

# AIA Los Angeles

A Chapter of the American Institute of Architects



October 2, 2008

Honorable Jane Ellison Usher and  
Honorable Members of the  
City Planning Commission  
Department of City Planning  
City of Los Angeles  
200 North Spring Street, Mail Stop 395  
Los Angeles, California 90012-2601

Re: Interim Control over Billboard Conversions to Digital

Dear Commission President Usher and Members of the Commission:

The Los Angeles Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (“AIA/LA”) wishes to be on record in SUPPORT of any proposed moratorium on the conversion of existing billboards to digital billboards (or the erection of any new digital billboards). **It is time for an interim control ordinance to prohibit new digital billboards while the issue is studied.**

We further urge that your Commission recommend to the City Council that Los Angeles **also adopt an interim control ordinance that prohibits the erection of any new off-site signs within the City of Los Angeles . . .** except in “signage supplemental use” districts and “creative signage” districts already approved and adopted *before* the date that the recent Council Motion on billboards was presented to the Council (on July 29, 2008) (Council File 08-2020).

AIA/LA believes that, during the interim control period, the City should solicit recommendations from a panel of citizens and professionals. Those recommendations should then be utilized to debate and adopt a Citywide policy that consistently regulates off-site signs. This is a position we have shared with the Planning and Land Use Management Committee in our September 9, 2008, letter to PLUM concerning that Council File 08-2020.

At present, City of Los Angeles policy with regard to off-site signage or billboards is inconsistent. Even as the City struggles to identify and regulate existing off-site signage, the City moves forward with spot-zoning type “creative signage” districts and “signage supplemental use” districts that add new off-site signs. New digital billboards raise the wrath of neighborhoods throughout the City. Taking the time to review existing policies and develop new ordinances will lead to a consistent Los Angeles approach where off-site signage is controlled and the benefits of such control accrue to the people of Los Angeles.

For example, there are at least three additional supplemental-use signage districts now being proposed in Los Angeles. On the one hand, the City seeks funds from these new billboard districts to realize important community-based projects. But, on the other hand, the off-site signage companies turn around and seek to justify overturning citywide ordinances limiting billboards by pointing to the adoption of these very districts.

In the past, Los Angeles has adopted ordinances to limit billboards along freeways. Recent agreements allow for the erection of more signage and digital billboards along these byways. Digital billboards are now the source of both safety and welfare complaints. Communities are concerned that these signs are hazardous to drivers and intrusive to residential neighborhoods. At the same time there is little understanding regarding just how much revenue such off-site signs generate to their owners and how much funding and consequent benefits the City should fairly realize from these signs. **The City is allowing the use of its visual bandwidth without understanding how much that bandwidth is worth.**

Because more off-site signs and sign districts are being proposed every day; because there are serious questions about traffic safety associated with digital billboards; because digital billboards are brighter and more intrusive at night than some policy makers may have anticipated; because the City may not realize maximum revenue value from new or existing billboards; because it is a long term City objective to reduce the number of billboards; because some of Los Angeles' most precious assets are its scenery and viewscapes; because visual blight contributes to economic blight; and because AIA/LA knows that other cities do successfully limit and/or prohibit billboards and off-site signs, AIA/LA believes that:

**Now is the time to pause.**

**Now is the time to consider what citywide signage policies make sense.**

**Now is the time to develop new ordinances** that both reflect community values and beautify Los Angeles to the benefit of all who are attracted to live, work and visit here.

AIA/LA believes that the City can create the needed period of time to study, debate and determine new approaches to this issue . . . simply by adopting an interim control ordinance to prohibit the erection of new billboards and the conversion of billboards to digital.

As noted above, AIA/LA recommends that the City establish a citizen and professional study group to make recommendations with regard to digital signage as well as off-site signage policies, generally. AIA/LA further recommends that this group be staffed by the Department of City Planning and other City departments as appropriate in order to facilitate supportable recommendations that can be considered for adoption by the City Council.

AIA/LA stands ready to lend its expertise and assistance, and the expertise of its members, to such a study group and in subsequently working to implement the group's recommendations.

Very truly yours,



Martha Welborne, FAIA  
President  
AIA Los Angeles

cc: Directors, AIA/LA  
S. Gail Goldberg, AICP, Director of Planning