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SIGN ORDINANCE CF11-1705

1 message

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Tue, Aug 23, 2016 at 1:49 PM

To: "Sharon.dickinson@lacity.org" <sharon.dickinson@lacity.org>, "Councilmember.Jose Huizar" <councilmember.huizar@lacity.org>, Councilmember Mitch Englander <councilmember.englander@lacity.org>, Councilmember Marqueece Harris-Dawson <councilmember.harris-dawson@lacity.org>, Councilmember Gil Cedillo <councilmember.cedillo@lacity.org>, Councilmember Felipe Fuentes <councilmember.fuentes@lacity.org>, Mayor Garcetti <mayor@lacity.org>

The members of the current PLUM Committee have been hard at work over the past year or so attempting to disembowel the Sign Ordinance as an effective regulatory framework built upon a long history of painful litigation, court rulings and significant community input.

Major compromises were made along the way that gave outdoor advertisers the ability to construct NEW billboards in our City --- a city that has had a ban on new billboards since 2002. Of course, one might not know this fact because so many billboards have appeared since that time -- some permitted and some not.

Chair Ed Reyes was close to putting the ordinance "to bed" when a new enlarged PLUM Committee took over - consisting of new members with no institutional history or experience of "living with" digital billboards in their communities.

It almost seems as though this enlarged committee has worked very hard to compromise the Sign Ordinance and to make the City vulnerable, once again, to an onslaught of sign-related litigation and visual blight (to say nothing about permitting a growing source of driver distraction).

We strongly support the recommendations of the City Planning Commission from its 10/22/15 meeting. We do not believe that new billboards should be placed outside of sign districts under any circumstances.

IF the City is so desperate to raise funds at the cost of public safety (drivers/passengers, pedestrians, bicyclists), and the visual environment going into the long-range future, then permission for a VERY limited number of digital billboards on PUBLIC land only following the Chicago model (of many fewer than has been suggested in the staff report AND shared equally between all CD areas) can be considered. There must also be an option given for neighborhood council areas to "**OPT OUT**" of the program (or better yet, **OPT IN**)--understanding that they will not get the community benefits offered for those potential billboards (but will still get mandatory takedown credits and any available benefits for billboards erected in Sign Districts).

The only "good" news related to the placement of billboards on public (vs. private) land is that the Council can prohibit advertising of violent images and ads for unhealthful products and practices. No doubt a policy will be needed so that any regulations will be consistent and legally defensible.

It is no secret that the billboard lobbyists have been hard at work for months/years trying to salvage their digital billboards turned dark by court order. It is no secret that the City has failed to protect its communities from the lobbying pressures of the outdoor advertising industry.

The community has not forgotten the poisonous secret settlement agreements signed by the Council that were thrown out and invalidated by the courts. The community remembers when Councilmembers are given contributions for events from the outdoor advertising interests. And we certainly do not forget when candidates (and City departments) accept free space from billboard interests. In fact, any Councilmember that has accepted contributions from the outdoor advertising companies and their representatives and/or who have received free advertising space would best recuse themselves from further consideration of the Sign Ordinance. Who would remain to vote?

In short, the relationship between the outdoor advertising industry and the City has created an uneven playing field such that good public policy is being lost in the charade of the current public input process where meetings are called with little notice for neighborhood councils, homeowner associations, etc. to consider meeting agenda reports, to issue a CIS and be heard. Furthermore, the manner in which today's PLUM meeting agenda is written, it would appear that the neighborhood councils that submitted Community Impact Statements did so in support of the staff report being considered. THEY DID NOT. None have had time to agendize it or consider a response, much less issue a CIS. Meanwhile, no doubt today's meeting chambers will be filled with those brought out by billboard company lobbyists who may very well have known about today's meeting in advance of the public posting. But, that is how billboard/sign policy (and much land use policy) is crafted in Los Angeles.

We ask that you affirm the CPC's recommendations and hold firm to create a regulatory framework to serve the long-term best interests of the City of Los Angeles. Absolutely no digital signage outside of Sign Districts on private property. Enough is enough. There will be plenty to go around in the Sign Districts on land more appropriately zoned for such signage. Have the courage to "just say no."

Sincerely,

Barbara Broide
President

Westwood South of Santa Monica Blvd. HOA

(Member, Westside NC : WNC has not seen the staff report and cannot comment on it at this time. We have, however, voted to support the CPC recommendations.)