

Date: August 18, 2021

To: Millcreek City Council

From: Millcreek Planning Commission

Re: Open Letter to the City Council Regarding the City Center Digital Billboard Process

Dear City Council Members,

An open letter from a planning commission to a city council is perhaps unprecedented, but we feel it is important that you understand our alarm at the prospect of erecting digital billboards within the City Center. Nothing in our current ordinances supports billboards in the City Center and we oppose efforts to approve them without a robust open public process.

No support for this digital billboard plan can be found in the General Plan (adopted in 2019). The City Center Master Plan (adopted in 2019) explicitly stipulates signage that is diametrically the opposite of what constitutes a digital billboard. The City Center Overlay Zone Ordinance (adopted in 2019) prohibits digital billboards. The underlying sign and billboard ordinance (adopted in 2020) specifically prohibits digital billboards in the City Center.

All these documents are effectively new and were adopted by the city council after extensive public involvement, including open houses, polling of residents, public hearings and public meetings. These guiding documents and ordinances represent what Millcreek residents want. If the goal of erecting digital billboards in the city center persists, these guiding documents and multiple zoning ordinances must first be changed in substantive ways. All changes in these documents should go through the same extensive process involved in their creation. That includes outreach meetings, multiple hearings, dialogue with neighborhoods throughout the entire city, the community councils, the planning commission and finally the city council will then be free to move forward. After the culmination of this public process, and IF the changes in these city planning documents are approved, it would then be appropriate to start the discussion of any applications relevant to this issue.

The City Council appears to be motivated by what it feels are certain immediate exigencies regarding one billboard located on 3300 South. This is not a new issue nor is it urgent that a deal be made in the near future to exchange traditional billboards for digital billboards. The City Council can start the process of condemnation to remove this billboard, and then *if and after* changes are approved to the ordinances and guiding documents, a deal can still be made with Reagan Outdoor Advertising, or the city can simply choose to complete the condemnation process. Revising the definition of a digital billboard to make them acceptable – by adjusting their size, height, fancy framing and duration of each digital image – will not work.

Our advice: *slow down*. There are rational and thoughtful alternatives that are well within the control and financial resources of the city.

Commissioners

Dave Allen

Aryel Cianflone

Scott Claerhout

Shawn LaMar

Christian Larsen*

Victoria Reid

Skye Sieber

Tom Stephens

Ian Wright

**Mr. Larsen was not present to formally vote at the meeting but indicated via email he was in favor.*