



Memorandum

To: CITY COUNCIL

From: Mayor Sam Liccardo

Subject: SEE BELOW

Date: September 21, 2018

Approved:

9/21/2018

SUBJECT: AMENDMENT TO THE GENERAL PLAN LAND USE POLICY CD-10.4, CITY COUNCIL POLICY 6-4, AND TITLE 23 OF THE SAN JOSÉ MUNICIPAL CODE (THE SIGN CODE)

RECOMMENDATION

Approve the Planning Commission's recommendation – outlined as Policy Alternative #1 in the staff report – which would:

1. Allow the City to move forward with Phase 1, calling for a limited implementation of billboards on the pre-defined City-owned properties in and around the Downtown and Airport.
2. Maintain the current prohibition of billboards on freeways, grand boulevards, and gateway locations on non-city-owned sites, and away from other residential areas.

Decline to move forward with any costly and time-consuming Phase 2 analysis (which would study expanding signage to non-City-owned sites throughout San Jose) until we have heard sufficient feedback from our neighborhoods and community, and we have fully evaluated the results of Phase 1.

BACKGROUND

For several years, the City has been evaluating opportunities to modernize our sign code in ways that will better reflect our growing city and urban environment. I have embraced such opportunities where they involve on-site advertising or designation of a business by the business owner.

A very different analysis, however, arises with billboards located off-site from the advertiser's place of business. While we should consider how we might increase commercial vibrancy, bring in additional revenue to the City, and relocate some existing billboards in undesirable locations in our community, we should do so cautiously.

Like the Planning Commission, I recommend taking a careful approach to allowing new electronic billboards in San José by limiting this new signage to 17 City-owned properties that are all located in, or near, Downtown and our Airport. These locations have the greatest opportunity to advance our collective desire for a more vibrant city center, and will provide a relatively constrained environment—in the places where people expect to see commercial advertising—to evaluate our new policies.

I caution the Council against moving too quickly to add additional signage at other non-city owned locations. The City Council had good reason for halting commercial billboards in 1985, when out-of-control proliferations of billboards had created significant negative impacts to the aesthetic appearance of our neighborhoods. We must be careful to avoid the mistakes of the past, and consider its lessons.

We cannot simply remove billboards once a property owner has obtained the right to erect them—they remain for years, and generations. Diving into Phase 2 work prior to understanding the impacts of Phase 1 will create serious unintended consequences that could prove difficult to unravel.

Equally important, we have many high-priority tasks for the Office of Economic Development and the Planning Department, particularly as we consider the imperative to identify housing opportunity sites in North San Jose and Downtown, resolve the issues surrounding the planned Google campus, and other high-priority needs.

Let's walk before we run, and understand how our actions are impacting our residents, our neighborhoods, and cityscape. Most importantly, let's clearly convey that our neighborhoods are not for sale.