



Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND
CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Councilmember Raul Perez

SUBJECT: ELECTRONIC BILLBOARDS **DATE:** February 23, 2021
PRIORITY ITEM

Approved:

Date: 02/23/21

RECOMMENDATION

Direct the City Manager to completely halt Phase 2 of the Electronic Billboard Policy priority item and remove it from the 2020-2021 City Roadmap of projects slated for completion by June 2021.

BACKGROUND

In 2015, discussions began regarding updating our sign code relating to Electronic Billboards. The discussion provided considerations for new revenue opportunities, digital technologies that could allow for real time emergency notifications, and most importantly was an opportunity to potentially remove hundreds of blighted static billboards. Billboard companies have legal rights that protect them from being forced to take down pre-existing billboards but throughout the country we have seen them willingly partner with local jurisdictions to swap out their existing blighted billboards in exchange for erecting new digital billboards.

I have seen these exchanges benefit large and small cities, including many of our neighboring cities like Santa Clara, Oakland and Daly City. Additionally, I heard positive feedback from our city staff after a 2015 Denver Study Trip. I submitted a memorandum to initiate this work and during the December 2015 Priority Setting process, the City Council voted to prioritize the Electronic Billboard work. At that same meeting the proposed Downtown Sign Intensification Update was not prioritized by the Council. At the direction of the Mayor and in opposition to the decision at priority setting, the Downtown Sign Intensification work was folded into the overall sign code update when it was added into the 2016 Mayor's Budget Message. Today, our city staff have been working on both items all under the policy work entitled Electronic Billboard Policy.

In 2018, the City Council approved the policy framework for Phase 1 of this policy work and directed staff to commence the procurement process for implementation. City Staff had actually completed the Request for Proposal (RFP) process by early 2020 but encountered technical protests which along with the pandemic, caused further delays. Per the staff supplemental, the RFP process is nearing completion for awardee

recommendations and I recommend we conclude that process and leave the work from Phase 1 unaltered.

DISCUSSION

In the past year, I have met with residents and environmental advocates regarding the recent Phase 2 policy work. I have listened intently to their concerns about the impacts that the current Phase 2 policy work may have on our city. As promised, I took their feedback into consideration as I did my due diligence to reevaluate the work on this matter, weighing it against the many other priorities the city has in light of COVID-19. While I appreciate that the administration has indicated the work is slated for completion by the end of the fiscal year, in my conversations with Planning Staff just over a week ago, I understand there is still a significant amount of work left to do in Phase 2.

I, like the Mayor and my council colleagues, am charged to explore policies that could potentially enhance our City. My original intent was to do just that as I saw this as an opportunity to generate new revenues and improve the quality of life for some of our poorest neighborhoods who live with the status quo of blighted paper billboards. However, in light of the current realities of the pandemic and in respect of the thoughtful feedback from our community, I concur that we must reconsider any further attention to this work at this time. We would never have imagined over a year ago that our City would be in the trenches fighting for survival through a global health pandemic, but that is our reality today and we need to readjust our staff efforts and energies. As many of the advocates opposing this work have stated, considering the pandemic and the lack of city resources, the City should recalibrate and prioritize efforts on our recovery.

Therefore, I recommend the policy work of Electronic Billboards Phase 2 be shelved immediately so as to not take priority over other pressing matters. At this time, we should move on and truly focus on the herculean task of recovery for our City.