



STAFF REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL

DATE: Regular Meeting of July 14, 2023

TO: Mayor and Members of the City Council

VIA: Patrick Tang, Interim City Manager

SUBMITTED BY: Tim Rood, Community Development Director

SUBJECT: Waterfront Directional Signage

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Receive a report on waterfront directional signage, take public comment, and provide any direction to staff.

BACKGROUND:

On January 27, 2015, the City Council approved a one-year business district directional signage pilot program for Railroad Avenue. Staff proposed that a directory-style sign listing the names and addresses of two individual businesses be installed at the northwest corner of San Pablo and Sycamore Avenues. Staff proposed that header for the signs would identify the Railroad Avenue Business District, with individual businesses listed on panels below. Staff planned to work with the two restaurants proposing the sign (Leila by the Bay and Powder Keg Pub) to enhance the graphics to be more stylized and in keeping with the area.

The City Council directed that two signs be installed, although the second location was not given. The staff report stated that there would be no fiscal impact because the proposed directional signage would be funded by participating businesses and that staff would work with these businesses to refine the design of the signs.

Staff also noted that this type of off-site commercial advertising is not allowed under the City's sign code and suggested that the process to consider and amend the City's sign code to allow for such signs would take a considerable amount of time given staff workload and competing priorities.

Staff is not aware of any signage having been installed as a result of the one-year pilot program. Departmental files indicate that the existing large, unpermitted wooden sign advertising Leila By the Bay restaurant was installed in the City's right-of-way near the intersection of Railroad Avenue and Sycamore Avenue sometime before 2016 and that its face was repainted with similar content sometime prior to 2022. Staff has not located any records indicating who installed this sign or under what authorization.

Members of the Council have asked staff to propose directional signage to encourage patronage of businesses along the Bayfront. Since 2015, many additional businesses have opened, including several at The Exchange and The Aventine, as well as the live-work townhomes on Sycamore and Railroad Avenues.

Directory-style signs that list individual businesses are typically found at multi-tenant shopping centers, where property management is responsible for their construction and maintenance, including changing signs to respond to tenant turnover. Staff has observed that such signs in local shopping centers tend to age poorly and not to be well maintained or consistent in appearance as new tenants are added over the years.

With the number of existing and potential new businesses on the Bayfront, staff believes that directory-style signage for these businesses in a distant location or locations would not be effective in attracting visitors and additionally could pose a hazard by distracting drivers. Directory-style signs with small print are better suited to pedestrian wayfinding, with sidewalk or off-street installations in areas with high pedestrian traffic and multiple destinations within walking distance. In such locations, including Downtown Napa, these signs are typically installed by Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) that are funded by the businesses within the district through annual assessments. In Napa, BID staff oversees the sign program and coordinates installations with the City's Public Works Department.

Conditions and traveler behavior have also changed considerably since the one-year pilot was authorized in 2015. Online maps and directions and review aggregator applications such as Yelp and TripAdvisor have made finding individual businesses far more straightforward. In addition, businesses are now located on Sycamore Avenue and John Muir Parkway as well as Railroad Avenue, and access to the Bayfront is from both Sycamore Avenue and John Muir Parkway.

Signs within the roadway must generally conform to applicable engineering guidance, such as the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). The California edition of the MUTCD, known as the MUTCD-CA, includes examples of community wayfinding guide signs that are designed to be easy to read from a moving vehicle and provide clear turn indicators to help visitors reach key destinations, as opposed to individual businesses.

ANALYSIS:

Staff recommends that the City consider procuring and installing approximately eight permanent vehicular community wayfinding guide signs at key intersections, oriented to motorists arriving via Interstate 80, Highway 4, and San Pablo Avenue. These signs will direct visitors to the entire Bayfront business district in a way that conforms to applicable regulations, including the City's sign code and the MUTCD-CA. Community wayfinding guide signs are blue with white text and arrows and may include a community-specific branding element at the top.

These reflective metal signs are often installed on existing traffic signal poles. Similar to the existing blue-and-white wayfinding signs around Hercules, they are designed to be easily readable from passing vehicles and provide turn directions to key destinations. Here, the proposed destination would be the entire Bayfront business district, allowing the district to continue to grow and attract new businesses without distracting drivers or requiring the signage to be changed for each tenant.

A prototype wayfinding sign design and a location map of recommended locations are included in the attached presentation. A branding element on the top of the proposed signs, developed by staff from the City's 2024 logo stylebook, would provide a unifying element and could serve as a prototype for future wayfinding signs citywide, if desired. Additional engineering review would be required to confirm the exact size, position, and mounting method of these signs, as well as fabrication and installation costs.

With the leadership transition in the City's Public Works Department and many capital projects currently underway, the proposed directional signage could compete with existing projects for limited City funding and staff time. Staff therefore recommends that if the City Council wishes to proceed, that it request the interim Public Works Director evaluate the wayfinding guide sign project for potential inclusion in the City's Capital Improvement Plan and return to the Council with more detailed information about the estimated cost and timeline for design, procurement and installation when available.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact to this informational report. If the City Council so requests, staff will return with more information about the potential cost of the recommended signs.

ATTACHMENTS:

Presentation - Bayfront Wayfinding Signage