



# City of Culver City

## Staff Report

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**CC - ACTION ITEM: (1) Consideration of a Freestanding Monument Signage Program in Town Plaza; (2) Discussion of Proposed Donation and Installation of Signs by HC 9300 Culver LLC; and (3) Direction to the City Manager as Deemed Appropriate.**

**Meeting Date:** March 11, 2024

**Contact Person/Dept.:** Elizabeth Garcia, Office of Economic and Cultural Development Department

**Phone Number:** (310) 253-5708

**Fiscal Impact:** Yes  No       **General Fund:** Yes  No

**Attachments:** Yes  No

**Public Notification:** Posted at City Hall (01/03/2024) (E-Mail) Meetings and Agendas - City Council (03/06/2024)

**Department Approval:** Jesse Mays, Assistant City Manager (12/14/2023)

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### **RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends the City Council: (1) consider the implementation of a freestanding monument signage program in the expanded portion of Town Plaza; (2) discuss the proposed donation of the monument signs by HC 9300 Culver LLC; and (3) provide direction to the City Manager as deemed appropriate.

### **BACKGROUND**

In 2017, the Owner of the Culver Steps, HC 9300 Culver LLC (Steps Owner) and the City entered into a Reciprocal Easement Agreement (REA) to establish rights of use of certain non-exclusive pedestrian and vehicular access ways, to provide maintenance obligations, easements to private property and public property, and to allocate certain costs and responsibilities related to the Culver Steps (The Steps) and the expanded Town Plaza.

In 2018, the Steps Owner completed The Steps development in Downtown Culver City. The City, in partnership with the Steps Owner, spent approximately \$3.2 million dollars to revitalize the property adjacent to The Steps to expand the existing Town Plaza and create new public space that serves as a venue for art, music and special events. In 2021, the Steps Owner requested the City consider installing freestanding monument signs in Town Plaza to improve public awareness of interior facing businesses. The proposed locations would be at the Ince Avenue/Washington Boulevard (Ince/Washington) intersection and at the Main Street/Culver Boulevard (Main/Culver) intersection (Attachment 1).

Staff reviewed the request and determined that the signs will provide an economic benefit to the community in promoting visibility of businesses and services in the interior Plaza that lack street frontage.

On February 14, 2022, the City Council considered the program concept and directed staff to refine the proposed sign concept/design (Attachment 2) and prepare a licensing plan that addresses business eligibility, sign design/construction, and ongoing maintenance/ replacement costs.

In April 2023, staff sought additional input from the Economic Development Subcommittee (Subcommittee) regarding feasibility of the program and an overview of the proposed licensing program (Attachment 3). The Subcommittee requested staff research other types of monument signs that could incorporate changeable digital displays.

## **DISCUSSION**

### Design and Display

#### *Static Signs*

The proposed static signs provide simplicity and durability, and do not include digital display components. The anticipated cost for custom fabrication of the two signs is estimated at \$95,000, which does not include installation. The design incorporates wood and concrete elements, with removable business panels.

The proposed Ince/Washington sign is approximately 8' wide and 7" high and includes six advertising panels that measure 3'-6" x 12. The proposed Main/Culver sign measures approximately 5'-10" wide and 5' high and includes six advertising panels that measure 2'-6" x 8" and is oriented to the street.

#### *Digital Signs*

Digital signage provides opportunities for dynamic content. Staff researched digital sign options that could be incorporated within a frame similar in design to the proposed static signage. The average estimated cost for the larger sign is \$60,000 and the smaller sign is \$50,000, for a total of approximately \$110,000 for a full color board and wireless communication, excluding installation.

However, Culver City Municipal Code (CCMC) Section 17.330.035 prohibits/restricts "emitting" signs (A.1) and "changeable copy" signs (B.3), except as provided in Section 17.330.025. Digital, emitting signs are currently not contemplated by the Sign Code; therefore, not permissible per the CCMC. If the City Council wished to pursue digital signage, this portion of the CCMC would need to be amended.

### Business Eligibility and Interest

It is proposed that eligibility for the program be limited to those businesses that are located on the ground floor of Town Plaza with obscured visibility from either Culver or Washington Boulevards. There are approximately five properties that lack street visibility. The five properties are located at 9426 and 9432 Washington Boulevard, 9300 and 9500 Culver Boulevard and 3912/3918 Van Buren Place. Currently, there are six businesses that have expressed interest in participating in a signage program with a potential annual maintenance fee. Of, these, three businesses are tenants of the Steps Owner.

### Maintenance Fee

The estimated maintenance costs for the static signs are estimated to be \$3,000 per year. It is proposed that this cost could be paid for by participating businesses pursuant to the proposed licensing program (Attachment 3). The proposed annual maintenance fee is \$500 per business to fund routine maintenance (electrical, landscaping, lighting, graffiti) and non-routine repair/replacements. Eligible businesses that wish to participate in the program would be required to execute an agreement with the City. The agreement would renew annually and require a current lease in one of the identified eligible properties. This fee would also include general maintenance of the sign including the areas immediately adjacent to the sign location.

### Funding/Donation Opportunity

The Steps Owner has offered to donate the one-time capital cost of the fabrication and installation (approximately \$95,000 for the fabrication of two static signs) to progress this program and lower potential participation costs amongst eligible businesses. The total costs would also include installation of the signs which is estimated to be \$20,000. The Steps Owner's donation is contingent on selection of the static signs only, not the digital signs. If the City wished to pursue this opportunity, a formal agreement to receive the donation would need to be completed to transfer ownership of the signs to the City and would come before City Council for approval.

Both signs are proposed to be located within the REA boundaries which would allow for the installation; nonetheless, an encroachment permit would be required.

## **FISCAL ANALYSIS**

Should the City Council consider the donation from HCP, there would be no cost for the monument signs other than the staff time required for electrical connection for lighting and supervision of installation.

If the City Council does not accept the donation, the cost for the static signs would be approximately \$115,000 which includes fabrication and installation, plus the required staff time to supervise the work to be completed. Digital signs would be slightly more expensive at an estimated cost of \$130,000 including fabrication and installation. These costs are subject to change based on price of materials and labor available. The Adopted Budget for Fiscal Year 2023-2024 does not include funding for these signs.

The City would bear the costs of maintaining the signs going forward, but those costs are expected to be offset by the annual maintenance fee.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

1. Monument Sign Proposed Locations
2. Town Plaza Monument Sign Renderings
3. Proposed Town Plaza Monument Signage Licensing Program Overview

## **MOTIONS**

That the City Council:

1. Discuss and provide direction on a Town Plaza Monument Signage Licensing Program, including the installation of two freestanding monument signs in the expanded portion of Town Plaza;
2. Discuss and provide direction on the proposed donation from HC 9300 Culver LLC to fabricate and install the monument signs; and
3. Provide other direction to the City Manager as deemed appropriate.