

State Permit Requirements for Billboards

Any off-site advertising display (“billboard”) located within 660 feet of any California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) right-of-way is required to obtain an ODA permit from the Caltrans. The site criteria includes, but is not limited to:

- Must be located on a property zoned for either commercial or industrial use;
- Must be located outside of any stream or drainage channel;
- Must be located within 1,000 feet from existing commercial/retail activity on either side of the freeway;
- Must have written permission from the current property owner to place the sign at the desired location;
- Must not be located adjacent to a designated Scenic Highway or a Classified Landscaped Freeway; and
- Must have local approval, including any local zoning approval and necessary building permits.

A freeway segment is considered a Classified Landscaped Freeway if any portion is, or may be, landscaped with ornamental vegetation such as trees, lawns, shrubs, or other planting designed to improve the appearance of the freeway. In the City, approximately 85% of the freeways are designated Classified Landscaped Freeways. Classified Landscaped Freeway segments may be declassified, thereby making the segment eligible for an ODA permit, if certain criteria are met, including but not limited to:

- Caltrans does not maintain or plan to maintain the ornamental landscaping;
- The landscaping does not require reasonable maintenance (including watering, mowing, weed control or litter removal);
- The Classified Landscaped Freeway segment is less than 1,000 feet long; or
- The Classified Landscaped Freeway segment has gaps in landscaping larger than 200 feet.

Billboard Proposal

In 2025, a national outdoor advertising company, Lamar Advertising (Lamar), submitted an unsolicited proposal to relocate and replace various billboards throughout the City. The proposal is currently prohibited by the City’s existing billboard policy because the policy does not authorize applicant-initiated billboard relocation requests, and the existing billboards are located on non-County annexed parcels. As such, the proposal may not advance unless a Zoning Code Text Amendment is processed.

DISCUSSION:

City Billboard Policy

The City’s existing billboard policy is implemented through Riverside Municipal Code (RMC) Chapter 19.623 – Billboard Signs. The municipal code prohibits the construction of any new billboard throughout the City; those billboards which are legal non-conforming may continue to operate. In limited circumstances, existing billboards may be modified to modernize, but the modification of an existing billboard does not permit digital or electronic displays, and the signs must be located on the same property.

Chapter 19.623 provides a mechanism for the relocation of certain billboards through a Billboard Relocation Agreement. The billboard relocation provisions apply narrowly only to those billboards on parcels which were approved by Riverside County, and then subsequently annexed into the City. This means that other non-County annexed billboards which are legal non-conforming are not eligible for relocation. Additionally, any billboard relocation must be initiated by the City and be located on the same parcel to the same size, type and provide an aesthetic improvement. Digital billboards are also prohibited. Relocation Agreements are reviewed administratively and approved by the Community and Economic Development Department Director or designee. A billboard relocation agreement has not been processed within the last 15 years.

The current billboard policy is effective at prohibiting the construction of any new billboards, including those signs which are otherwise well suited for a different location in the City. The limitation imposed by the current ordinance is that the narrow application of the relocation provisions limits which billboards are eligible for relocation and prevents the replacement or modernization of billboards in exchange for potential takedown or other public benefit factors. There is limited flexibility with the current policy.

Table 1 below outlines the City’s current relocation requirements.

TABLE 1 - CITY BILLBOARD RELOCATION REQUIREMENTS (RMC 19.623.030)	
<i>Legally Permitted</i>	The billboard was originally permitted by Riverside County or had legal non-conforming status.
<i>Annexation</i>	The land where the billboard sits was later annexed into the City.
<i>City-Initiated Request</i>	The City is requiring or requesting the billboard to be relocated.
<i>Located on Same Property</i>	The billboard will stay on the same parcel or property.
<i>No Size Increase</i>	The new billboard must be the same size and shape as the original. There is no increase in area, height, width, number of faces, etc.
<i>Aesthetic Improvement</i>	The relocated billboard will constitute an aesthetic improvement compared to the original.
<i>Similar Lighting</i>	Lighting must match or be similar to the original. No digital displays or moving images are allowed (dynamic signage).
<i>Applicant Responsibility</i>	The billboard owner or applicant must cover all costs for the relocation. Any new structure must meet the current building and safety code.

Proposed Amendments

The following is a summary of the proposed changes organized by chapter.

CHAPTER 19.623 – BILLBOARD SIGNS

Chapter 19.623 is amended to authorize both City-initiated and Applicant-initiated billboard relocation, replacement, or modernization requests subject to Billboard Relocation Agreement between a billboard owner/operator and the City. New language clarifies that the City Council is the sole authority to approve or deny any Billboard Relocation Agreement. The City Council also has sole discretion to negotiate the terms of the agreement.

The negotiated terms of the agreement may specify the dimensions and type of billboard sign including if the new sign may be static, digital, single-sided, double-sided, freeway-oriented or along major arterials or regional gateways as denoted by the General Plan. Billboard Relocation Agreements may also specify minimum “takedown” ratios where billboard operators are required to remove a certain number of existing billboards in exchange for permission to install new ones, although this term and its specifics would also be negotiable at the discretion of the Council.

The City Council may also negotiate public benefit provisions which may encompass site improvements, public art installations, street or infrastructure improvements, public messaging allowances, annual fees, revenue-sharing mechanisms, or other measures that generate community or fiscal benefit.

Chapter 19.623 is also amended to outline eligibility criteria and a process for the issuance of a Billboard Relocation Permit. A permit may be issued once a Billboard Relocation Agreement has been approved by the City Council.

CHAPTER 19.650 – APPROVING AND APPEAL AUTHORITY

Table 19.650.020 (Approving and Appeal Authority) outlines the approving and appeal authorities for various discretionary and administrative actions. The current table does not provide an approving and appeal authority for a Billboard Relocation Permit. With the proposed amendments the table is amended to incorporate the Community and Economic Development Director as the approving authority for the issuance of a Billboard Relocation Permit once a Billboard Relocation Agreement has been approved. The City Council shall serve as the final approving authority on appeal.

PUBLIC OUTREACH AND COMMENT:

Notice was published in the Press Enterprise on March 11, 2026. As of the writing of this report, Staff has not received public comments regarding this project.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with this report.

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Attachments:

1. Proposed Ordinance
2. ALUC Letter of Consistency
3. Presentation