



AIA San Diego
URBAN DESIGN COMMITTEE

February 19, 2014

Mr. Bill Fulton
Planning Director,
City of San Diego

RE: Proposed Changes to Downtown Signage Ordinances

Dear Mr. Fulton,

On September 6, 2013 the AIA San Diego Urban Design Committee (UDC) had the pleasure of engaging Interim Mayor / City Council President Todd Gloria in a discussion on proposed changes to downtown San Diego's signage ordinances. Following that meeting, the UDC developed several recommendations that we wish to share with you and planning staff.

Background

The proposed changes were outlined in several documents presented to the Land Use and Housing Commission (LU&H) on August 1, 2012 by FinWater Advisors and Marston+Marston and called for the creation of an Arts and Entertainment (A&E) District within a defined area of downtown San Diego. An additional report was issued on May 21, 2013 by the San Diego Office of the Independent Budget Analyst. The report made specific comments regarding signage criteria in the proposed new District, and recommended that additional details be developed and presented to the City Council.

The UDC reviewed the above mentioned reports, as well as information regarding similar Districts cited as examples to follow such as the Denver and Philadelphia A&E or Theatre / Arts District models. Based upon that research, and the meeting with the Mayor, we offer the following recommendations.

Recommendations

1. The UDC recommends careful consideration of potential over-commercialization of new signage. Specifically, we suggest a higher percentage of signage as art (say 80%), vs. signage as advertisement (20%), and better definition of what constitutes "advertising" vs. "art". Consideration and definition should be given to who will make these decisions.
2. The UDC suggests that C Street be considered as the core of the new A&E District, reinforcing C Street as a public transit corridor and an area where bars, restaurants, and nightclubs are present. Implementing existing plans for the Civic Theater expansion and revitalizing the California Theater will support this goal.
3. There is an ongoing increase of residential units being built downtown in response to the demand for urban living in downtown San Diego. Boundaries of the A&E District



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should be respectful of unique characteristics of each neighboring area, especially where residential uses occur, or are planned. The UDC urges the City to avoid locating signage that may interfere with downtown residents due to design factors such as excessive or directional light emittance, flashing or changing lighting or graphics as may occur with digital signage, audio, or other attributes that may detract from the peaceful enjoyment of the neighborhood.

4. The UDC recommends the City carefully evaluate signage lighting intensity and direction with regard to interfering with driver visibility where signage occurs adjacent to roadways.
5. The proposed District signage plan calls for an estimated 15% of gross revenue generated to be directed back into supporting the art and entertainment aspects of the district. The UDC suggests the City consider a higher ratio of revenue be allocated toward supporting art and entertainment.
6. The UDC urges the City to better define how structures of historic significance will be protected, preserved, and respected with regard to introduction of new signage, whether electronically lighted or not.
7. The UDC suggests more public outreach is needed with regard to definition of the new signage ordinances.
8. The UDC recommends NO tobacco advertising be permitted.

As the proposed changes to San Diego's downtown signage ordinances develop; and the A&E District guidelines, boundaries, and overall design are refined, the San Diego AIA UDC looks forward to working with the City Planning Department, and we invite the City to call on us to assist in this important effort.

Respectfully,

Daniel A. Stewart AIA

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Daniel A. Stewart', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Chairman, Urban Design Committee
AIA San Diego: *Building for Life*