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1500 Green Oak Road - Vista, CA 92081

July 1, 2013

Kevin Ham
Economic Development Director
City of Vista
200 Civic Center Drive
Vista, CA 92084

By hand

Re: City of Vista Digital Message Boards: Draft Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration

Dear Mr. Ham:

These are my comments on the above draft study and Mitigated Negative Declaration (hereafter, MND) for the City's proposal to erect two double-sided digital billboards boards (DBB). The page numbers below refer to the pages in the MND.

Page 5. Purpose and Need

The whole purpose of the DBB project, according to the MND, is "to communicate city messages for benefit of the community." But then the MND confesses that "the City may utilize up to 15 percent of the ... display time for Public Service Messages." Only up to 15%. If it's THE purpose, why not 50% -- or 75%? Up to 15% percent is not worth that much visual blight, regardless of the revenue mentioned. The stated purpose is a specious justification for the DBB project.

Page 5. Project Location and Site

The MND fails to explain why two sites are being considered for the University Drive location.

I believe the MND fails to adequately address the impact on our community of the following aspects of the DBB proposal:

I. Aesthetics and Community Character

Page 1. Determination: The MND lists four items here which it acknowledges would suffer potentially significant impacts if not sufficiently mitigated. It fails to include Aesthetics or Community Character as one of those items.



SR 78 now

SR 78 if DBB are approved

As shown by images included in the MND, the visual impact of the DBB and the damage to the visual quality of SR 78 and the community character of Vista is one of the most serious and significant of all impacts. The MND fails to explain how this serious negative impact can be mitigated?

Page 22. 4.1 Aesthetics

(a), (c) and (d) should have “potentially significant impact” checked.

For (d), the MND states that 96% of glare is caused by sky glow and other sources. The remaining 4% of glare is not an insignificant amount and could potentially be a hazard nuisance as well as impacting residences within view of the DBB. If there is fog, the glare impact could be even more severe.

Page 28. 4.10 Land Use and Planning

(b) The DBB project is in direct conflict with the provisions of Vista General Plan 2030, Land Use and Community Identity Element (December 2011), pp. 2-1 — 2-6:

- LUCI Goal : Increase the level of design quality and preserve and enhance Vista’s identity and image.
 - LUCI Policy 1.7 - Ensure that telecommunications facilities are designed to integrate into existing structures and/or landscapes with *minimal visual intrusion*. [Emphasis added.]
- LUCI Goal 2: Preserve and enhance the characteristics and features of neighborhoods that share common development patterns, topography, major streets, and zoning patterns.
 - LUCI Policy 2.12 - *Restrict development of hillsides so that the natural appearance and landform of the site is preserved*. [Emphasis added.]
- LUCI Goal 3: *Preserve and protect existing residential neighborhoods from actions, activities, or land uses that may have an adverse impact upon the enjoyment of the residential living environment*. NOTE: The DBB may be only 250 feet from some residences, according to the MND, and the DBB will operate 24 hours/day. [Emphasis added.]
 - LUCI Policy 3.1 - *Require all new development to be designed to minimize impacts on adjoining residential neighborhoods*. [Emphasis added.]

- LUCI Policy 3.2 - Mitigate unacceptable levels of noise, odors, pollution, dust, light, and *glare upon residential areas* and other sensitive receptors, such as schools and day care centers. [Emphasis added.]
- (b) The DBB project is in direct conflict with a goal set by the City Council. See City Council Special Meeting minutes (Goal-Setting for 2012-2014), March 22, 2012, p. 2: “Mr. Stark asked the City Council, City staff, and members of the community what opportunities would take the City of Vista's reputation/image/quality of life to an even higher level... Make all entrances into the City attractive and make roadway improvements.”

Page 32. 4.18 Mandatory Findings of Significance

- (c) The MND does not adequately address the substantial adverse effects of the DBB on human beings, directly or indirectly. Visual blight is an environmental effect. The DBB will have a significant negative impact on the visual quality of life for residents and for people driving through Vista on SR 78. Billboards have also been shown to have an adverse effect on values of properties in their vicinity – see *Beyond Aesthetics*, Jonathan Snyder, Samuel S. Fels Fund, December 2011.

Page 33. 5.1 Aesthetics

- (a) The MND finds only “two main viewsheds” in the project area. This is a very limited definition of “viewshed” and does not address the real visual impact of the DBB.

(The natural environment that is visible from one or more viewing points. – Merriam Webster)

(A viewshed is an area of land, water, or other environmental element that is visible to the human eye from a fixed vantage point... Viewsheds are often spaces that are readily visible from public areas such as from public roadways, public parks or high-rise buildings. The preservation of viewsheds is frequently a goal in the designation of open space areas, green belts, and community separators.) – Urban Dictionary

A viewshed is what any person sees from any location – driving along SR 78, going east or west, from any residence or location overlooking SR 78 or the DBB when erected.

- (c) The MND does not adequately address the significant degradation of the existing **visual character or quality** of the sites and surroundings. The document cites the change in character at the sites from the physical installation of the sign *columns*, which would indeed be a small footprint. The MND does not address the visual impact of the DBB.

Page 34. 5.1 Aesthetics

- (d) The MND states that 96% of glare is caused by sky glow and other sources. The remaining 4% of glare is not an insignificant amount and could potentially be a hazard nuisance, particularly if there is fog, as well as impacting residences within view of the DBB. The DBB may be only 250 feet from some residences, according to the MND, and the DBB will operate 24 hours/day.

Page 58. 5.10 Land Use and Planning

- (b) See comments (above) for 4.10 Land Use and Planning. The MND fails to note that the DBB project conflicts with some items in the LUCI Element, Vista General Plan 2030.

Page 70. Aesthetics

The MND again fails to deal with the significant negative impact on the entrances to Vista from east and west along SR 78 and the visual damage to those who live or work within sight of the DBB. This paragraph puts a very narrow construction on “viewsheds” and does not address what will be in plain sight, the DBB.

Page 75. 5.18 Mandatory Findings of Significance

(c) The MND fails to acknowledge the potential to degrade the visual quality of the environment and the extent of degradation that will occur. See comment above for page 32 (c).

II. Driver Distraction Leading to Accidents

Page 31. 4.16 Transportation/Traffic

(d) See comment above for page 22 (d) regarding glare hazard.

It is my understanding that billboard technology is developing to the point that “interactive” billboards may soon be able to pinpoint messages to specific drivers passing along this area of SR 78. This would be an even greater distraction for drivers and should be prohibited.

Page 64. 5.16 Transportation/Traffic

(d) See comment above for page 22 (d) regarding glare hazard. See comment above regarding interactive billboards.

Page 74. 5.18 Mandatory Findings of Significance

(b) This statement admits the potential for driver distraction as the DBB are located within the viewshed of drivers on SR 78. See comment above for page 22 (d) and comment above for page 31.

The draft MND fails to acknowledge the numerous significant negative environmental impacts the DBB will impose upon our community, residents, and drivers along SR 78. I ask the City to reject the findings of the MND and to reject the Digital Message Board project.

However, I believe the Project will continue to impose significant negative environmental impacts, even with whatever mitigation can be proposed, and an MND is not adequate to address this project. I request the City to prepare a complete Environmental Impact Report before proceeding further with the Project.

Sincerely,

Stephanie D. Jackel