



City of Arts & Innovation

Economic Development Committee

TO: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS **DATE: JANUARY 22, 2026**

**FROM: COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
DEPARTMENT** **WARDS: ALL**

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF REGULATIONS PERTAINING TO BILLBOARDS

ISSUE:

Review existing policy pertaining to off-site advertising regulations (billboards) and provide staff with policy direction on potential changes to relocation and removal requirements of existing billboard signs.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Economic Development Committee provide staff with policy direction on potential changes to relocation and removal requirements for existing billboard signs.

BACKGROUND:

Outdoor advertising displays which are visible from the National Highway System (NHS) are regulated per the Federal Highway Beautification Act of 1965 (FHBA). The FHBA aims to enhance the visual quality of highways by controlling outdoor advertising and supporting the scenic development and beautification of roadway corridors. In California, the FHBA is implemented through the Outdoor Advertising Act of 1933 (ODA), codified in the California Business and Professions Code (Sections 5200 et seq.). The ODA governs the placement and regulation of advertising signs along state-designated freeways.

State Permit Requirements for Billboards

Any off-site advertising display ("billboard") located within 650 feet of any Caltrans right-of-way is required to obtain an ODA permit from the California Department of Transportation (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.

City of Riverside Billboard Regulations

Prior to 2005, off-site advertising signs were permitted in the C-3 (General Commercial) and M-2 (Industrial) Zones, subject to location and development standards. After 2005, billboard signs were prohibited as set forth in Chapter 19.623 of the Zoning Code to reduce their visual and aesthetic impacts on the cityscape. In 2007, the City adopted the 2025 General Plan which reclassified the C-3 and M-2 zoning designations to Commercial General (CG) and General Industrial (I), respectively.

Chapter 19.623 permits the relocation of only those billboards which were legally permitted by Riverside County and then subsequently annexed into the City through a Relocation Agreement. Relocation Agreements are reviewed administratively and approved by the Community & Economic Development Department Director or designee. All other billboards not annexed into the City, including those which are considered to be legal nonconforming, are ineligible for relocation. Relocated billboards are subject to the ODA and Title 19 requirements as described in Table 1 below. A billboard relocation agreement has not been initiated in at least 15 years.

TABLE 1 - CITY BILLBOARD RELOCATION REQUIREMENTS	
<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.

The City Council may modify the City's billboard ordinance including amending the requirements for allowing new billboard signs and for the replacement and relocation of existing billboards.

Billboard Proposal

A national outdoor advertising company has submitted an unsolicited proposal to relocate and replace existing billboards within the City. The proposal would remove 10 static billboard signs currently located along major arterial streets, including Van Buren Boulevard, Madison Street, and Main Street. In exchange, the company proposes to install 10 new electronic, double-sided billboard signs: 5 freeway-oriented signs along the I-215, SR-91, and SR-60 freeways, and 5 signs along major arterial streets, including Van Buren Boulevard, Tyler Street, Magnolia Avenue, Indiana Avenue, and 14th Street. The existing billboards are not located on properties that were originally annexed from Riverside County. The proposal entails a one-time payment of \$600,000 and estimated annual revenue of \$2,500,000.

DISCUSSION:

Under the existing regulatory framework, only the City may initiate a billboard relocation, with specific terms and conditions to be established through a Billboard Relocation Agreement. The City's current billboard regulations do not permit applicant-initiated relocation requests nor allow for the relocation of billboard signs that were not originally annexed from Riverside County. Additionally, any billboard relocation must occur on the same parcel as the existing sign. As a result, even if a more suitable alternative site is identified, relocation to that site is precluded by the current ordinance and policy provisions.

To advance the unsolicited proposal, a Zoning Code Text Amendment is required pursuant to Chapter 19.810 (Zoning Code Text/Map Amendment) to modify the relocation and removal provisions contained in Chapter 19.623.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS: TITLE 19 (Zoning Code)

City staff have prepared draft text amendments to Chapter 19.623 and Chapter 19.650 that would implement the following changes:

- 1) Authorize City-initiated and Applicant-initiated billboard relocation requests subject to Billboard Relocation Agreement between a billboard owner/operator and the City; and
- 2) Establish the City Council as the sole authority for the negotiation of the terms set forth in Billboard Relocation Agreements; and
- 3) Clarify that the City Council is the final approving authority for Billboard Relocation Agreements.

As part of a Billboard Relocation Agreement, the following terms and conditions may be negotiated:

- Size and Type of Signs
 - 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.
- Public Benefits
 - The terms of the agreement may also include public benefit provisions, which could 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.

Next Steps

Staff will advance draft text amendments to Title 19 (Zoning Code) in accordance with the Committee's direction and will coordinate the preparation of a Billboard Relocation Agreement template as directed by the Committee. If directed, staff can return to the Committee or proceed to the City Planning Commission with draft ordinance language, supporting analysis, and recommendations for review and direction.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact related to receiving this report.

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Certified as to

availability of funds: Julie Nemes, Interim Finance Director

Approved by: Mike Futrell, City Manager

Approved as to form: Rebecca McKee-Reimbold, Interim City Attorney

Attachments:

1. Caltrans Outdoor Advertising Act Overview
2. Proposed Redlines to Chapter 19.623 – Billboards
3. Proposed Redlines to Chapter 19.650 – Approving and Appeal Authority
4. Presentation