

Attachment III

Large Banner Signs/Supergraphics

Proposed Revisions to the  
City of San Jose Sign Ordinance  
November, 2009

## **Large Banner Signs/Supergraphics Proposed Revisions to the City of San Jose Sign Ordinance**

Supergraphics are very large signs consisting of a message printed on flexible material (generally plastic-based) attached to a building with adhesive, anchor bolts or a frame structure. Supergraphics can be limited to on-site or non-commercial messages or can provide off-site advertising. Although much larger than a traditional billboard, supergraphics can function like a billboard where an outdoor advertising company leases a building façade, sells the advertising space and changes the message periodically. Figure 1 shows examples of supergraphic displays.

### Existing Regulations

The current Sign Ordinance does not define “supergraphic” as an allowed sign category, as these are a relatively new signage medium. Supergraphics do not fit into the “billboard” definition in that they generally exceed the maximum dimensions of a billboard (14 feet by 48 feet), but would fall within the general category of a “banner sign”. A banner sign is defined as “...a sign on cloth or other flexible material which projects from a building, pole or wire”. Buildings in the Downtown Sign Zone with a footprint of 75,000 square feet or greater may display up to 5 permanent banners, one of which may be up to 1,200 square feet in area; which is smaller than a typical supergraphic sign. The current banner sign provision does not allow off-site commercial messages. Very few buildings in the Downtown Sign Zone meet the minimum size qualifications for a 1,200 square-foot banner sign.

### Public Input Regarding Supergraphics

The response to supergraphic images in the community and focus group meetings was generally positive; however, participants very consistently expressed negative reactions to supergraphic signs that covered windows and doors, or were located on historic buildings. Objections to signs covering windows were based on concern that such signs replace a building’s architecture and block natural light and views that would otherwise be available to building occupants. Supergraphic signs on walls without windows, which are often fairly unadorned facades, were more well-received; many participants indicated that the signs were more interesting than the empty wall, although some concern was expressed that such signs should not face residential uses. Representatives of the outdoor advertising companies expressed a strong interest in regulations allowing supergraphic signs on buildings facing Route 87, including buildings with windows.



**Supergraphics on Blank Walls**



**Supergraphics Covering Windows**



**Figure 1: Examples of Supergraphic Displays**

The Internet Visual Preference Survey results were similar. On a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being not at all acceptable, and 7 being completely acceptable, the mean score for responses to a supergraphic image on the blank wall of a building in Downtown San Jose was 4.8, well on the positive side. In contrast, the mean score for an image of a supergraphic sign covering the windows of a building was 3.3, and the mean score for a sign mounted on an historic building was 3.4. These latter scores were the lowest mean scores for any of the images in the survey.

Regulations of Other Cities for Supergraphics

Table 1 provides a summary of the regulations of other large cities in regard to large “supergraphic” signs/billboards. Los Angeles has recently taken measures to preclude supergraphic signs. San Francisco does not allow off-site advertising but does allow large building-mounted banners for on-site messages. New York City, Columbus, Dallas and West Hollywood allow them subject to various parameters. Seattle allows them with on-site messages only. Regulations include limits on minimum and maximum size, total number of signs; length of sign display, and placement.

**Table 1. Supergraphic Regulations of Major U.S. Cities.**

City	Summary of Regulations
San Francisco	As result of a 2002 ballot measure, San Francisco does not allow off-site advertising signs, but allows large banners for on-site advertising.
Los Angeles	Based on revised regulations approved in August of 2009, Los Angeles does not allow supergraphics.
Times Square New York	Supergraphic signs allowed without limitation on size, number or duration.
Dallas	Allows supergraphic signs in a downtown sign zone in four size categories ranging between a maximum of 5,000 and 20,000 square feet for four consecutive months per calendar year. The number of signs is limited by category with a total limit of 19 signs. Signs may not cover windows or architectural features.
Columbus	Allows temporary supergraphic signs in the downtown area. Size limited by size of wall. No limit on number of signs. Signs allowed on blank walls only.
West Hollywood	Allows supergraphics with a minimum size of 5,000 sq.ft. and no maximum size. Signs may cover windows. Duration is 6 months, or 1 year with an extension.
Seattle	Allows supergraphics as permanent signs in the downtown with on-site messages only. Size is not limited. Height is limited to 65 feet.

Analysis and Recommendation

Staff is recommending that supergraphics be allowed in the Downtown Sign Zone as temporary signs on blank walls of buildings. The Downtown is the city’s most visually intensive signage area where large colorful images have potential to add visual interest and enliven otherwise blank facades. As indicated in Table 2, this proposal would allow up to five temporary signs at any one time on the blank walls of buildings within the Downtown Sign Zone, regardless of the size of the building footprint, for a period of up to 60 consecutive days in any calendar year. Staff is recommending a minimum sign area of 1,200 square feet and a maximum area of 5,000 square feet; within these parameters, the sign would be allowed to entirely cover a building wall, so long as it does not cover or surround windows or doors.

**Table 2. Large Flat-Mounted Banner Signs in the Downtown Sign Zone**

	<b>Current Regulations</b>	<b>Recommended Regulations</b>
<b>Large Permanent Banner Signs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buildings with a footprint of 75,000 square feet or greater in area may display banners consistent with overall sign area limitations and the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Maximum number: 5;</li> <li>2) Maximum height: 80 ft.;</li> <li>3) Size: 1 banner up to 1200 sq. ft. &amp; up to 4 additional banners that total 600 sq. ft. or less</li> </ol> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retain existing regulations</li> </ul>
<b>Temporary Signs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buildings with a footprint of 5,000+ sq. ft. allowed temporary signs in conformance with the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Number: 1 sign;</li> <li>2) Maximum Size: 65 sq. ft.;</li> <li>3) Duration: maximum of 30 consecutive days/year.</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Buildings with a footprint of 20,000+ sq. ft. allowed temporary signs in conformance with the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Number: 1 sign;</li> <li>2) Maximum size: 125 sq.ft.</li> <li>3) Duration: maximum 30 consecutive days/year.</li> </ol> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retain current regulations; revise to allow large temporary attached signs in the Downtown Sign Zone as follows: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Height: Cannot extend above the cornice/parapet.</li> <li>2) Size: 1,200 to 5,000 sq. ft.</li> <li>3) Duration: maximum 60 consecutive days/calendar year;</li> <li>4) Number: Maximum 5 in the Downtown Core at any time</li> <li>5) Sign may not cover or surround windows or doors; and</li> <li>6) Requires a Permit Adjustment.</li> <li>7) On-site or non-commercial messages only.</li> </ol> </li> </ul>

This provision would allow property owners greater opportunity for large-scale signage on a temporary basis to accommodate an art display, announce an upcoming event, display a corporate logo, or advertise an on-site product, while including appropriate limitations to ensure that signs do not impact historic resources, replace building architecture, or obscure windows. The proposal to limit the signs to on-site advertising or non-commercial messages would allow signs that serve a way-finding function for businesses and activities at that location and ensure that a property owner or building tenant plays a role in determining the type of message displayed and takes responsibility for maintaining the sign. The on-site advertising provision is also consistent with Caltrans regulations which preclude off-site advertising near or within view of a landscaped freeway. See pages 2-4 of Attachment IV for more information regarding state regulations for off-site advertising proximate to a freeway.

Staff's recommendations to allow large temporary banner signs on the blank walls of buildings in the Downtown Sign Zone offers the potential to enliven the Downtown Core with creative signs and art displays in a manner that supports local businesses, does not replace building architecture or obscure windows and ensures that such signs can be located proximate to State Route 87 in a manner that is consistent with Caltrans requirements.

### Conclusion

Staff's recommendation for supergraphic signs in the Downtown Sign Zone supports the City's goals for a more visually vibrant downtown and provides expanded opportunity for local businesses and organizations to advertise events or products on a temporary basis.