



LEGISLATIVE ALERT

CITY COUNCIL'S PLANNING & LAND USE MANAGEMENT (PLUM) COMMITTEE TO HOLD HEARING ON SIGN ORDINANCE APRIL 21

On Tuesday, April 21, 2009 the City Council's Planning and Land Use Management (PLUM) Committee will hold a hearing regarding the City's ongoing efforts to revise the Sign Ordinance. The ordinance would regulate all signage in the City, including business identification signage.

The current draft would significantly reduce allowable sign area, height and size; drastically restrict the areas eligible for Sign Districts; and ban electronic message signage, among other restrictions. Needless to say, the proposal poses a threat to your business success and viability. The potential loss of jobs and sales tax, as well as reduced property values and lost property tax, will be great if this ordinance passes.

Businesses survive or fail depending on their ability to effectively advertise. The most cost-effective form of advertising is on-premise business signage. It works 24 hours a day, seven days a week drawing in as much as 50% or more of the business' new clients. It does not make sense to strip your business of the right to reach out and communicate.

We need your help to ensure that the City Council adopts a workable ordinance that will not harm businesses in this troubled economy. Please consider sending a letter to the City Council and appearing to testify at the April 21 hearing. We have attached talking points organized by issue that you can tailor to address your particular concerns.

We need your support at this hearing, which will take place on:

**Tuesday, April 21st at 2:00 pm
City Hall, Room 350
200 North Spring Street**

Los Angeles, CA 90012

If you have any questions or would like more information on this issue, please contact Veronica Perez Becker at (213) 624-1213, ext. 217. Please see below for suggested talking points.

SUGGESTED TALKING POINTS ON SIGN ORDINANCE BY TOPIC

• **Preserve On-Site Signage Rights**

o I wish to voice my strong objection to the proposed revisions to the City's sign ordinance, now pending before you. Virtually all of the controversy surrounding the sign issue in Los Angeles has been generated by billboards and super-graphics, not on-premise signage.

o The proposed ordinance's restrictive prohibitions upon on-premise business signage – the very signs my business needs to identify itself and to announce the goods and services I provide my customers – will have severe, unintended consequences.

o I am not aware of any objections or complaints about the current sign code as it applies to on-premise signs and the negative impact on my business if this ordinance passes will be profound. Moreover, very little input has been sought from businesses and merchants, such as me, who are directly affected.

o At an economic time when businesses – both small and large – are struggling just to survive, the imposition of on-premise sign restrictions that will dramatically reduce our ability to advertise is like throwing gasoline on the fire.

o A rewrite of the on-premise regulations was never anticipated by the City Council, which was instead focused on digital conversions of billboards, super-graphics and enforcement concerns. Please separate the changes regarding off-site signs from those proposed for on-site signage and focus your immediate efforts on the off-site sign issues affecting Los Angeles.

o Don't rush changes regarding on-site signs. If the City wishes to address on-premise signage then it must first involve the various stakeholders, including business owners like myself, architects, sign designers and the on-premise sign industry, who are knowledgeable in these areas.

• **Modify Temporary Sign Provisions**

o Current sign regulations relating to temporary signs are unworkable for businesses and cultural institutions.

o Allowing a maximum of 90 days per year for temporary signs – including real estate “for sale” and leasing signs – does not put our businesses in a position to succeed in this ailing economy.

o The temporary signs typically used to advertise residential leasing and sales often generate as much as 50% of buyer/tenant traffic. Even in a normal market, a project typically takes at least a year to lease or sell out completely. In the current market, it is almost impossible to tell how long it will take to lease or sell a project.

o “For Sale” signs on single-family properties are allowed to stay up in perpetuity. Why then, are we punishing our multi-family properties, which are in line with Los Angeles' goal to be a greener, transit-oriented City?

- o These rules also do not work for cultural institutions, where museum and educational programming runs all year, or for retailers advertising their products, among other businesses.

- o We ask that you amend the ordinance to allow more flexibility and a longer duration for temporary signs.

- **Comprehensive Sign Program** (City review process whereby it can grant greater signage rights for projects with a minimum of 5 acres and 100,000 square feet of non-residential floor area).

- o The proposed Comprehensive Sign Program would not work for an urban environment, such as Downtown, because many high-density urban properties do not meet the restrictive eligibility requirements.

- o In particular, the 5-acre requirement would virtually eliminate the possibility of a Comprehensive Sign Program in Downtown, where larger projects are built up, rather than out.

- o We ask that the 5 acre requirement for the Comprehensive Sign Program be eliminated.

- o We also ask that the Comprehensive Sign Program not be restricted to just the C, M, PF and R5 zones, since greater on-site signage rights are often necessary and appropriate in other zones as well to accommodate appropriate signage for cultural centers, sports venues, and schools.

- o Finally, we request that on-site digital signs, such electronic message displays, and roof signs be permitted pursuant to a Comprehensive Sign Program. When approved in appropriate areas, these signs can add excitement and character to a building.

- **Supplemental Use Districts (Sign Districts)**

- o Sign Districts can complement neighborhood character and be a vital source of income during these times of economic crisis.

- o Sign Districts are already expensive, time consuming, and difficult to obtain. Indeed, the existing regulations have resulted in the creation of only two sign districts in the last seven years.

- o Yet the draft before you drastically reduces the areas in which Sign Districts will be permitted, tying Council's hands if they determine a Sign District is appropriate in a restricted area.

- o Rather than limit sign district opportunities with arbitrary and restrictive thresholds, we should maintain current thresholds and rely on public input and the discretion of the City Planning Commission/City Council to determine whether a proposed Sign District is appropriate.

- o I am opposed to mandatory sign reduction programs within Sign Districts. We have learned time and time again that the one-size-fits-all approach rarely works. A mandatory reduction discriminates against areas of the City that currently do not have a large amount of signage. We must maintain flexibility to allow the right kind of signage for each neighborhood.

- o The requirement that a Sign District have at least 5,000 lineal feet or 15 acres

discriminates against downtown properties. There should be an alternative qualification criteria of 300,000 square feet of non-residential development.

o In addition, all Sign District applications in the pipeline should be grandfathered, since to not do so causes a real fairness issue and sends a message to potential investors that L.A. will change the rules midstream.

- **Settlement Agreements**

o Unless the unlevelled playing field created by the City's Settlement Agreements with the largest outdoor advertising companies is addressed, changes to the sign ordinance will have little to no impact on Los Angeles' sign landscape.

o This is because the Settlement Agreement Companies – which are exempt from the City's sign regulations – operate over 90% of the pole signs in the City, and all of the City's approximately 100 digital signs.

o Yet the Draft Sign Ordinance does not address whether the new regulations are intended to apply to the Settlement Agreement Companies.

o We respectfully request that the draft sign ordinance be amended to include such language.

**Central City Association
626 Wilshire Boulevard, 2nd Floor**

(SE corner of Hope and Wilshire)

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