



City of San Antonio

Agenda Memorandum

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Agenda Item Number: 17.

Agenda Date: 11/7/2019

In Control: City Council A Session

DEPARTMENT: Development Services

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Michael Shannon

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: City Wide

SUBJECT:

Proposed Changes to San Antonio City Code Chapter 28 - Sign Code regarding Digital Billboards

SUMMARY:

City Council will consider a proposed update to the City's Chapter 28 Sign Code which will allow an additional digital billboard within the City.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In the 1980s, there were around 2,300 billboards within the San Antonio City limits and, over time, that number has decreased to around 1,200 billboards. Additional billboards are prohibited within the City and in order to relocate a billboard, two billboards must be removed. Similarly, new digital billboards are prohibited within the City and the Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ).

In 2007, the City authorized a one-year pilot program for digital billboards that allowed for up to 15 off-premises digital billboards (Ordinance No. 2007-12-06-1247). However, permits for only 13 digital billboards were issued and installed during the one-year pilot program, each having only one side of the billboards as digitals. In general, three signs were removed for each re-face (i.e., a 3 to 1 takedown ratio). Overall, 83 billboards were removed during the 2007 digital billboard pilot program. Until September 2019, City code did not allow any new off-premises digital signs to be permitted in the city or the ETJ. The 13 existing digital billboards are required to follow minimum safety standards including minimum dwell time of 10 seconds, the change of message has to be within 1 second or less, default freeze mechanism (in case of malfunction), and may not display light of such intensity or brilliance to cause glare or impair vision of drivers.

In September 2019, City Council approved a change to the City's sign code that allowed digital faces to be added to the backside of the 13 existing digital billboards by removing an estimated 300 junior billboards as well as removal of some large billboards along scenic, urban and/or historic corridors. This approval came after an almost year-long process in which the Development Services Department (DSD) held three stakeholder meetings on February 26, 2019, April 5, 2019, and August 6, 2019, to discuss the proposal. Some of the stakeholders include representatives from the Texas Sign Association, billboard operators, Scenic San Antonio, San Antonio Conservation Society, American Institute of Architects and some neighborhood association groups. DSD also held one community meeting through SA SpeakUp on May 15, 2019, to obtain community input and released two on-line surveys through SA SpeakUp to seek input from the community on specifics related to the proposal.

DSD presented the proposed digital billboard changes to the Planning and Community Development (PCD) council committee on August 12, 2019 and again on September 9, 2019. The PCD members recommended approval of the proposed changes to City Council for consideration. In addition to the original proposal to allow digital faces to be added to the backsides of the existing 13 existing digital billboards, Outfront Media provided a proposed code change to allow them to re-activate their original permit that was authorized by the 2007 pilot ordinance that they did not take at that time. The PCD committee instructed DSD staff to bring forward the proposal from Outfront Media to add this fourteenth digital billboard location at a future council action, separate from the original proposal for the existing 13 locations.

ISSUE:

Chapter 28 Sign Code revisions require City Council approval. Upon direction from the PCD committee, DSD held another stakeholder meeting on October 10, 2019 to discuss the modified proposal from Outfront Media. The representatives from the Texas Sign Association, billboard operators, Scenic San Antonio, and some neighborhood association groups who were part of the year-long process voiced general approval of the additional sign code change proposal, summarized below.

- Using an increased take down ratio of 5.4 to 1 square foot, Outfront Media would take down 7,284 square feet of existing static advertising faces in order to convert 2 existing static faces on one existing structure into standard 14' x 48' digital displays. This equates to 8 structures and 15 total ad faces.
- At least one of the billboard takedowns for each of the additional digital faces would be required to be a large 672 sq. ft. billboard located within a protected designated corridor (i.e., historic, urban, scenic, etc.).
- No "new structures" would be added as a part of the "billboard reduction" program.
- Removal of the existing sign structures would be required prior to receiving a permit for the new digital displays.
- An off-premise digital sign owner, with approval from the city, may make alterations to the digital signs as necessary to deploy the additional digital displays.
- An off-premise digital sign owner must apply for all the necessary permits within six (6) months of approval of this ordinance.

Such action would result in increasing the number of digital billboards by one additional structure (total of 14 structures with digital billboards) by decreasing the overall number of billboards within City limits.

ALTERNATIVES:

City Council could choose not to take any action at this time and leave Chapter 28 - Sign Code as is and maintain the current number of digital billboards.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends City Council approval of the proposed changes to Chapter 28 - Sign Code that would result in the ability to grant one digital billboard permit to Outfront Media to add 2 existing static faces on one existing structure into standard 14' x 48' digital displays for a take-down ratio of 5.4 to 1 square foot or 7,284 square feet of existing static advertising faces.