-oriented uses, rather than ever shop that has one.
- I don't like to see signs other than on major commercial streets. There are a couple of major commercial streets in San Jose that are blighted – if you get on West San Carlos, it's auto dealer, auto repair shops – they all have different signs going on. But they do need to identify themselves, so that's why I chose strategy 3. If I could vote again, I'd vote for strategy 2 – assembly uses only.
- *Would Steven's Creek come up under strategy 3? The City Council raised the minimums on Steven's Creek from 150 to 200 square feet and increased the height to 40 feet, but did not approve electronic digital signage because we hadn't done outreach for that. If we do allow digital signs for Steven's Creek, it would mean that they would need to be allowed on all wide commercial streets in San Jose.*

SHOPPING CENTER FREEWAY SIGNS

Strategy 1 – current regulations	1
Strategy 2 – Static freeway signs	1
Strategy 3 – Programmable electronic signs	2

- I would choose strategy 2 – if it is a shopping center, that would be where you'd want a sign. Most shopping centers already have a lot of signage.
- What is your definition of on-site?
- I would suggest a CUP for those signs that expire and pretty strict planning commission guidelines for these. I don't know what is happening with those signs, but some of them are so dated and so ugly. If some of the tenants are going out of business, a conditional use permit would be helpful. The pylon signs aren't probably very expensive, but putting some restrictions if a tenant goes out of business may be a good thing to do.

SUPERGRAPHICS IN THE DOWNTOWN

Strategy 1 – Current regulations	0
Strategy 2 – Supergraphics as temporary on-site signs	1
Strategy 3 – Supergraphics as permanent changeable on- or off-site advertising	3

- I would limit this to smaller than 80% of a building's surface. How many can you see at the same time – maybe separation requirements, so that you're not just seeing every single building has one. Maybe this is a moot point, but I think we need to address that there may be 3 or 4 that you can see from one spot and I wouldn't like that.