

San Jose Sign Code Update  
Meeting Notes

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Sign Code Update  
Community Meeting Notes  
3/25/09; 7:00 p.m.  
11 attendees

***Billboards and supergraphics***

- I think they give life to downtown; there is commerce going on and I'm really very much against prohibition of them. I don't think they should go all the way around, but they say "hey, this is where business is conducted and there is commerce here".
- These types of signs are very expensive and are sold to large corporations. You might get something like United Airlines promoting itself, but nothing promoting something in San Jose. Ultimately what we're trying to promote is local businesses here. So, unless it's a manner or size for most local businesses where they would take advantage it.
- I'm against most signs, to be honest with you, but especially these because they don't convey what I'd like San Jose to be.
- I worry about the residents of that building; are you covering their windows and their lighting?
- Are there any jurisdictions that allow supergraphics and how do they deal with issues surrounding mounting and maintenance? How do you get out of a window with a supergraphic on it?
- Salt Lake City used them during the Olympics and it was wonderful, but you go back and it is still the charming city it was.
- How do you deal with the vinyl going down into the stormdrains after rain. It becomes blight.
- I have significant problems with these billboards. We have spent decades trying to rid ourselves of billboards. I don't see how this dovetails with the mayor's green vision? These billboards are nothing more than visual blight. We are considering selling our souls for a small amount of money.
- Typically, these billboards are to be viewed from far away. If we're promoting downtown San Jose as walkable and transit friendly, the scale of signs should reflect that.
- The supergraphics billboard – downtown or city wide? (Both)
- You have no control over the content so anyone with money can put up whatever they want to promote? Campaign statements or another city?

***Electronic and programmable signs***

- I'm against these but they're at school, facial place, nail places, San Carlos - this is not the image I'd like to see of San Jose. I want quaintness and charm. Some similarity and not visual blight.
- Downtown has a purpose that is commercial. I agree they shouldn't be in a residential areas. We are working against ourselves if we think up reasons why signs should be restricted. We should be encouraging signage rather than think of ways to restrict them.

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- My business is out in a neighborhood – small businesses are frustrated with the lack of ability to promote their business. The anchor store controls the monument sign and will have the majority of the space. The other stores are relegated to a very small area. Businesses in their frustration are moving into the illegal signage. They string signs between trees, in park strips, to stop signs. When you take a monument programmable sign and provide a neighborhood setback of some sort, you can give each business some time on the sign. When you give businesses the opportunity to promote themselves, you'll discourage illegal signage. No signage at all is not an option for businesses, because they will take their business elsewhere. You think there is a deficit now, wait until businesses move out.
- As far as neighborhoods, I think we're talking about two different areas.
- I have no problems with electronic signs for schools that announce the next football game. There are some off 101 that flash and people look at those, and I wouldn't want it to be a hazard.

***Freeway/pylon signs***

- I don't like these and they are not pretty. There is too much writing on these large freeway pylon signs. Maybe you can limit the amount of information on a freeway sign?
- Is there a relationship between the size of the business and the size of the sign allowed?
- In traveling, I have found it useful to have a pylon sign that states the name of the center. People will say "take the exit next to Serramonte", for example, because people know it that way. I also notice that as those signs have evolved and become cluttered with all of the names of the tenants in a center, they are distracting and no longer as useful. There are now lots of those pylon signs and a lot of repetitiveness because I no longer use them as a wayfinding sign. All reader boards are also distracting and difficult. One of the things that make travel in west Los Angeles difficult – and it's not the traffic – is the visual clutter there. It's one of the great things about San Jose is the lack of visual clutter (after spending four years in Southern California).
- Ultimately, when you're leasing these places, part of the enticement for the businesses is that they'll get a certain amount of signage square footage. If you remove that, it will be harder to lease space. We have shopping centers in decline that have difficulty leasing spaces because they can't promote their business and advertise.

***Amount of signage that is appropriate (picture of Times Square)***

- NYC has an ordinance that requires businesses in Times Square to dedicate one façade to signage.
- I wouldn't want this in a neighborhood. I disagree that businesses would not do well without signage. Neighborhood areas that have charm and consistency is our goal. I cannot stand the surplus of signs.
- I will agree with you on surplus of signs, I don't want a blight of signs. But what I'm having to deal with now is illegal signs posted everywhere. If they were allowed to advertise their businesses with more and better signage, we wouldn't see these illegal signs.
- In Carmel, no one has any signs. Even the Shell station, there is a discrete small sign.

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- But no one knows where there is a barber shop, or how to get places. There is a street (Post Street) in downtown San Jose that has grandfathered signs on one side and no signs on the other. Businesses that don't have the signs are suffering.
- Does the city have guidelines on how many signs are appropriate? I counted the amount of signs and there were vast differences from block to block. Is there a sign density guideline? How about density guidelines for billboards?
- 1st Act had a presentation on what streetscapes and signage should be in downtown San Jose. They had some signage and it seemed to be more balanced. It wasn't Times Square
- Are there restrictions on projected signs?

***Placement of signs on a building***

- The examples in slide show are fine.

***Quality of signs and materials***

- Are there examples of cities that have done this? How do you write a regulation to allow people to do creative signs?
- The sign code preamble – that's what it's called
- Can you have a limit on setback and ensure that it is structurally sound? You can't have it extend too far out, right?
- I love 1950's kitsch – I can see how it would be great to have that look. Let's make some 2010 "1950's kitsch".

***Art displays in downtown***

- I find what you're asking to be dangerous – as long as it isn't commercial it's okay?
- "BJ's" likes to incorporate building art onto their walls that has to do with their business. It looks artistic but it's also commercial and is related to their business. Is it signage or is it art?

***Signage on news racks***

- Yes, this is something San Jose should consider doing

***A-frame signs***

- I thought they were allowed city-wide because they are all over.
- Yes, they should be allowed. I would much rather see this than wiring a sign to a lamppost.
- A-frame signs shouldn't be allowed to be focused to vehicles. They should be for pedestrian traffic.
- People shouldn't be forced to walk in the street to walk around the signs.
- Garage sale signage is out of control – people put them up and don't take them down. It's against the law for garage sale signage to be put on an a-frame, but perhaps if it is allowed,

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they may take them down. Unlike paper signs that get taped everywhere, no one takes those down. There is no room in the existing code to allow for garage sale signage.

*Other issues*

- Neon signs should be considered – some of them are nice.
- Physically moving signs – need to make sure they're not too noisy. Lighting – should not add to light pollution – point down instead of pointing upwards. Should be able to see stars. Is there a regulation against putting signs up on cars?
- Where is sign code enforcement in list of priorities?
- Sometimes signs are nice but you can't regulate good taste.
- Residents adjacent to billboards are hearing gossip that they will become motion, lighted and flashing in bedrooms. I don't care how much money the city makes – that will ruin people's lives.
- Downtown – the larger signs are exciting, and that is not an argument for me. But the neighborhoods – if there could be a way to get some kind of enforcement of the sign code and make sure it's implemented. Neighborhood associations maybe can help? I took some snapshots of signage that is not appropriate. I don't think it's intentional of these businesses to do that. Perhaps when homes are being rezoned to allow for businesses, perhaps regulations can be written to take signage into consideration.
- Our downtown is my focus – a planning official once told me that there was no relationship between signage and a business. There has been an increase of signage downtown and that is great, but we need a lot more. The new ordinance should have a purpose statement that is positive: about 10 years ago, there was a move to change the sign ordinance. The purpose statement of it contained three times the words “blight” and “clutter”. It became the guiding principle of that ordinance. I'm not against use of these words, but let's have the word “encouragement” in there, too.
- Can you define the downtown zoning district?
- Skyline signage – multiple signs okay for each business in the building? No, only one sign per building. Buildings have a name and it becomes a place and a destination that becomes known.
- Is there a limit to the height of the skyline sign depending on the size of the building?