



SAN MATEO, SANTA CLARA & SAN BENITO COUNTIES

SAY NO TO DIGITAL BILLBOARDS ALONG SAN JOSE STREETS & HIGHWAYS

The City of San José is proposing to weaken the Sign Ordinance to allow "Programmable electronic signs" (digital billboards) in San Jose. New billboards have generally been prohibited since 1985 – that's why our newer freeways like 85 and 87 are free from billboard blight.

A programmable electronic sign is an "animated sign capable of displaying words, symbols, figures, or images that can be electronically or mechanically changed by remote or automatic means. The elements may be internally illuminated or may be illuminated by reflected light. ..."

On December 19, 2017, the City Council directed staff to investigate removing barriers to off-site commercial advertising within the City. On September 25, 2018, the City Council approved Phase 1 of the Sign Ordinance update that allowed digital billboards on 17 City-owned sites.

Phase 2 would allow free standing billboards and/or building-mounted programmable signs and signs displaying off-site commercial speech on non-City owned sites. Replacement of existing traditional static billboards with new electronic billboards more profitable for the outdoor advertising industry would be allowed at a ratio of 4:1. City staff have **identified 90 potential locations for new billboards**, mostly along Highway 87.

Currently, illuminated and digital signs are required to be shut off from 12:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. City Council has directed staff to evaluate allowing illuminated and programmable signs to begin operation at 5:00 a.m., and to evaluate illumination parameters to mitigate light pollution.

Opportunities for public comment:

- **July 13, 2020.** Public meeting regarding the ordinance updates and the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) which will consider the impacts of the proposed amendments.
- **Early Fall 2020.** Draft EIR available for public review.
- **Fall 2020.** City Council vote on Sign Ordinance update.

More information:

- [Sign Ordinance Update Community Meeting Calendar and Agenda](#)
- [City of San Jose Sign Ordinance Update Phase 2 EIR](#)

More Public Outreach Needed

July 13 is the first public meeting on the Phase 2 updates. More outreach is needed as follows:

- Meetings with appropriate City Commissions and Committees, and other stakeholders
- Another public meeting when the Draft EIR is released
- A representative public opinion survey, including videos that show digital signs at night (a visual preference survey conducted in 2009 documented inconclusive results and is now out of date)

Why the City Should Not Allow Additional Digital Billboards

The City's two stated goals are billboard reduction and revenue generation. However, to date the City has provided no studies or other information explaining anticipated yearly revenue from programmable signs.

No billboards have yet been installed under Phase 1 of the Sign Ordinance update. Before moving on the Phase 2, the City needs to hear sufficient feedback from the community, and to fully evaluate the results of Phase 1.

The City has focused locations for digital billboards on properties located in, or near, downtown and the airport where they see an opportunity to advance "a more vibrant city center," and where they think people expect to see commercial advertising. However, it is unclear how digital billboards contribute to make a place more vibrant. The City should provide some research supporting this assumption.

The City site selection criteria include compatibility with riparian corridors and bird safe design. Therefore, any selected site within the 300' riparian corridor should be eliminated. Also, no design criteria can protect night-flying migratory birds, which confuse bright light with the sun.

Environmental Impacts Cannot be Mitigated

Aesthetics. Digital billboards will interfere with views of downtown and the mountains from freeways such as 87, hampering City efforts to create a sense of place. These installations will also lower property values nearby, and will disproportionately impact communities of color.

Biological Resources. Night-time light pollution affects every living thing throughout the entire food chain. The incremental and cumulative impacts of light pollution are not disputable, and scientific evidence shows that the effects of light pollution are incremental and cumulative.

Human Health. Digital billboards are extraordinarily bright, and can disrupt sleep by residents when they shine into windows. Darkness in the sleeping environment is tied strongly to sleep duration and quality, which is necessary for restoring physiological and biological processes

Energy. Total energy cost of one digital billboard can be 20 times greater than the annual cost to power the average home. Installing energy-intensive billboards will increase greenhouse gas emissions, interfering with the City's climate-resilience goals set forth in Climate Smart San José.

Public Safety. It has been demonstrated that digital roadside billboards represent a greater distraction to drivers than static billboards, increasing side-swipe and rear-end crashes.

Sierra Club Policy Related to Billboards

The Sierra Club opposes the proliferation of outdoor off-premise advertising (billboards) and endorses legislative and other actions at the federal, state, and local levels to strengthen prohibitions against billboard proliferation. The Sierra Club opposes unnecessary night lighting in both urban and suburban areas. This practice is a waste of electrical energy, destroys the aesthetics of the night time sky, and seriously interferes with astronomical research.