

Mem # 7A

**City of Carson City
Agenda Report**

Date Submitted: December 12, 2006

Agenda Date Requested: December 21, 2006

Time Requested: 10 minutes

To: Mayor and Board of Supervisors

From: Planning Division

Subject Title: Report to the Board of Supervisors and possible action to direct staff regarding possible amendments to the Carson City Municipal Code Title 18, Chapter 18.16, Development Standards, Division 4, Signs relating to commercial signs and off-premise signs (billboards) on private property along the freeway corridor, including discussion regarding height and size regulations, and other matters properly related thereto. (File ZCA 06-102.)

Staff Summary: The Carson City Master Plan identifies the potential need for specific regulations for signs along the freeway. Based upon discussion with the Planning Commission that included potential freeway-oriented sign regulations, the Planning Commission and city staff recommend no changes to the current sign ordinance at this time. The current sign ordinance requires a Special Use Permit for signs that exceed the permitted sign area, sign height (currently 20 feet for single commercial uses and 30 feet for shopping centers) and number of freestanding signs. The current sign ordinance also prohibits billboards along the freeway. The Board of Supervisors may provide further direction to staff regarding these matters.

Type of Action Requested: No recommended action.

Does This Action Require A Business Impact Statement: () Yes (X) No

Planning Commission Action: Motion to not amend the current Sign Ordinance at the Planning Commission meeting of October 25, approved 6 Ayes, 0 Nays, 1 Absent.

Recommended Board Action: No action required.

Explanation for Recommended Board Action: (See attached memo to the Planning Commission.)

Applicable Statute, Code, Policy, Rule or Regulation: Title 18, Section 18.16, Development Standards Division 4, Signs.

Fiscal Impact: N/A

Explanation of Impact: N/A

Funding Source: N/A

Alternatives: 1) Refer the matter back to Planning Commission for further review.

Supporting Material: Staff Memo to Planning Commission

Prepared By: Donna Fuller, Administrative Services Manager

Reviewed By:

Walter Sullivan Date: 12-12-06
(Walter Sullivan, Planning Director)

(Larry Werner, Development Services Director/City Engineer) Date: _____

Linda Ritter Date: 12-12-06
(Linda Ritter, City Manager)

Melanie Bruketta Date: 12-12-06
(Melanie Bruketta, Chief Deputy District Attorney)

Board Action Taken:

Motion: _____

1) _____	Aye/Nay
2) _____	_____

(Vote Recorded By)

G-5

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CARSON CITY NEVADA
Consolidated Municipality and State Capital



ADMINISTRATION

3505 Butti Way
Carson City, NV 89701-3498
Ph: 775-887-2355
Fx: 775-887-2112

**BUILDING and
SAFETY DIVISION
PERMIT CENTER**

2621 Northgate Lane, Suite 6
Carson City, NV 89706-1319
Ph: 775-887-2310
Fx: 775-887-2202

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3505 Butti Way
Carson City, NV 89701-3498
Ph: 775-887-2355
Fx: 775-887-2112

CONTRACTS

3505 Butti Way
Carson City, NV 89701-3498
Ph: 775-887-2355
Fx: 775-887-2112

ENGINEERING DIVISION

2621 Northgate Lane, Suite 54
Carson City, NV 89706-1319
Ph: 775-887-2300
Fx: 775-887-2283

FLEET SERVICES

3303 Butti Way, Building 2
Carson City, NV 89701-3498
Ph: 775-887-2356
Fx: 775-887-2258

PLANNING DIVISION

2621 Northgate Lane, Suite 62
Carson City, NV 89706-1319
Ph: 775-887-2180
Fx: 775-887-2278

PUBLIC WORKS OPERATION

(Water, Sewer, Wastewater,
Streets, Landfill, Environmental)
3505 Butti Way
Carson City, NV 89701-3498
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TRANSPORTATION

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Fx: 775-887-2112

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Planning Division *LP* *WG*

DATE: October 25, 2006

SUBJECT: ZCA-06-102 – Freeway-Oriented Sign Regulations:

Action to consider alternatives regarding possible amendments to the Carson City Municipal Code Title 18, Zoning, Chapter 18.16, Development Standards, Division 4, Signs, relating to commercial signs and off-premise signs (billboards) on private property along the freeway corridor, including discussion regarding height and size regulations, and other matters properly related thereto.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: No action to modify the sign ordinance at this time; or provide staff with further direction regarding freeway-oriented sign regulations.

DISCUSSION:

On July 26, 2006, the Planning Commission discussed potential regulations for freeway-oriented signs (see attached memo dated July 26, 2006). No action was taken at that time, and staff committed to working with stakeholders and identifying any additional issues related to freeway-oriented signs before bringing the issue back to the Planning Commission.

Staff worked with the Chamber of Commerce to assemble a sign committee, as has been done in the past, which consisted of local property and business owners, two City Supervisors, members of GROW (Gardeners Reclaiming Our Waysides, who worked on freeway aesthetics with the City and NDOT), and sign company representatives with expertise in the field. The sign committee met several times and took a group tour of the freeway with 60 to 65-foot high cranes placed at three locations (Pinion Plaza, Highway 50 Shopping Center, and the site adjacent to WalMart; courtesy of Custom Sign & Crane) to see the visibility of potential sign locations. The sign committee came to following conclusions:

- On-premise signs generally will not be visible from the freeway, at any reasonable height, prior to the freeway exit to serve that site. Businesses and services that want to direct non-resident travelers off the freeway at a certain exit will need to participate in NDOT service signage program (i.e. gas, food and lodging signs) on the freeway.
- There are varying degrees of commercial property visibility along the freeway—some are easily visible while others are partially or completely obscured by soundwalls.
- Most commercial properties along the freeway have adequate visibility for drive-by traffic to see on-premise signs that meet current sign standards (for signs on buildings and freestanding signs 20 feet in height for single commercial uses and 30 feet in height for shopping centers.

- Current Carson City sign standards have provisions through the Special Use Permit process to adequately address situations where additional sign height and/or sign area may be appropriate along the freeway, and the Planning Commission has the ability to limit such signs as appropriate based upon individual circumstances and community input.

The Chamber of Commercial sign committee made the following recommendations based upon the above conclusions and other discussions:

- **The current sign ordinance should not be amended at this time to specifically regulate freeway-oriented signs.**
- The impact of the freeway on additional requests for Special Use Permits beyond what is typical of current development is unknown at this time, but should be re-evaluated in the future as freeway construction extends to the south of Highway 50 East.
- The City should continue to work with NDOT to incorporate on-freeway directional signs to Carson City attractions such as the Railroad Museum, Capitol complex, and downtown.
- The City should explore a community signage program to make drive-through travelers aware of businesses, services and attractions available in Carson City.
- The City should continue to evaluate sign regulations for specific uses such as casino for potential code amendments for signage more appropriate to that specific use (such as the auto dealership sign standards recently adopted).
- The City should continue to work with the Chamber of Commerce, Convention and Visitors Bureau and other business and community groups to market Carson City as a destination.

If you have any questions regarding this memo or current sign standards, please contact Walter Sullivan or Lee Plemel at 887-2180.

Attachment: PC memo dated July 26, 2006

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ADMINISTRATION

3505 Buttl Way
Carson City, NV 89701-3498
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TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Planning Division *AP WJ*

DATE: July 26, 2006

SUBJECT: ZCA-06-102 – Freeway-Oriented Sign Regulations

The Action Plan of the adopted 2006 Master Plan identifies the establishment of specific sign regulations for the freeway corridor as one of five top priority Master Plan implementation actions. This memo and accompanying information is intended to help the Planning Commission provide direction to staff on the preferred methods to manage commercial signage along the freeway in order for staff to prepare an ordinance for such regulations. Sign regulations are contained in the Carson City Municipal Code, Title 18, Development Standards, Division 4.

DISCUSSION

Billboards Prohibited Along the Freeway

Billboards are currently prohibited along the freeway per the Development Standards Division 4.8.3(b). Based on past discussion and comments from the Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors, and the public during the Envision Carson City process, it is assumed that there is not a broad desire to open up additional areas for the placement of billboards along the freeway and they will continue to be prohibited in these areas. Therefore, this memo does not include discussion about possible regulations for billboards. Should the Planning Commission direct staff to provide potential regulations to allow billboards along the freeway, this information could be brought back to the Commission at a future meeting.

On-Premise Signage

The discussion in this memo focuses primarily on potential regulations for on-site commercial signage—i.e. signage advertising a business or businesses on a parcel or in a shopping center on which the sign is located—that would be visible from the freeway. Without establishing regulations specific to freeway-oriented signs, the Planning Commission will likely be faced with reviewing Special Use Permit requests on an individual basis for increased sign height, sign area and number of freestanding signs. The establishment of freeway-oriented sign regulations will give developers, staff and the Planning Commission clear direction on what is expected of such signage.

There are five general vicinities where the freeway intersects or abuts commercial areas and these regulations would be applicable: North Carson Street (north of Broadleaf Lane), College Parkway, Highway 50 East, Fairview Drive and South Carson Street.

Freeway-oriented signs can provide a valuable service to the public in directing them to goods and services. Signs can increase business for merchants, thereby increasing the sales tax revenue. Sales tax revenues have a positive impact on the fiscal health of the city, which is tied strongly to retail sales.

However, the provision of signs must be balanced with other community desires, such as aesthetics and community character. Too much signage, or "sign-clutter," can actually detract from the clear message that is trying to be conveyed. The intent of pursuing specific regulations for signage along the freeway is to strike a balance between promoting economic growth and maintaining quality community aesthetics consistent with the goals and policies of the Master Plan.

Staff researched the sign codes of various cities along freeways, primarily in Northern Nevada and California. A summary of the cities' regulations as they pertain specifically to freeway-oriented signs are included in the attached table (Attachment A) to give a sense of how other cities regulate such signs. Regulations range from having very specific criteria to dealing with signs on individual basis through the Special Use Permit process. It should be noted that Carson City is fairly unique in that we are a relatively small community compared to others that have a freeway running through them.

There are four categories generally used within freeway-oriented sign regulations. These are:

- Minimum parcel or shopping center size
- Maximum distance of property and sign from freeway
- Maximum sign height
- Maximum sign area

The regulations within these categories are inter-related. For example, the distance of a sign is from the freeway affects the size and height it needs to be to be legible. Other specific regulations may be added to these general regulations. Below is discussion on these specific aspects of freeway sign regulations.

Minimum parcel or shopping center size

Establishing a minimum parcel size for parcels or shopping centers helps regulate the number of signs that would potentially be erected along the freeway. The larger the required parcel or shopping center size and the fewer properties there are that meet this criteria, the more "consolidation" of signage is encouraged. For example, a shopping center or group of businesses would have one sign with multiple businesses on the sign rather than having multiple individual signs.

Maximum distance of property and sign from freeway

The permitted distance of a property from the freeway also has an affect on the number of potential freeway-oriented signs. The distance a sign is from the freeway has an additional impact on the size and height necessary for the sign to be legible from the freeway.

Staff conducted an analysis of potential freeway-oriented sign sites on commercial and industrial zoned properties along the freeway based on proximity of sites to the freeway and potential parcel or shopping center size (assuming combining of adjacent parcels could occur to meet the minimum area requirements). This analysis is only an "order-of-magnitude" estimate and is intended only to give a general idea of potential number of freeway-oriented signs that could be erected. The actual permitted locations would depend on how development actually occurs in these areas.

**Approximate Number of Potential Freeway-Oriented Signs
 Based on Proximity to Freeway and Site Area***

	Contiguous Properties	Within 300 feet	Within 600 feet
Minimum 5 acres	22 (15/7)**	(to be added)	(to be added)
Minimum 10 acres	13 (9/4)		
Minimum 15 acres	9 (7/2)		
Minimum 20 acres	7 (5/2)		

* Assuming potential combining of parcels and excluding the Lompa property south of Highway 50 East, which will likely include some commercial development in the future.

** Total # of signs (# from N. Carson St. to Hwy. 50 E / # in Fairview and S. Carson vicinities)

Maximum sign height

In order for signs to be visible to freeway motorists, sign height would have to be increased from the currently permitted 30 feet for a shopping center or 20 feet for a single commercial use. From North Carson Street to Highway 50 East, the freeway is elevated from approximately 10 feet to 35 feet above the adjacent grade. Additionally, some locations have a 12 to 17-foot tall soundwall above freeway grade. Following is a summary of general freeway heights above adjacent grade for various locations along the freeway:

- Highway 50 East: 25-30 feet (no soundwall)
- College Parkway: 10 feet at south end near WalMart (with soundwall on west side); 25-30 feet at intersection and on north side of College Pkwy. (with soundwall)
- Arrowhead/North Carson Street: 25-35 feet (with soundwall at south end)

Detailed construction drawings for the freeway phases south of Highway 50 East are not yet available. However, it is known that the freeway will be below grade at Fairview Drive and above grade over South Carson Street.

In order for a sign to be visible from a relative height of approximately 30 feet above the freeway, it will need to be approximately 40 to 65 feet tall, depending on location. In cases where a sound wall limits viewing, such as in the College Parkway vicinity, a sign could need to be up to approximately 75 feet tall to be visible from the freeway (30 foot freeway grade + 17 feet sound wall + 28 feet visible sign height = 75 feet).

While such sign heights would provide for a consistent viewing angle for freeway motorists, it could have a negative impact to surrounding properties, particularly if located near residential properties. As viewed from street level, larger signage could be out of proportion to surrounding development.

Maximum sign area

In order to be viewed at the distances and speeds that occur on a freeway, freeway-oriented signs must be of adequate size to be legible. Size is also a factor of distance. For example, a sign located 600 feet from the freeway would need to be much larger than a sign adjacent to the freeway to be legible.

The Signage Sourcebook (a book published by the sign industry) states that a standard sign face size for an urban freeway is 300 square feet. (By comparison, it states that for a 55 mph roadway a standard sign size is 200 square feet.) The minimum recommended lettering size on an urban freeway is 15 inches. Carson City Municipal Code currently allows a maximum of 300 square feet of sign area (each side) for freestanding signs for commercial uses and shopping centers.

The following table is a sampling of existing freestanding signs in Carson City that received Special Use Permit approval within the last few years for increased sign height and/or sign area to give the Commission a reference point for this discussion regarding sign size and height.

Sign Location	Sign Height (ft.)	Sign Area (sq. ft.)
Carson Tahoe Hospital, Medical Pkwy.	35	Less than 150
WalMart, College Pkwy. (2 signs)	35	360
Frontier Plaza, N. Carson St.	40	450
Fandango, S. Carson St.	30	400 (200 video)
Comstock Casino, Goni Rd.	30	208
Billboards (various locations)	28 max.	400 max.

Other regulations for consideration:

Minimum parcel frontage

Some jurisdictions require a minimum freeway right-of-way frontage to allow a freeway-oriented sign. This prevents the purchase of narrow strip of land adjacent to the freeway for a site that may be located some distance from the freeway.

Minimum distance between signs

Establishing a minimum separation between signs can minimize potential sign clutter. However, this creates a "first-in" advantage, meaning the erection of a sign on one property could prevent others, possibly more desirable signs, from going in. Other means of regulation seem more practical.

Freeway program signage: Food, Gas, Lodging, Attractions

Some jurisdictions regulate freeway-oriented signage by the type of use, allowing individual signs for food, gas and lodging uses to direct freeway motorists off the freeway for such services. However, due to the configuration and location of the Carson City Freeway exits in relation to the commercial areas, it cannot be reasonably expected that a motorist will see a specific business in time to get off the freeway at the correct exit the first time by.

NDOT has a program for signs on the freeway, placed prior to the appropriate exit, where businesses for food, gas, lodging and other attractions can place their logo to direct consumers off the freeway (the blue signs on the right side of the travel lanes). Staff believes that this is the most effective means of capturing the drive-through business in Carson City.

Minimum distance from an exit

A required minimum distance from a freeway exit can focus signage to areas that are better served to freeway customers (near the exit) and prevent a continuous line of signs along the freeway. With the limited commercial "nodes" along the Carson City freeway, staff does not anticipate this being a major issue; although the requirement could be used in conjunction with other requirements to allow signage in appropriate locations.

Maximum number of tenants per sign

At highway speeds, motorists have a limited amount of time to view signage. The message needs to be short to be effective. Additionally, with limited sign area, too many tenants on a sign can result in the lettering being too small to be legible.

Minimum distance from residential property

Staff did not find other jurisdictions that limited freeway-oriented signage near residential areas. However, there are residential areas in relatively close proximity to the commercial areas along the Carson City freeway and the freeway exits. While residents in these areas should anticipate commercial uses to occur in these areas, excessive sign heights and sizes could have a negative impact on surrounding residential properties.

Readerboards, LED displays, flashing or moving signs

Flashing and moving signs are regulated (but not prohibited) by NDOT highway regulations. Such displays have been used elsewhere along freeways and are being used more often in signage generally. Given the additional sign height necessary for freeway oriented signs, staff believes such displays could have a negative impact on surrounding residential properties and community visual resources.

Special Use Permit versus by-right

Presently, signs that meet the requirements of the Sign regulations are allowed by-right—i.e. no discretionary permits such as a Special Use Permit are required—except for billboards. Any signs that do not meet the standards of sign height, area or number of signs require Special Use Permit approval. This encourages compliance with the set regulations by making the approval process much easier for compliant signs.

NDOT regulation compliance

Signs along State Highways are always subject to Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT) regulations. Freeway-oriented signs would be subject to NDOT regulations in addition to city regulations.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the above discussion, staff recommends the following as a starting point for discussion for regulation of freeway-oriented signage.

1. Continue to prohibit billboards along entire length of freeway.
2. Freeway-oriented signs only permitted for commercial uses along the freeway from North Carson Street overpass to South Carson Street (not extending up Lakeview Hill or Spooner/Highway 50 West).
3. Limited to parcels contiguous to the final freeway right-of-way (except #5 below).
4. Minimum combined development area of 10 acres (except #5 below).
5. At Highway 50 East only, minimum 5 acres within 500 feet of freeway exit.
6. Maximum sign height: 30 feet above nearest adjacent freeway grade. (Note: Signs may be visually precluded by sound walls in some locations near residential areas.)
7. Maximum sign area: 300 sq. ft. for multi-tenant sign; 150 sq. ft. max. for single tenant.
8. Minimum freeway right-of-way frontage: 300 feet (except at Hwy. 50 East as noted above in #5).
9. Maximum 5 tenants per sign
10. Readerboards, LED displays, moving or flashing signs are prohibited.
11. Minimum distance from residentially zoned property: 5 times the sign height. (For example, a 60-foot sign would require a 300-foot setback = 60 feet x 5.)
12. Signs must incorporate materials, colors and architecture and be compatible with the primary building.
13. A freeway-oriented sign is permitted in addition to other permitted signs and sign area for properties meeting these standards.
14. Signs meeting these standards are allowed by-right (building permit required).

15. Proposed "Freeway-Oriented Sign" definition: Any freestanding sign that exceeds the maximum permitted sign height or sign area for a commercial or shopping center use and is designed to be visible from at least one direction of the Carson City Freeway (Interstate Highway 580).

If you have any questions regarding this memo, please contact Walter Sullivan or Lee Plemel at 887-2180.

Freeway-Oriented On-Premise Commercial Sign Standards Comparison Table

City	Permitted Height (feet)	Permitted Area (sq. ft.)	Proximity of property to Freeway	Other Requirements
Reno, NV	By SUP	By SUP	100'	All signs within 100 feet of the freeway ROW that are more than 20 sq. ft. in area that are visible from the freeway require an SUP
Sparks, NV	30' above highest freeway improvement, including walls, within 1,500 feet of the sign	None additional	Contiguous	* Tourist Commercial zoning district only * Min. 1 acre parcel size * Sign must be within 500 feet of freeway
Washoe County, NV	20', 30' or 40', depending on zoning	None additional	N/A	No specific standards for freeway-oriented signs
Auburn, CA	N/A	N/A	N/A	* No specific standards for freeway-oriented signs * No billboards permitted within 660' of freeway
Rocklin, CA	30'	300 max.	100'	
Roseville, CA	By SUP	By SUP	N/A	Freeway oriented signs allowed only by SUP for the auto mall and regional mall uses
Davis, CA	25'	None additional	Contiguous lot & within 1/4-mile of off-ramp	Auto dealers may have additional signage visible from the freeway with an approved sign program

Freeway-Oriented On-Premise Commercial Sign Standards Comparison Table

City	Permitted Height (feet)	Permitted Area (sq. ft.)	Proximity of property to Freeway	Other Requirements
Vacaville, CA	25' above freeway elevation; five additional feet for each tenant on sign up to 60' max.	175 max. for single business; 325 max. for multi-tenant	300'	* 5 acre min. site area * Retail center must have a min. 80,000 sq. ft. floor area * Restaurants, service stations, hotels, motels and auto sales are also eligible for freeway signs as individual businesses
Fairfield, CA	15' above grade of nearest freeway lane	300 max.	Contiguous	* Sign must be within 200' of freeway
Vallejo, CA	40'	150	Contiguous, min. 150' frontage	
Hercules, CA	N/A	N/A	N/A	Freeway signs expressly prohibited; no freestanding signs in side or rear yards that can be seen from the freeway
Hayward, CA	50'	None additional	600'	* 4 acre min. site size for retail * Food, lodging or fuel signs also allowed
Red Bluff, CA	40'	240	Designated on map; generally contiguous	
Redding, CA	40' (shopping center)	By zoning	N/A	No specific standards for freeway-oriented signs

Freeway-Oriented On-Premise Commercial Sign Standards Comparison Table

City	Permitted Height (feet)	Permitted Area (sq. ft.)	Proximity of property to Freeway	Other Requirements
Grand Terrace, CA	50'	75	250'	
San Diego, CA	50'	300	660'	Property must be within 1,500 feet of a freeway exit
San Bernardino, CA	Existing signs only	Existing signs only	1,000'	Min. 20 acre site area
Goodyear, AZ	80'	150 max. for any single tenant; 450 max. overall	Contiguous, min. 300' frontage	* Min. 30 acre site or 200,000 sq. ft. office/retail floor area * Max. 4 tenants on sign * Min. one-half mile separation between such signs on the same side of the freeway
Tucson, AZ	48' from freeway grade	360 max.	250'	
N. Richland Hills, TX	65'	400 max.	200'	