



International Dark-Sky Association

"...to preserve and protect the nighttime environment and our heritage of dark skies through environmentally responsible outdoor lighting."

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Mayor Bob Filner
City Administration Building
202 C St., 11th Floor
San Diego, CA 92101

Mayor Filner,

I am writing to you to express concern that the City of San Diego is considering amending its sign ordinance to greatly expand the number of signs in the downtown area and allow for the use of electronic billboards. As a homeowner in the area, a former employee of the Palomar Observatory and as Managing Director of the International Dark-Sky Association I have serious concerns about the proposal. The matter was referred to me by our San Diego Chapter, which is equally concerned.

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The proposed Downtown San Diego District Sign Plan seems to be in direct conflict with the City's existing ordinance on light pollution that was adopted so that all outdoor lighting "minimizes negative impacts from light pollution including light trespass, glare, and urban sky glow in order to preserve enjoyment of the night sky and minimize conflict caused by unnecessary illumination."

The current sign ordinance offers reasonable limitations on signs that the new plan would not. Under the proposed ordinance new signs would be permitted that could cover building faces up to 14 stories tall and the entire length of street blocks. This is in addition to large electronic panels with TV-style video displays. Such outrageous displays are better reserved for Times Square, not San Diego.

Allowing electronic displays such as these would reverse night sky protections that the City has put into place for citizens and the astronomers at both Palomar Observatory and Mount Laguna Observatory. Nighttime use of electronic billboard displays are a tremendous source of light pollution. Much of the light emitted from these excessively bright devices directly brightens the night sky making them a significant threat to astronomical research, one of Southern California's most valuable economic and technical assets.

The light of electronic billboard displays does not shine directly upward, it is instead projected sideways at angles that are above the horizontal. Research has shown that light emitted in this direction produces more light polluting skyglow than light emitted at higher angles, and that the effects of this low-angle light are visible over a much broader area. This bright, horizontal light would also create light trespass as it shines directly at the windows of residents in and near the downtown area.

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Because of their detrimental affects on astronomy, earlier this year the State of Arizona outlawed the use of electronic billboards located within 75-miles of astronomical observatories. It is certain that permitting the use of electronic billboards within the City of San Diego would have a negative impact on the observatory's nightly astronomical research programs and forever change the character of the City's Downtown District.

Given the legitimate concerns expressed by others regarding electronic billboards' excessive energy use, their potential as a distraction to roadway motorists and the reasons provided above, I request that you do not allow the use of electronic billboards and similar signs in the City

Sincerely,

W. Scott Kardel
Managing Director
International Dark-Sky Association

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