



El Dorado Hills
Area Planning Advisory Committee
1021 Harvard Way
El Dorado Hills, CA 95762

2008 Board
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March 15, 2009

El Dorado County Planning Services
Jonathan Fong
2850 Fairlane Court
Placerville, CA 95667

Subject: S 09-0003 - EL DORADO HILLS COMMUNITY PARK SIGN

Jonathon,

The El Dorado Hills Area Planning Advisory Committee met February 12, 2009 to review the request: A request for a special use permit to install a LED Reader Board. The reader board would be for a community information display at the El Dorado Hills Community Center. The vote resulted in a tie (4 in favor, 4 opposing). The overall consensus was that the El Dorado County Sign ordinance needs to be updated to include the conditions/constraints for which electronic sign boards can be used can be used by governmental agencies responsible for public health, safety and welfare. Residential area signage needs to have numerous additional constraints (i.e. hours of operation, illumination levels in the evening and night time, frequency at which the sign message can be changed-once/hour vs. 5 second revisions). The point is that electronic signage in residential areas needs to subtly provide useful information to the passing motorist as opposed to the distractions of "commercial advertising." Comments from both groups are outlined below.

Comments from the group that conditionally supports the LED sign:

If the special use permit is properly conditioned by County and public complaints/comments reviewed on at least an annual basis by County, then the EDH Community Services District should be allowed to have the electronic sign board. Several public agencies including the EDH Fire Department as well as other non-profit organizations (Churches) have a desire to inform the community of key matters/events happening locally that could positively influence their safety, health or overall well being. To unilaterally recommend the denial of the use of modern electronic signboards to communicate important messages does not best serve the greater good of the community. This group has placed their confidence in County Development Services, our Planning Commission, and our Board of Supervisors to apply the proper conditions and reviews on this special use permit to minimize any negative residential community impacts, and to take action to update the County Sign ordinance to impose a specific set of standard conditions/constraints for the use of this type of signage.

Conditional support with the following conditions:

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1. The sign must be turned off completely between 10:00 pm and 6:00 am and the intensity of the light must be adjusted as low as possible to minimize glare.
2. The sign must not be programmed with moving letters, symbols or messages. The message may change throughout the day but will have no “movement” or action graphics (animation).
3. The sign will use two colors and low glare fonts.
4. The sign must be low profile and will fit well to the setting.
5. The sign must be used only for CSD and other governmental activities, onsite events and meetings only.
6. No advertising can be allowed on the sign.
7. Sign must be reviewed for conformance in one year at public hearings by CSD.

Comments from the group that voted in non-support of the LED sign:

El Dorado Hills Community Services District (CSD) has applied for a special use permit to erect an illuminated sign in front of the CSD offices, at the corner of El Dorado Hills and Harvard Way. The active screen of the sign would be illuminated by light emitting diodes (LEDs) and may be programmed to show a changing display of text and pictures, though the CSD has applied only for a sign to display text. The intersection has a traffic signal and El Dorado Hills Boulevard is curved at that point. The sign would be across the street from a residential neighborhood.

One-half of the members of the Committee are concerned that (1) an illuminated sign on the corner of a busy signalized intersection on a curved road would be a distraction to passing motorists, (2) the LED sign would violate the dark skies policy of the county, and (3) approval would set a precedent that would allow such signs to proliferate throughout the county. The members therefore voted against approving the application.

By its nature, an illuminated sign seeks to grab the attention of passers-by to communicate its message, and thus could distract motorists. This is particularly troubling since the intersection is adjacent to the CSD’s main recreational facility and near the local high school. The issue of driver distraction is important, as is shown by the fact that the county Department of Transportation will not place traffic signals at intersections that occur in quick succession because motorists can become confused, and may run a red light in the first intersection while looking at the green traffic light in the second intersection.

The dissenting members are also concerned that LED signs are not consistent with the county’s dark skies environment and thus voted to not support the application. They feel that the application does not fall into a category that has been thoroughly examined. They are concerned that supporting this application would be setting a precedent that may have serious unintended consequences, since no statutes appear to cover this application. However, County policy seems to lean against the erection of such an active illuminated sign.

The county General Plan’s vision for future growth in the County includes the goal to maintain and protect the County’s natural beauty and environmental quality, vegetation, air and water quality, natural landscape features, cultural resource values, and maintain the rural character and lifestyle while ensuring the economic viability critical to promoting and sustaining community identity.

Objective 2.8.1 of the County General Plan, Lighting Standards, calls for providing standards, consistent with prudent safety practices, for the elimination of high intensity lighting and glare. Policy 2.8.1.1 of the General Plan states that development shall limit excess nighttime light and glare from parking area lighting, signage, and buildings. Consideration will be given to design features, namely directional shielding for street lighting, parking lot lighting, sport field lighting, and other significant light sources, that could reduce effects from nighttime lighting. In addition,

consideration will be given to the use of automatic shutoffs or motion sensors for lighting features in rural areas to further reduce excess nighttime light.

County Code 17.16.070, Lighting, provides that lighted signs shall not be blinking and shall be controlled so that visibility of vehicular traffic is not impaired, and objectionable glare is shielded from adjoining residential zones. (Prior code Section 9430(l)(7))

County Code 17.14.170, Outdoor Lighting, provides that it is the policy of the County that the creation of artificial light and glare be controlled to the extent that unnecessary and unwarranted illumination of an adjacent property be prohibited. The creation of light or glare by any person in violation of this Section shall constitute a public nuisance.

If you have any questions or comments regarding this letter, please contact John Hidahl at 916-933-2703.

Sincerely,

John Hidahl
Chairman

cc: Lou Rain, Planning Commissioner District 1
John Knight, Supervisor District 1
APAC Read File