



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Executive Summary Planning Code Text Amendment

HEARING DATE: SEPTEMBER 15, 2016

EXPIRATION DATE: OCTOBER 13, 2016

Project Name: Signs- Exemptions and General Advertising Sign Penalties
Case Number: 2016-008022PCA [Board File No. 160553]
Initiated by: Supervisor Peskin / Introduced May 17, 2016
Staff Contact: Diego R Sánchez, Legislative Affairs
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Reviewed by: Aaron Starr, Manager of Legislative Affairs
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Recommendation: **Recommend Approval**

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PLANNING CODE AMENDMENT

The proposed Ordinance would amend the Planning Code to clarify that all noncommercial Signs are exempt from regulation pursuant to Planning Code, Article 6. It would also increase penalties for repeat violations for the display of illegal General Advertising (GA) Signs, shorten the time before penalties for GA Sign violations begin to accrue and allow property liens for such penalties that go unpaid.

The Way It Is Now:

Identifying, Exempted and other Signs

1. A bulletin board of a public, charitable or religious institution, used to display announcements relative to meetings to be held on the premises is an Identifying Sign.
2. Religious symbols attached to buildings, if not projecting beyond any street property line or setback line, are exempt from the restrictions under Article 6.
3. Information plaques or signs which identify to the public open spaces, architectural features, creators of artwork, or an Identifying Sign directing the public to open spaces or parking resources projecting not more than three inches from the wall and with dimensions no greater than 24 inches by 24 inches are exempt from the restrictions under Article 6.
4. Flags indicating weather conditions and single flags that are emblems of business firms, enterprises and other organizations are exempt from the restrictions under Article 6.
5. Non-illuminated art murals within the South of Market Mixed Use Districts and the Eastern Neighborhood Mixed Use Districts, except for the Urban Mixed Use District, are exempt from the restrictions of Article 6 if they project no more than 18 inches from the pre-existing surface of a structure.

General Advertising Signs

6. The Responsible Party for a violation of GA Sign requirements has 30 calendar days to either file an application to remove the GA Sign, correct the violation, or request reconsideration of the violation.
7. A Repeat Violation is subject to the same administrative penalties as an initial violation of the GA Sign requirements. These are based on the size of the GA Sign found in violation of the Planning Code and are assessed for every day in violation.

8. The Planning Department (Department) coordinates with the Bureau of Delinquent Revenue Collection for payment of assessed GA Sign penalties that go unpaid.

The Way It Would Be:

Identifying, Exempted and other Signs

1. A bulletin board of a public, charitable or religious institution, used to display announcements relative to meetings to be held on the premises would no longer be an Identifying Sign. It would be regulated under other existing sign controls including, but not limited to, exempted signs or business signs.
2. Religious symbols without limits to their projection over the street property line or setback line would be exempt from the restrictions under Article 6.
3. Information plaques or signs which identify to the public open spaces, architectural features, creators of artwork, or an Identifying Sign directing the public to open spaces or parking resources without limits to their dimensions would be exempt from the restrictions under Article 6.
4. Flags indicating weather conditions would be considered signs exempt from the restrictions under Article 6. Single flags which are emblems of business firms, enterprises and other organizations would no longer be exempt from the restrictions under Article 6. They would be considered Wind Signs.
5. Art murals, including non-illuminated art murals, in any zoning district and of any projection would be considered exempt from the restrictions of Article 6.

General Advertising Signs

6. The Responsible Party for a violation of GA Sign requirements would have five calendar days from the date of a postmarked notice of violation, or three calendar days from the hand delivery or electronic mail delivery date of a notice, to either file a permit application to remove the GA Sign, correct the violation, or request reconsideration of the violation.
7. The Responsible Party for a Repeat Violation may elect one of two ways in which to calculate accrued penalties. The first is the “Daily Penalties.” These are also based on the size of the GA Sign found in violation of the Planning Code. However, on the first day in violation, the penalty is twice the amount of the penalty for an initial violation, three times on the second day in violation, four times on the third day in violation and five times for each subsequent day in violation. The second is the “Alternative Penalty.” The Alternative Penalty consists of the income earned for the display of the illegal GA Sign, including revenue earned by the Sign owner or operator from advertisement placement and revenue earned by the property owner or lessee from the lease of the property to the Sign owner or operator, plus an additional 20% of that total income.
8. The Planning Director would be able to initiate proceedings to make payment for unpaid assessed GA Sign penalties, and all additional authorized costs, a lien on the property pursuant to Administrative Code Chapter 100.

ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS

Signs and the City’s Streetscape

It is important that the City’s sign controls serve its interest in aesthetics and safety while safeguarding the First Amendment right to free speech. Signs have important civic, institutional, wayfinding and commercial purposes; however, misplaced, disproportioned or an excessive number of signs detract from the visual qualities of the urban environment. They may even create pedestrian and motorist hazards. At

the same time, sign controls must comply with the First Amendment, and to that end must not regulate noncommercial speech based on content. It is therefore imperative that the City continue to refine its sign controls to ensure public beauty and safety while complying with the First Amendment by clarifying that all noncommercial speech is exempt from regulation under Article 6.

Ballot Measures Regulating General Advertising Signs

San Francisco voters have repeatedly approved ballot measures that enhance the City's regulations on General Advertising Signs. For example, in March 2002 San Francisco voters overwhelmingly approved Proposition G. This Proposition amended the Planning Code to prohibit the installation of new GA Signs.¹ In November 2007 voters approved Proposition K, a policy statement declaring the proliferation of advertising signs in the public right of way as contributors to urban blight and visual clutter.² In November 2009 the San Francisco voters once again approved a measure to limit advertising signs. Proposition E prohibited an increase in the number of GA signs on street furniture and prohibited new GA Signs on City-owned buildings.³ Together these measures indicate a preference of the City's voting electorate to restrain the proliferation of GA Signs as a means to improve neighborhood aesthetics and character.

General Advertising Sign Enforcement

Initial Violations

The intent of the Department's GA Sign enforcement procedures is to eliminate illegal GA Signs and discourage violation of the GA Sign regulations. The procedures consist of multiple steps. The first is to determine whether a GA Sign has either been erected, installed, expanded, intensified, relocated or is operating in violation of Planning Code requirements. If staff determines that a violation exists, a notice of violation is sent to the responsible party by first class mail. The notice describes the violation and provides the responsible party 30 days to respond in one of the three ways. The first is to file a permit application to remove the GA Sign. The second is to correct the violation. The third is to request reconsideration of the notice due to an error in issuance. If the Responsible Party fails to respond to the notice within the 30 days, administrative penalties are assessed. Penalties are assessed per violation on a daily basis and their magnitude depends on the size of the GA Sign found in violation (*See Table 1: GA Sign Penalty Amounts*).

¹ March 2002 Proposition G

<http://sf-planning.org/sites/default/files/FileCenter/Documents/3284-PropositionG.pdf>

Election results:

<http://sfgov.org/elections/results-summary-mar-2002>

² November 2007 Proposition K (page 102)

http://sfpl.org/pdf/main/gic/elections/November6_2007.pdf

Election results:

<http://sfgov.org/elections/election-summary>

³ November 2009 Proposition E (page 47):

http://sfpl.org/pdf/main/gic/elections/November3_2009.pdf

Election results:

<http://sfgov.org/elections/november-3-2009-municipal-election-results-summary>

TABLE 1: GA SIGN PENALTY AMOUNTS (*Planning Code Section 610(b)(2)(B)*)

SIGN SIZE	PENALTY PER DAY PER VIOLATION
100 Square Feet or Less	\$100
101 – 300 Square Feet	\$1,000
301 – 500 Square Feet	\$1,750
Over 500 Square Feet	\$2,500

Under certain circumstances, the 30 day response period is an ineffective deterrent to installing unauthorized GA Signs. In the case of short term or one-time events, the 30 day response period can be too generous a time frame. The GA Sign can publicize the event and the event can conclude well within the 30 day response period. Any costs associated with legally removing the GA Sign may be absorbed by the event host. However, no penalties would be assessed or accrued.

Subsequent Violations

Repeat violations, defined as a violation occurring on a property subject to a notice of violation during the previous five years and owned by the same entity at the time of the earlier violation, are subject to an accelerated response time prior to penalty assessment. Instead of 30 days, a response is required in three days or penalties are assessed. However, the penalty rates are currently the same as those for first time violations. While repeat violations are not extremely common, it is worthwhile to bolster repeat violation penalties. Strengthened penalties serve as a deterrent to repeatedly violating GA Sign regulations while also compensating the public for the injury and damage caused by the GA Sign violation.

Penalty Collection

When GA Sign penalties are assessed, it has been the Department's experience that violators typically pay those penalties within a reasonable time frame; however, on occasion, the GA Sign owner in violation does not pay assessed penalties at all. In these instances, the Department has worked with the Bureau of Delinquent Revenue Collection to retrieve outstanding penalties. This typically occurs many weeks into the process. Delinquent amounts are then able to be made into a lien on the property with the GA Sign violation. It would be useful if an official from the Planning Department was enabled to begin lien proceedings earlier in the enforcement process so that it could serve as a deterrent to potential GA Sign violators or those delaying payment of penalties.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department recommends that the Commission recommend *approval* of the proposed Ordinance and adopt the attached Draft Resolution to that effect.

BASIS FOR RECOMMENDATION

The Department supports the proposed Ordinance because it further aligns the Planning Code's sign controls with the First Amendment's protection of noncommercial speech. The Department also supports the proposed strengthened deterrents to violating GA Sign controls. The accelerated violation response timeframe, updated penalty elections and the possibility of early lien proceeding initiation will serve as

valuable tools. Further, the Ordinance proposes changes in line with the multiple voter-approved ballot measures supporting the containment and enhanced control of GA Signs. Taken as a whole, the proposed amendments serve the City's interest in improving its physical aesthetics and public safety through enhanced sign regulation.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Department has determined that this Ordinance will impact our current implementation procedures; however the proposed changes can be implemented without increasing permit costs or review time.

REQUIRED COMMISSION ACTION

The proposed Ordinance is before the Commission so that it may recommend adoption, rejection, or adoption with modifications to the Board of Supervisors.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The proposed amendments are not defined as a project under CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(c)(2) and 15378 because they do not result in a physical change in the environment.

PUBLIC COMMENT

As of the date of this report, the Planning Department has not received any public comment regarding the proposed Ordinance.

RECOMMENDATION:	Recommend Approval
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Attachments:

Exhibit A: Draft Planning Commission Resolution
Exhibit B: Board of Supervisors File No. 160553



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Planning Commission Draft Resolution

HEARING DATE SEPTEMBER 15, 2016

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RECOMMENDING THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS ADOPT A PROPOSED ORDINANCE THAT WOULD AMEND THE PLANNING CODE TO CLARIFY THAT ALL NONCOMMERCIAL SIGNS ARE EXEMPT FROM REGULATION PURSUANT TO PLANNING CODE, ARTICLE 6; INCREASE PENALTIES FOR REPEAT VIOLATIONS FOR THE DISPLAY OF GENERAL ADVERTISING SIGNS; SHORTEN THE TIME BEFORE PENALTIES FOR GENERAL ADVERTISING SIGN VIOLATIONS BEGIN TO ACCRUE; ALLOW PROPERTY LIENS FOR SUCH PENALTIES THAT GO UNPAID; AFFIRMING THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT'S DETERMINATION UNDER THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT; AND MAKING FINDINGS OF CONSISTENCY WITH THE GENERAL PLAN, AND THE EIGHT PRIORITY POLICIES OF PLANNING CODE SECTION 101.1, AND A FINDING OF PUBLIC NECESSITY, CONVENIENCE, AND WELFARE UNDER PLANNING CODE SECTION 302 FINDINGS.

WHEREAS, on May 17, 2016 Supervisor Peskin introduced a proposed Ordinance under Board of Supervisors (hereinafter "Board") File Number 160553, which would amend the Planning Code to clarify that all noncommercial Signs are exempt from regulation pursuant to Planning Code, Article 6; increase penalties for repeat violations for the display of illegal General Advertising Signs; shorten the time before penalties for General Advertising Sign violations begin to accrue; and allow property liens for such penalties that go unpaid;

WHEREAS, The Planning Commission (hereinafter "Commission") conducted a duly noticed public hearing at a regularly scheduled meeting to consider the proposed Ordinance on September 15, 2016; and,

WHEREAS, the proposed Ordinance has been determined to be categorically exempt from environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act Sections 15060(c)(2) and 15378; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission has heard and considered the testimony presented to it at the public hearing and has further considered written materials and oral testimony presented on behalf of Department staff and other interested parties; and

WHEREAS, all pertinent documents may be found in the files of the Department, as the custodian of records, at 1650 Mission Street, Suite 400, San Francisco; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission has reviewed the proposed Ordinance; and

MOVED, that the Planning Commission hereby recommends that the Board of Supervisors **approve** the proposed ordinance.

FINDINGS

Having reviewed the materials identified in the preamble above, and having heard all testimony and arguments, this Commission finds, concludes, and determines as follows:

1. San Francisco's urban environment and aesthetics set it apart from most large cities in the US. Carefully crafted signage regulations have helped the City's aesthetics and contributed to its distinction.
2. The City's voters have repeatedly adopted ballot measures to contain and control General Advertising Signs. These have been adopted in large part to maintain and improve the City's aesthetics.
3. Ordinances to bolster existing sign regulations, and in particular those for General Advertising Signs, align with the voting electorate's policy preference for meaningful signage controls.
4. Clarifying sign exemptions, increasing penalties for repeat General Advertising Sign violators, accelerated response times for General Advertising Sign violators and new methods to assure the City collects unpaid penalties are all methods to improve the City's signage regulations and are consistent with the policy direction for sign regulations.
5. **General Plan Compliance.** The proposed Ordinance is consistent with the following Objectives and Policies of the General Plan:

URBAN DESIGN ELEMENT

OBJECTIVE 4

IMPROVEMENT OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD ENVIRONMENT TO INCREASE PERSONAL SAFETY, COMFORT, PRIDE AND OPPORTUNITY.

Policy 4.14

Remove and obscure distracting and cluttering elements.

The proposed Ordinance will help to better regulate signs in the City, including illegal General Advertising Signs. Illegal signage is often culpable for the street clutter that detracts from the City's urban streetscape.

VAN NESS AVENUE AREA PLAN

OBJECTIVE 8

CREATE AN ATTRACTIVE STREET AND SIDEWALK SPACE WHICH CONTRIBUTES TO THE TRANSFORMATION OF VAN NESS AVENUE INTO A RESIDENTIAL BOULEVARD.

Policy 8.11

Permit general advertising signs, business signs and other identifying signs. Permitted signs should meet the following design criteria.

The proposed Ordinance will aid enforcement efforts on General Advertising signs that are illegally installed or that are altered to not meet the design criteria in the Van Ness Avenue Area Plan, including that General advertisement Signs should conform to State Outdoor Advertisement regulations requiring that no advertising display shall be placed within 100 feet from another advertising display.

6. **Planning Code Section 101 Findings.** The proposed amendments to the Planning Code are consistent with the eight Priority Policies set forth in Section 101.1(b) of the Planning Code in that:

1. That existing neighborhood-serving retail uses be preserved and enhanced and future opportunities for resident employment in and ownership of such businesses enhanced;

The proposed Ordinance would not have a negative effect on neighborhood serving retail uses and will not have a negative effect on opportunities for resident employment in and ownership of neighborhood-serving retail as the Ordinance concerns itself with sign regulations.

2. That existing housing and neighborhood character be conserved and protected in order to preserve the cultural and economic diversity of our neighborhoods;

The proposed Ordinance would not have a negative effect on housing or neighborhood character because the Ordinance amends sign regulations.

3. That the City's supply of affordable housing be preserved and enhanced;

The proposed Ordinance would not have an adverse effect on the City's supply of affordable housing as it focuses on regulating signs.

4. That commuter traffic not impede MUNI transit service or overburden our streets or neighborhood parking;

The proposed Ordinance would not result in commuter traffic impeding MUNI transit service or overburdening the streets or neighborhood parking because the Ordinance proposes to amend the City's sign regulations.

5. That a diverse economic base be maintained by protecting our industrial and service sectors from displacement due to commercial office development, and that future opportunities for

resident employment and ownership in these sectors be enhanced;

The proposed Ordinance would not cause displacement of the industrial or service sectors due to office development, and future opportunities for resident employment or ownership in these sectors would not be impaired because the Ordinance concerns itself with sign regulations.

6. That the City achieve the greatest possible preparedness to protect against injury and loss of life in an earthquake;

The proposed Ordinance would not have an adverse effect on City's preparedness against injury and loss of life in an earthquake as it deals with the regulation of signs.

7. That the landmarks and historic buildings be preserved;

The proposed Ordinance would not have an adverse effect on the City's Landmarks and historic buildings.

8. That our parks and open space and their access to sunlight and vistas be protected from development;

The proposed Ordinance would not have an adverse effect on the City's parks and open space and their access to sunlight and vistas.

- 8. Planning Code Section 302 Findings.** The Planning Commission finds from the facts presented that the public necessity, convenience and general welfare require the proposed amendments to the Planning Code as set forth in Section 302.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Commission hereby recommends that the Board ADOPT the proposed Ordinance described in this Resolution.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was adopted by the Commission at its meeting on September 15, 2016.

Jonas P. Ionin
Commission Secretary

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ADOPTED: September 15, 2016

[Planning Code - Signs - Exemptions and General Advertising Sign Penalties]

Ordinance amending the Planning Code to clarify that all noncommercial Signs are exempt from regulation pursuant to Planning Code, Article 6; increase penalties for repeat violations for the display of illegal General Advertising Signs; shorten the time before penalties for General Advertising Sign violations begin to accrue; allow property liens for such penalties that go unpaid; affirming the Planning Department's determination under the California Environmental Quality Act; and making findings of consistency with the General Plan, and the eight priority policies of Planning Code, Section 101.1, and a finding of public necessity, convenience, and welfare under Planning Code, Section 302.

NOTE: **Unchanged Code text and uncoded text** are in plain Arial font.
Additions to Codes are in *single-underline italics Times New Roman font*.
Deletions to Codes are in ~~*strikethrough italics Times New Roman font*~~.
Board amendment additions are in double-underlined Arial font.
Board amendment deletions are in ~~strikethrough Arial font~~.
Asterisks (* * * *) indicate the omission of unchanged Code subsections or parts of tables.

Be it ordained by the People of the City and County of San Francisco:

Section 1. Environmental and Planning Findings.

(a) The Planning Department has determined that the actions contemplated in this ordinance comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (California Public Resources Code Sections 21000 et seq.). Said determination is on file with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors in File No. ____ and is incorporated herein by reference. The Board affirms this determination.

(b) On _____, the Planning Commission, in Resolution No. _____, adopted findings that the actions contemplated in this ordinance are consistent, on balance, with the City's General Plan and the eight priority policies of Planning Code Section 101.1.

1 The Board adopts these findings as its own. A copy of said Resolution is on file with the Clerk
2 of the Board of Supervisors in File No. _____, and is incorporated herein by reference.

3 (c) Pursuant to Planning Code Section 302, the Board of Supervisors finds that the
4 proposed Planning Code amendments will serve the public necessity, convenience, and
5 welfare for the reasons set forth in Planning Commission Resolution No. _____, and
6 the Board incorporates such reasons herein by reference.

7
8 Section 2. General Findings.

9 (a) San Francisco is one of the most unusual and beautiful cities in the world, but it is
10 losing its character as more general advertising signs, commonly known as billboards, pollute
11 its streets and neighborhoods every day.

12 (b) In past years, hundreds of general advertising signs have been displayed across
13 the City's neighborhoods: on the side of buildings, plastered next to shop windows, and
14 stacked one-after-another on major streets. Due to new technology, billboard companies can
15 erect signs anywhere quickly, easily, and cheaply.

16 (c) San Francisco's historic buildings, scenic views, and distinctive neighborhoods are
17 being overrun by huge new general advertising signs. These intrusive advertisements hang
18 over parks, playgrounds, public plazas, and homes and block views. Over the last few
19 years there has been a dramatic increase in general advertising billboards, particularly the
20 massive wallscapes that cover entire sides of buildings. General advertising signs are urban
21 blight. They command viewers' attention without their consent, robbing them of the right to
22 see the beautiful city they live in. They destroy the distinctive qualities that make San
23 Francisco and its individual neighborhoods unique.

1 General advertising signs are currently in, adjacent to, and visible from public and
2 historically significant civic spaces including not only parks and public plazas, but also historic
3 buildings and the waterfront.

4 (d) The number of general advertising signs is increasing all over the City. Many
5 areas of the City are saturated with general advertising signs. In these areas the general
6 advertising signs are obtrusive, out of scale, and contribute to visual pollution and blight. As
7 population, traffic, and building trends grow and shift within the City, it is difficult to assess
8 which areas of the City will be inundated with general advertising signs next.

9 (e) The harms created by the large number of general advertising signs in San
10 Francisco transcend aesthetic and environmental concerns, important as those concerns are
11 to the community. There are other concrete harms as well. First, tourism, San Francisco's
12 largest revenue-generating industry, benefits from the preservation of the City's unique
13 character, architecture, and vistas. As general advertising signs become more and more a
14 part of the City's landscape, its distinctive appearance recedes or is hidden, and the character
15 that tourists visit the City to experience is lost. Second, City officials and the public have
16 expressed concern over the negative impact of the increasing volume of general advertising
17 signs on traffic and pedestrian safety. Third, signs identifying local services and businesses
18 are often blocked or obscured by general advertising signs, a practice that confuses and
19 distracts the public from finding those services and businesses.

20 (f) City officials have received complaints from the public about the proliferation of
21 general advertising signs in the City, the commercialization of the City's public space, and the
22 increased size of vinyl signs which cover entire sides of buildings, as well as about general
23 advertising signs placed on architecturally and historically significant buildings.

1 (g) More than 600 cities in the United States – including San Jose, San Diego, Denver,
2 and Seattle – and six States have protected their environment by prohibiting new general
3 advertising signs.

4 (h) The City currently contains an ample supply of legally permitted general advertising
5 signs.

6 (i) Planning Code Section 601 identifies the need to regulate signs in order to reduce
7 hazards that can distract motorists and pedestrians traveling on the public right of way. Sign
8 controls reduce the potential for accidents, especially in congested parts of the City.

9 (j) Planning Code Section 601 cites as among the special purposes for adopting sign
10 regulation: safeguarding and enhancing of property values in residential, commercial, mixed
11 use, and industrial areas, protecting the public investment in and the character and dignity of
12 public buildings, open spaces and thoroughfares, and protecting the distinctive appearance of
13 San Francisco produced by its unique geography, topography, street patterns, skyline and
14 architectural features.

15 (k) Policy 4.14 of the Urban Design Element of the City's General Plan states, "Signs
16 are another leading cause of street clutter. Where signs are large, garish and clashing they
17 lose their value as identification or advertising and merely offend the viewer. Often these signs
18 are overhanging or otherwise unrelated to the physical qualities of the buildings on which they
19 are placed. Signs have an important place in an urban environment, but they should be
20 controlled in their size and location."

21 (l) Upon the adoption in March 2002 of Proposition G's citywide ban on new general
22 advertising signs, it was estimated that roughly 1,500 general advertising signs existed in San
23 Francisco.

24 (m) In 2007, in Ordinance No. 52-07, the City adopted what were then thought to be
25 heavy penalties for illegal general advertising signs. But, despite these penalties, roughly 200

1 additional general advertising signs have since been installed. While these signs have been
2 removed through Planning Department enforcement activities, litigation, or a combination
3 thereof, these 200 signs were equivalent to roughly one-quarter of the City's current total legal
4 inventory of approximately 800 general advertising signs. Not only is this ratio of
5 noncompliance inconsistent with the voter mandates set forth in March 2002's Proposition G,
6 November 2007's Proposition K, and November 2009's Proposition E, but this striking pattern
7 of unlawful activity also drains important City resources better put to other uses. Further, this
8 pattern of unlawful activity demonstrates the continuing appeal of general advertising signs
9 within the advertising industry, an appeal that often leads to the unlawful placement of such
10 signs in San Francisco.

11 (n) General advertising signs remain highly prominent in the advertising industry, and
12 have not been meaningfully displaced by internet or other digital forms of advertising.
13 Nationally, revenue from general advertising signs "rose 4.6 percent in 2015 compared to the
14 previous year, accounting for \$7.3 billion," according to the Outdoor Advertising Association of
15 America, which "marks an all-time high."

16 (o) Consistent market demand for general advertising signs, notwithstanding the City's
17 10-year-old penalty amounts levied against illegal general advertising signs, has led to a
18 situation in which penalties resulting from the display of illegal general advertising signage are
19 internalized as a "cost of doing business." The penalties for such illegal signage no longer
20 serve as a meaningful deterrent to unlawful behavior, if they ever did.

21 (p) The size of a sign is a key factor in determining the profitability of a general
22 advertising sign.

23 (q) A central purpose of administrative penalties under Article 6 of the Planning Code
24 is to deter illegal general advertising signs. Another purpose is to compensate the City for its
25 costs of enforcing Article 6. To encourage compliance with Article 6, the City must have the

1 ability to impose administrative penalties that are sufficiently large to deter illegal general
2 advertising signs.

3 (r) Sign companies generally have the ability to remove illegal signage quickly after
4 receiving notice that a sign violates Article 6 of the Planning Code. For example, in 2016, just
5 before the Super Bowl, the City determined that a general advertising sign on the side of a
6 building in Embarcadero Center violated Article 6. The Responsible Party removed the sign
7 within two days of receiving notice from the City that the sign was illegally displayed.

8 (s) Current penalties for illegal general advertising signs do not deter sign companies
9 that wish to display an illegal general advertising sign during a particular event, such as the
10 Super Bowl or SF Pride weekend. Under current Planning Code Section 610, a sign company
11 may display a general advertising sign a few days before the event, knowing that penalties will
12 not begin to accrue until 30 days after a notice of violation for the sign is issued, long after the
13 event is over and the purpose of the general advertising sign, to reach attendees of the event,
14 has been served.

15
16 Section 3. The Planning Code is hereby amended by revising Sections 602.10, 603
17 and 610, to read as follows:

18 **SEC. 602.10. IDENTIFYING SIGN.**

19 A sign for a use listed in Article 2 of this Code as either a principal or a conditional use
20 permitted in an R District, regardless of the district in which the use itself may be located,
21 which sign serves to tell only the name, address, and lawful use of the premises upon which
22 the sign is located, or to which it is affixed. ~~A bulletin board of a public, charitable or religious~~
23 ~~institution, used to display announcements relative to meetings to be held on the premises, shall be~~
24 ~~deemed an identifying sign.~~ With respect to shopping malls containing five or more stores or
25 establishments in NC Districts, and shopping centers containing five or more stores or

establishments in NC-S Districts or in the City Center Special Sign District, Identifying Signs shall include Signs which tell the name of and/or describe aspects of the operation of the mall or center. Shopping malls, as that term is used in this Section, are characterized by a common pedestrian passageway which provides access to the businesses located therein.

SEC. 603. EXEMPTED SIGNS.

Nothing in this Article 6 shall apply to any of the following signs:

(a) Noncommercial Signs, including but not limited to

_____ (~~#1~~) Official public notices, and notices posted by public officers in performance of their duties;

_____ (~~#2~~) Governmental signs for control of traffic and other regulatory purposes, street signs, danger signs, railroad crossing signs, and signs of public service companies indicating danger and aids to service or safety;

_____ (~~#3~~) Temporary display posters, without independent structural support, in connection with political campaigns and with civic noncommercial health, safety, and welfare campaigns, ~~provided that in R districts such posters shall be removed within 60 days following the conclusion of the campaign;~~

_____ (~~#4~~) Flags, emblems, insignia, and posters of any nation or political subdivision, and temporary displays of a patriotic, religious, charitable, or other civic character;

_____ (~~#5~~) House numbers, whether illuminated or not, "no trespassing," "no parking," and other warning signs;

_____ (~~#6~~) Commemorative plaques placed or provided by recognized historical agencies;

_____ (~~7~~) Religious symbols;

_____ (~~8~~) Information plaques or signs which identify to the public open space resources, architectural features, creators of artwork, or otherwise provide information required by this Code or

1 by other City agencies, or an identifying sign which directs the general public and/or patrons of a
2 particular establishment to open space or parking resources;

3 (g**b**) Signs within a stadium, open-air theater, or arena which are designed primarily to
4 be viewed by patrons within such stadium, open-air theater, or arena;

5 ~~(h) Religious symbols attached to buildings if not projecting beyond any street property line or~~
6 ~~building setback line;~~

7 ~~(i) Flags indicating weather conditions, and single flags which are emblems of business firms,~~
8 ~~enterprises and other organizations;~~

9 (j**c**) Two gGeneral aAdvertising sSigns each not exceeding 24 square feet in area on
10 either a transit shelter or associated advertising kiosk furnished by contract with the Municipal
11 Transportation Agency or predecessor agency for the Municipal Railway in RTO, RTO-M, RM-
12 2, RM-3, RM-4, RC, NC, C, M, PDR, Eastern Neighborhoods Mixed Use Districts, and South
13 of Market Mixed Use Districts, and in those P Districts where such sSigns would not adversely
14 affect the character, harmony, or visual integrity of the district as determined by the ~~City~~
15 Planning Commission; eight gGeneral aAdvertising sSigns each not exceeding 24 square feet
16 in area on transit shelters located on publicly owned property on a high level Municipal
17 Railway boarding platform in an RH-1D District adjacent to a C-2 District, provided that such
18 advertising signs solely face the C-2 District; up to three double-sided gGeneral aAdvertising
19 sSigns each not exceeding 24 square feet in area on or adjacent to transit shelters on publicly
20 owned high level Municipal Railway boarding platforms along The Embarcadero south of the
21 Ferry Building, up to six double-sided panels at 2nd and King Streets, and up to four double-
22 sided panels at 4th and King Streets; up to two double-sided panels not exceeding 24 square
23 feet in area on each low-level boarding platform at the following E-Line stops: Folsom Street
24 and The Embarcadero, Brannan Street and The Embarcadero, 2nd and King Streets, and 4th
25 and King Streets; and a total of 71 double-sided gGeneral aAdvertising sSigns each not

1 exceeding 24 square feet in area on or adjacent to transit shelters on 28 publicly owned high
2 level Municipal Railway boarding platforms serving the Third Street Light Rail Line. Each
3 advertising sign on a low-level or high-level boarding platform shall be designed and sited in
4 such a manner as to minimize obstruction of public views from pedestrian walkways and/or
5 public open space.

6 Notwithstanding the above, no ~~s~~Sign shall be placed on any transit shelter or
7 associated advertising kiosk located on any sidewalk which shares a common boundary with
8 any property under the jurisdiction of the Recreation and Park Commission, with the exception
9 of Justin Herman Plaza; on any sidewalk on Zoo Road; on Skyline Boulevard between Sloat
10 Boulevard and John Muir Drive; on John Muir Drive between Skyline Boulevard and Lake
11 Merced Boulevard; or on Lake Merced Boulevard on the side of Harding Park Municipal Golf
12 Course, or on any sidewalk on Sunset Boulevard between Lincoln Way and Lake Merced
13 Boulevard; on any sidewalk on Legion of Honor Drive; or in the Civic Center Special Sign
14 Districts as established in Section 608.3 of this Code.

15 The provisions of this subsection (c) shall be subject to the authority of the ~~San~~
16 ~~Francisco~~ Port Commission under Sections 4.114 and B3.581 of the City Charter and under
17 State law.

18 ~~(k) Information plaques or signs which identify to the public open space resources,~~
19 ~~architectural features, creators of artwork, or otherwise provide information required by this Code or~~
20 ~~by other City agencies, or an identifying sign which directs the general public and/or patrons of a~~
21 ~~particular establishment to open space or parking resources, provided that such sign shall not project~~
22 ~~more than three inches from the wall and that its dimensions shall be no greater than 24 inches by 24~~
23 ~~inches;~~

1 ~~(l) Nonilluminated art murals within the South of Market Mixed Use District and Eastern~~
2 ~~Neighborhoods Mixed Use Districts, with the exception of the UMU District, if they project no more~~
3 ~~than 18 inches from the pre-existing surface of a structure;~~

4 ~~(md)~~ Two ~~g~~General ~~a~~Advertising ~~s~~Signs each not exceeding 52 square feet in area on a
5 public service kiosk furnished by contract with the Department of Public Works which contract
6 also provides for the installation and maintenance of automatic public toilets. Each such public
7 service kiosk shall be divided into three sections, one of which shall provide a public service,
8 such as a newsstand, newsrack, map, public telephone, vending machine, display of public
9 service information, or interactive video terminal;.

10 ~~(ne)~~ Advertising placed on fixed pedestal newsrack units in accordance with Section
11 184.12 of the Public Works Code.

12 ~~(of)~~ To the extent not otherwise exempted pursuant to subsection (a) of this Section 610, Any
13 Historic Movie Theater Projecting Sign or Historic Movie Theater Marquee when preserved,
14 rehabilitated, restored, or reconstructed pursuant to Section 188(e) of the Planning Code.

15
16 **SEC. 610. VIOLATION OF GENERAL ADVERTISING SIGN REQUIREMENTS.**

17 * * * *

18 (b) Administrative Penalties. The Director of Planning may impose administrative
19 penalties for violations of the regulations governing ~~g~~General ~~a~~Advertising ~~s~~Signs set forth in
20 this Article 6. These administrative penalties are cumulative to and do not foreclose any criminal or
21 civil penalties that may apply under state or local law. Administrative penalties shall be imposed in
22 accordance with the following procedures:

23 (1) Notice of Violation.

24 (A) Upon the Planning Department's determination pursuant to Section
25 176 of this Code that a general advertising sign has been erected, installed, expanded,

1 intensified, relocated, or otherwise operated in violation of the requirements of this Code or
2 has been denied an in-lieu identifying number pursuant to Section 604.1(c) of this Code, the
3 Director shall send a written notice of violation to the Responsible Party for delivery by first
4 class mail, ~~or hand-delivery,~~ or electronic mail. The notice of violation shall describe the
5 violation(s), state that the Responsible Party has ~~thirty~~ five calendar days from the date
6 postmarked on the notice or three calendar days from the date of hand-delivery or electronic
7 mail delivery of the notice to: (i) file an application for a permit to remove the general
8 advertising sign; (ii) correct the violation(s) pursuant to ~~S~~subsection (c); or (iii) request
9 reconsideration pursuant to ~~S~~subsection (d). An electronic mail message shall be considered
10 delivered on the same day that it is sent.

11 * * * *

12 (2) Penalties.

13 (A) Accrual of Penalties. If a Responsible Party fails to respond to the
14 notice of violation as outlined in subsection (b)(1)(A), penalties shall accrue under this Section
15 610 at the daily rate set forth in subsection (b)(2)(B) beginning on the Accrual Date, which is
16 defined as the sixth day after the date postmarked on a notice delivered by first class mail, or on the
17 ~~thirty-first~~fourth day after hand-delivery or electronic mail delivery of a notice, and the Director
18 shall refer the matter to the City Attorney for further action. If the Responsible Party responds
19 after the Accrual Date~~thirty days~~, but before the Director has referred the matter to the City
20 Attorney, the Responsible Party shall be assessed a penalty based on the number of days
21 that have passed beginning on the Accrual Date until~~between the end of the thirty-day period and~~
22 the date the Responsible Party responded. Once the matter has been referred to the City
23 Attorney for further proceedings, it shall be within the discretion of the City Attorney, in
24 consultation with the Director, whether to allow the Responsible Party to request a
25 reconsideration of the notice of violation or to proceed with other legal action. If the

1 Responsible Party is allowed to request reconsideration, the Responsible Party shall pay a
2 penalty based on the amount accrued beginning on the Accrual Date until~~between the end of the~~
3 ~~thirty-day period and~~ the date the Responsible Party responded. The Responsible Party shall
4 pay this penalty within five ~~(5)~~ business days of notice that the Responsible Party will be
5 allowed to request reconsideration.

6 (B) Amount of Penalties.

7 (i) The administrative penalties that the Director or administrative
8 law judge assesses against the Responsible Parties shall be related to the square footage of
9 the ~~g~~General ~~a~~Advertising ~~s~~Sign found to be in violation of the Planning Code, as shown
10 below:

- 11 _____ ~~a.(i)~~ 100 square feet or less –\$100.00 per day per violation;
12 _____ ~~b.(ii)~~ 101 - 300 square feet - \$1,000.00 per day per violation;
13 _____ ~~c.(iii)~~ 301 - 500 square feet - \$1,750.00 per day per
14 violation; and
15 _____ ~~d.(iv)~~ Over 500 square feet - \$2,500.00 per day per
16 violation.

17 If the violation for which the administrative penalty is assessed has increased the size
18 of the ~~g~~General ~~a~~Advertising ~~s~~Sign, the penalty shall be based on the actual size of the
19 ~~g~~General ~~a~~Advertising ~~s~~Sign.

20 * * * *

21 (d) Reconsideration of Notice of Violation or Administrative Penalty.

22 (1) Reconsideration Hearing.

23 (A) A Responsible Party may seek reconsideration of the issuance of the
24 notice of violation or any administrative penalty. Any request for reconsideration shall be
25 accompanied by written evidence that demonstrates why the notice of violation was issued in

1 error or why the administrative penalties were assessed in error. Upon receipt of a request for
2 reconsideration within the time limits established by § subsection (b)(1)(A) or when allowed
3 under § subsection (b)(2)(A), the Planning Department shall schedule a reconsideration
4 hearing before an administrative law judge. Such hearing shall be scheduled for a date no
5 later than 60 days after the request. At least 10 days before the scheduled hearing, the
6 Planning Department shall notify the Responsible Party by mail in writing of the hearing date,
7 time, and location.

8 (B) The administrative law judge shall hold a hearing to reconsider the
9 Director's notice of violation or administrative penalty. The administrative law judge's decision
10 for a reconsideration of the notice of violation shall be based upon, but not limited to, the
11 Planning Code, any final Zoning Administrator Interpretations, the Building Code, building
12 permits issued by the City, and any final decisions of the Board of Appeals regarding the
13 subject property. The administrative law judge's determination of a request for reconsideration
14 of any administrative penalty shall take into account the validity of accrual dates, accuracy of
15 assessment based upon sign size and whether the Responsible Party was accurately
16 identified. For repeat violations, the administrative law judge shall also take into account the
17 considerations specified in subsection (f)(3) of this Section 610. Within 30 days of the hearing, the
18 administrative law judge shall issue a final written decision, which shall be mailed to the
19 Responsible Party. The final written decision shall not be appealable to the Board of Appeals.
20 All final written decisions shall inform the Responsible Party of its right to seek judicial review
21 pursuant to the timelines set forth in Section 1094.6 of the California Code of Civil Procedure.

22 (C) If the Planning Department rescinds the notice of violation or
23 penalties prior to the reconsideration hearing, the case shall be considered abated and all
24 accrued penalties shall be rescinded. If penalties or the reconsideration hearing fee set forth
25

1 in Subsection (d)(2), below, have been paid, the Planning Department shall refund in a timely
2 matter any unused portions of the penalties or fee.

3 If the administrative law judge overturns the notice of violation or penalties, the case
4 shall be abated and all accrued penalties shall be rescinded. If penalties have been paid, the
5 Planning Department shall refund the penalties.

6 If the Responsible Party withdraws its request for reconsideration of notice of violation
7 or penalties prior to the reconsideration hearing and cures the violation(s) by filing for a
8 building permit under subsection (c), any accrued penalties shall apply in addition to a
9 mandatory ten-day fixed penalty based upon the daily rate outlined in Subsection (b)(2)(B). If
10 the request for reconsideration is withdrawn within less than 10 days from the date it was
11 timely made, the Responsible Party may apply to the Director for a reduction in the fixed
12 penalty amount based upon the number of days less than 10 that the reconsideration request
13 was withdrawn. Any such reduction shall be granted or denied at the sole discretion of the
14 Director and is not appealable.

15 If the administrative law judge upholds the notice of violation or penalties, the
16 Responsible Party shall cure the violation(s) by filing for a building permit pursuant to the
17 procedures and requirements of Subsection (c) within fifteen days of the date the decision is
18 mailed to the Responsible Party. The Responsible Party shall be subject to any accrued
19 penalties, plus a mandatory twenty-day fixed penalty based upon the daily rate outlined in
20 Subsection (b)(2)(B). If the reconsideration hearing is held within less than 20 days from the
21 date it was timely requested, the Responsible Party may apply to the Director for a reduction
22 in the fixed penalty amount based upon the number of days less than 20 that the
23 reconsideration hearing was held. Any such reduction shall be granted at the sole discretion
24 of the Director and is not appealable. If the Responsible Party does not file for a building
25 permit within the fifteen-day period, additional penalties shall accrue at the daily rate outlined

1 in ~~S~~subsection (b)(2)(B) and the Director shall refer the case to the City Attorney for further
2 action.

3 * * * *

4 (f) Repeat Violations.

5 * * * *

6 (2) For the purposes of this subsection ~~(f)~~, a repeat violation shall mean any
7 violation of the general advertising provisions of this Article which ~~(1A)~~ occurs on a property
8 that was the subject of a notice of violation under Article 6 during the previous five years and
9 ~~(2B)~~ is owned by the same entity which owned the property upon which the general
10 advertising was located at the time of the earlier violation. A repeat violation shall not include
11 one based upon a notice of violation that was overturned by an administrative law judge or
12 rescinded by the Planning Department under subsection (d)(1)(C) of this Section 610. A
13 Responsible Party may seek reconsideration of a notice of violation for a repeat violation under
14 subsection (d) of this Section 610, provided that the request for reconsideration is filed and all general
15 advertising copy is removed prior to the Accrual Date, as defined in subsection (b)(2)(A) of this Section
16 610.

17 ~~_____ (3) Violations under this subsection (f) shall be treated like other violations of Section~~
18 ~~610 except that (i) the 30-day period identified throughout subsection (b) shall be reduced to three~~
19 ~~business days, (ii) the penalties set forth in subsection (b) shall begin to accrue on the fourth day, and~~
20 ~~(iii) the general advertising sign and any sign structure must be completely removed from the site~~
21 ~~within the three-day period. A Responsible Party may seek reconsideration under subsection (d),~~
22 ~~provided that the request for reconsideration is filed and all general advertising copy is removed prior~~
23 ~~to expiration of the three-day period. Penalties for violations under this subsection (f) shall accrue as~~
24 ~~described in subsection (b)(2) of this Section 610, except that the amount of penalties shall be~~
25 ~~calculated as follows:~~

1 (A) Daily Penalties. Daily penalties shall accrue as described below, until the
2 date that the General Advertising Sign and any associated sign structure are removed from the site, or,
3 if the City accepts a late request for reconsideration from the Responsible Party pursuant to subsection
4 (b)(2)(A) of this Section 610, until the date that all copy is removed from the General Advertising Sign:

5 (i) On the Accrual Date, which is the first day on which penalties accrue,
6 the daily penalty shall be the amount specified in subsection (b)(2)(B) of this Section 610 multiplied by
7 2.

8 (ii) On the second day on which penalties accrue, the daily penalty shall
9 be the amount specified in subsection (b)(2)(B) of this Section 610 multiplied by 3.

10 (iii) On the third day on which penalties accrue, the daily penalty shall
11 be the amount specified in subsection (b)(2)(B) of this Section 610 multiplied by 4.

12 (iv) On the fourth day on which penalties accrue and for each day
13 thereafter for which penalties accrue, the daily penalty shall be the amount specified in subsection
14 (b)(2)(B) of this Section 610 multiplied by 5.

15 (B) Alternative Penalty. As an alternative to the daily penalties described in
16 subsection (f)(3)(A) of this Section 610, all Responsible Parties may jointly opt to pay an alternative
17 penalty, which consists of (i) the income earned by the Responsible Parties for the display of the illegal
18 General Advertising Sign, including but not limited to revenue earned by the Sign owner or operator
19 from advertisers or advertisement placement firms and revenue earned by the property owner or lessee
20 from the lease or sublease of the property to the Sign owner or operator; plus (ii) an additional 20% of
21 that total income amount. The income amount shall be calculated beginning on the Accrual Date, as
22 defined in subsection (b)(2)(A) of this Section 610, until the date that the General Advertising Sign and
23 any associated sign structure are removed from the site, or, if the City accepts a late request for
24 reconsideration from the Responsible Party pursuant to subsection (b)(2)(A) of this Section 610, until
25 the date that all copy is removed from the General Advertising Sign.

1 To calculate this alternative penalty, the Planning Department may require that all Responsible
2 Parties provide evidence of their income, such as a lease between the property owner and the Sign
3 operator or Sign owner, and any agreements between the Sign owner or operator and advertisers or
4 advertisement placement firms who have contracted to have their advertisements displayed on the Sign
5 during the relevant time period.

6 (C) Standard of Review. Pursuant to subsection (d) of this Section 610, a
7 Responsible Party may request reconsideration of a notice of violation for a repeat violation by an
8 administrative law judge. In any such proceeding, a rebuttable presumption shall exist that the penalty
9 amount is reasonable. In reviewing a penalty imposed pursuant to subsection (f)(3) of this Section 610,
10 the administrative law judge shall give substantial weight to that presumption, but may consider the
11 nature and egregiousness of the violation, the financial resources of the Responsible Party, the need to
12 deter illegal conduct, and the Responsible Party's culpability, to determine if the penalty is excessive.

13 (g) Liens. For any penalties assessed pursuant to this Section 610, the Director may initiate
14 proceedings to make the payment amount due and all additional authorized costs and charges,
15 including attorneys' fees, a lien on the property pursuant to Chapter 100 of the Administrative Code.
16 This subsection (g) does not apply to a notice of violation that has been overturned by an
17 administrative law judge or rescinded by the Planning Department under subsection (d)(1)(C) of this
18 Section 610.

19
20 Section 4. Effective Date. This ordinance shall become effective 30 days after
21 enactment. Enactment occurs when the Mayor signs the ordinance, the Mayor returns the
22 ordinance unsigned or does not sign the ordinance within ten days of receiving it, or the Board
23 of Supervisors overrides the Mayor's veto of the ordinance.

1 Section 5. Scope of Ordinance. In enacting this ordinance, the Board of Supervisors
2 intends to amend only those words, phrases, paragraphs, subsections, sections, articles,
3 numbers, punctuation marks, charts, diagrams, or any other constituent parts of the Municipal
4 Code that are explicitly shown in this ordinance as additions, deletions, Board amendment
5 additions, and Board amendment deletions in accordance with the “Note” that appears under
6 the official title of the ordinance.

7
8 Section 6. Severability. If any section, subsection, sentence, clause, phrase, or word
9 of this ordinance, or any application thereof to any person or circumstance, is held to be
10 invalid or unconstitutional by a decision of a court of competent jurisdiction, such decision
11 shall not affect the validity of the remaining portions or applications of the ordinance. The
12 Board of Supervisors hereby declares that it would have passed this ordinance and each and
13 every section, subsection, sentence, clause, phrase, and word not declared invalid or
14 unconstitutional without regard to whether any other portion of this ordinance or application
15 thereof would be subsequently declared invalid or unconstitutional.

16
17 APPROVED AS TO FORM:
18 DENNIS J. HERRERA, City Attorney

19 By: _____
20 VICTORIA WONG
21 Deputy City Attorney

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