



**City of Santa Ana**  
**20 Civic Center Plaza, Santa Ana, CA 92701**  
**Planning Commission Staff Report**  
**March 10, 2025**

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**Topic:** Conditional Use Permit No. 2024-15 – MainPlace Mall Digital Billboards (2800 N. Main Street)

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**RECOMMENDED ACTION**

Adopt a resolution approving Conditional Use Permit No. 2024-15, as conditioned, to allow for conversion of two existing freeway-oriented on-premise digital signs to digital billboards and to allow the digital billboards to continue to exceed 60 feet in height.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

George Manyak with GM Outdoor Inc. (Applicant) on behalf of Centennial (Property Owner), is requesting approval of Conditional Use Permit (CUP) No. 2024-15, to allow the conversion of two existing freeway oriented, on-premise digital signs, to off-premise advertising digital signs (i.e., digital billboards), and to allow the digital billboards to continue to exceed the maximum height of 60 feet. The digital signs are located at MainPlace Mall, an existing indoor shopping mall located at 2800 N. Main Street (Project). The Applicant is making the request pursuant to Sections 41-1110 and 41-1131 of the Santa Ana Municipal Code (SAMC), which allow for such signage, subject to review and approval of an Operating Agreement by the City Manager and CUP by the Planning Commission. Staff recommends approval of the applicant's request, as the existing structures are carefully designed to minimize any impacts to the surrounding community, are consistent with City standards, and would support the economic prosperity of the site and City. Furthermore, the project aligns with several goals and policies of the General Plan that encourage land uses that not only respect but enhance the existing character of the community and promote the City's economic prosperity.

**DISCUSSION**

**Project Description**

The Applicant proposes to convert two existing freestanding, freeway-oriented digital signs into digital billboards. The first sign is currently located along the Santa Ana (I-5) Freeway, and extends to a height of 81.83 feet with a sign area of 672 square feet. The second sign is positioned along the Garden Grove (SR-22) Freeway, and stands at a

height of 71.83 feet with a sign area of 624 square feet. Exhibit 5 of this staff report highlights the location of both signs on the subject property.

Pursuant to the SAMC, the existing signs currently meet the definition of *On-Premise Advertisement Signs*, as the commercial advertisement pertains solely to goods or services which are produced or offered for sale on the premises where the advertisement is displayed (i.e., MainPlace Mall).

The proposed conversion would consist of transitioning the existing digital signs to digital billboards, by providing off-premise advertising in the display in addition to the already provided civic promotions. The physical structures of the signs would remain largely unchanged, with the primary change being the type of digital content displayed. The SAMC defines *Off-Premise Advertisement Sign* as any commercial advertisement other than an on-premise advertisement sign that advertises products or services that is not located, produced, or offered for sale on the subject premise. As part of the conversion, all existing tenant identification signage would be removed from the structures, and “Santa Ana” would be prominently added to the support beam of each sign to comply with the SAMC requirements and provide clear location identification.

The existing freestanding digital signs feature two digital displays supported by a single post, and are situated within existing landscape planters that range from approximately 525 square feet to 2,000 square feet in size. The existing digital displays are equipped with light-sensing devices designed to monitor brightness and ambient light conditions, automatically adjusting or dimming the brightness levels to ensure compliance with lighting regulations and to minimize potential impacts on surrounding areas. The digital billboards will operate daily from 6:00 a.m. to midnight. Apart from removal of the tenant identification signs, no equipment upgrades are proposed as part of this request. Further details related to the project and site are listed below in Table 1.

**Table 1: Project and Location Information**

Item	Information	
Project Address and Council Ward	2800 N. Main Street – Ward 3	
Nearest Intersection	Main Street and Mainplace Drive	
General Plan Designation	District Center – Medium (DC-2.1)	
Zoning Designation	Specific Plan No. 4	
Surrounding Land Uses	North	Residential/Commercial (City of Orange)
	East	Residential/Commercial
	South	Office
	West	Single-Family Residences across I-5
Property Size	49 acres (2,134,440 square feet)	
Existing	On-Premise Digital Sign	
Proposed	Off-Premise Commercial Advertising Sign (Digital Billboard)	
Use Permissions	Allowed with a conditional use permit (CUP) and operating agreement.	
Zoning Code Sections Affected	Uses	SAMC Sec. 41-1110

Table 2 provides a detailed comparison of the project's compliance with the applicable land use and development standards.

**Table 2: Development Standards**

Standard	Required for Digital Billboards	Provided
Maximum Sign Area	As allowed by Caltrans	Existing, 672 max. square feet
Maximum Number of Faces	Two	Complies; 2 each
Maximum	60 feet (May be modified by the Planning Commission)	81 feet and 10-inches max. (Height modification included as part of overall request to the Planning Commission)
Spacing Between Billboards	1,000 feet	Complies; 1,200 feet
Number of Vertical Supports	One	Complies; One each
Design Standards	Santa Ana permanently appear on structure	Complies; Provided on both structures

### **Project Background**

The subject structures are located at MainPlace Mall, a prominent 49-acre commercial site comprising eight parcels and approximately 1,130,000 square feet of retail and commercial space. Both signs were originally constructed as part of the establishment of Regional Plan Sign Program Application (RSPG) No. 2014-01, which was conditionally approved by the Planning Commission on May 1, 2015. This was subsequently approved by the City Council on June 2, 2015.

On July 19, 2022, the City Council adopted Ordinance No. NS-3023, which updated regulations pertaining to off-premise commercial advertising signage. The ordinance established specific requirements for the location, design, and operation of digital billboards and included provisions allowing for the conversion of existing freeway-oriented, on-premise digital signs into off-premise advertising digital billboards, provided they met the new regulatory standards.

The applicant submitted the conversion request on October 12, 2023 but suspended processing the application during a brief period of time. During the review process, the applicant collaborated closely with City staff to ensure full compliance with the applicable development standards and design criteria. Additionally, the applicant worked with staff to negotiate and establish the terms of the Operating Agreement, ensuring alignment with the City's objectives for digital billboard conversions and regulatory compliance.

## **Project Analysis**

Conditional Use Permit (CUP) requests for conversions of On-Premise Digital Signs to Off-Premise Commercial Advertising Signs (digital billboards) are governed by Section 41-1110 of the SAMC and are subject to discretionary review and approval of a CUP by the Planning Commission. Such CUPs may be granted when the required findings can be made; however, if the findings cannot be made, the request must be denied.

Staff recommends approval of the proposed Project, as it would allow the Applicant to convert the existing digital signs into digital billboards without introducing new impacts to the surrounding community. The Project would also provide additional benefits to the City and contribute to the economic viability of MainPlace Mall. The physical structures of the signs would remain largely unchanged, with only minor modifications to remove tenant identification signage. The primary change would be to the type of content displayed. Currently, the signs are limited to on-premise advertising, meaning they can only promote businesses or activities located on the same property. The proposed conversion would allow off-premise advertising, enabling the display of regional or national advertisements unrelated to the site.

Furthermore, the existing signs were originally constructed as part of the approval for RSPG No. 2014-01 and were designed to fully comply with the City's development standards at the time, adhering to regulations outlined in the SAMC regarding height, sign area, design, location, and brightness. The signs are located at least 1,000 feet from each other, appropriately scaled to the surrounding development, and positioned a minimum of 250 feet from existing historic landmarks. As a result, the existing structures remain in conformance with City standards. Since no improvements to the equipment are proposed, the requested conversion would not introduce any new impacts or hazardous conditions for adjacent freeway drivers. In addition to compliance with development standards, the project is anticipated to enhance the economic viability of MainPlace Mall. By establishing a new revenue stream through advertising sales, the project will support the ongoing redevelopment and modernization of the 49-acre site. This economic boost will strengthen the property owner's ability to maintain and improve the mall while also contributing to the area's overall economic health. Moreover, the proposed operating agreement ensures the City will receive a portion of the revenue generated from advertising sales thus contributing to the economic viability of the City as well.

## ***General Plan Consistency***

The proposed Project aligns with several goals and policies of the City's General Plan. Goal LU-1 of the Land Use Element seeks to provide a land use plan that enhances the quality of life for residents while respecting and preserving the character of the existing community. By converting the signage at MainPlace Mall, the Project aims to support the ongoing development and vibrancy of the site, while maintaining harmony with the

surrounding environment. The revenue generated by the digital billboards will provide the Property Owner with the financial resources to reinvest in the continued redevelopment of the mall, consistent with both the MainPlace Specific Plan and the broader vision set forth in the City's General Plan. This reinvestment ensures that the mall remains a vital and attractive community asset, which directly supports Policy LU-1.1. This policy emphasizes the importance of fostering compatibility between land uses to enhance livability, promote healthy lifestyles, and create a cohesive urban environment. By using existing signage in a way that is in keeping with the scale and design of the existing site, the project will contribute to a vibrant and sustainable community that balances economic vitality with the preservation of community values.

The Project is also consistent with various goals and policies of the Economic Prosperity (EP) Element, particularly Policy EP-1.2 and Goal EP-3. Policy EP-1.2 aims to strengthen and expand citywide business attraction efforts to help the city achieve its full employment potential. The proposed conversion of the existing signage into digital billboards will create valuable advertising opportunities for businesses beyond MainPlace Mall but also for businesses across Santa Ana's commercial centers and Downtown. This expanded advertising platform will allow local businesses to reach a broader audience, including commuters and visitors traveling along major highways like the I-5 and SR-22, which are heavily trafficked corridors. By offering a larger and more visible marketing space, the digital billboards will contribute to a dynamic business ecosystem, attracting more businesses to the area and supporting the city's efforts to increase its economic activity. Additionally, the project aligns with Goal EP-3, which promotes a business-friendly environment where businesses can thrive and leverage Santa Ana's strengths and opportunities. The conversion takes full advantage of the City's strategic location along key highways in Orange County, providing high-visibility advertising that helps local businesses gain exposure. This increased visibility not only supports the economic viability of MainPlace Mall but also promotes Santa Ana as a prime location for business growth. The project will enhance the City's ability to attract new businesses and investment.

### **Public Notification and Community Outreach**

Project notifications were posted, published, and mailed in accordance with City and State regulations. Copies of the public notice, including a 1,000-foot notification radius map, and the site posting are provided in Exhibit 6. The site is located across from Morrison/Eldridge Park and Fisher Park Neighborhood Association, whose leadership was notified of the project.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and its Guidelines, the Project is exempt from further review under Section 15301 (Class 1 – Existing Facilities).

The Project qualifies for this exemption, as it pertains to the operation, licensing, or minor alteration of private structures with little to no expansion of their existing or prior use as the subject structures are being utilized as a digital signs as existing and would not be expanded as part of the subject request. As such, a Notice of Exemption, Environmental Review No. 2023-111 will be filed for this project.

### **ECONOMIC AND FISCAL IMPACTS**

The proposed Project will generate an annual operating fee payable to the City of \$100,000.00 in the first year, \$106,468.72 in the second year, and \$113,355.95 in the third year. Thereafter, the operating fee will continue to increase by approximately 6.46% annually for the duration of the 20-year operating agreement. The total agreement term remittance amount would be \$3,869,408.98. Further details regarding the Operating Agreement are provided in Exhibit 2.

### **EXHIBITS**

1. Conditional Use Permit Resolution
2. Draft Operating Agreement
3. Vicinity Zoning and Aerial Map
4. Site Photo
5. Project Plans
6. Copy of Public Notices

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