

Providence City Plan Commission

September 20, 2022



AGENDA ITEM 6 ■ AMENDMENT FOR SIGNAGE AND ILLUMINATION

OVERVIEW

PETITIONER:	Diony Garcia	RECOMMENDATION:	Recommend denial of the proposed zoning changes
CASE NO./ PROJECT TYPE:	CPC Referral 3527 Zoning Ordinance Amendment		
PROJECT DESCRIPTION:	Changes to the ordinance pertaining to signage	PROJECT PLANNER:	Robert E Azar, Deputy Director

Discussion

The petitioner is requesting to amend the zoning ordinance to allow for conversion of existing nonconforming standard billboards to electronic message signs. This would be through a mechanism that the petitioner refers to as incentive zoning, which would allow conversion of any billboard that faces an interstate highway in exchange for the removal of double the square footage of the billboard to be converted. The petition states that electronic message sign billboards shall be oriented towards an interstate highway and may only be incidentally noticeable from a residential zone.

This petition is similar to one that was filed three years ago, with some notable differences. In the original petition the signs were only permitted in M1 and MMU zones, the conversion required a special use permit, and the conversion to an electronic message sign could be achieved through removal of an equivalent square footage of billboard area elsewhere in the city.

While the CPC supported the original petition, it did recommend that it be amended to ensure that the signs not be visible from residential zones, and to ensure that they are no brighter and no more distracting than non-electronic signs. At the time, DPD staff felt that this could be a positive amendment because it appeared to be a means to remove some billboards in the city and return some land to other, more desirable development. However, we have come to feel that there could be adverse impacts from the adoption of this amendment. First, we are concerned that the new petition appears to allow electronic message sign billboards in any zone, as long as they are visible from an interstate highway. This opens the door to potentially every highway-oriented billboard being converted. Further, the standard of “incidentally noticeable from a residential zone” is subjective, will be difficult to enforce, and is contrary to the CPC’s original recommendation. We are concerned that even if the sign face is not directly visible from a house in a residential zone, the reflective glare and flashing from a message that changes every 10 seconds could be an unacceptable impact. Finally, in the years that have passed since introduction of the original petition, staff have had the opportunity to observe many existing electronic message sign billboards. While under certain light conditions, these signs appear no more bright than static billboards, there are conditions where they appear much brighter. And the changing message is, in our opinion, a more intensive use of the sign face and more distracting to motorists.

Findings

Comprehensive Plan objectives BE-1 and BE-7 of the comprehensive plan encourage design excellence and enhancement of neighborhood character. Zoning Ordinance Section 101.E calls for promoting a high level of design and protecting the scenic character of the City. It is the DPD's opinion that, by the proliferation of billboards that are more intensive in appearance than existing static billboards, this petition would be contrary to these provisions of the plan and the ordinance.

Recommendation

Based on the foregoing discussion, the DPD recommends that the CPC advise the City Council to deny the petition.