

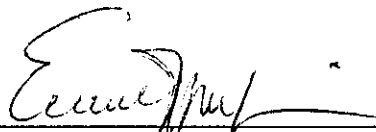
DATE November 7, 2001

BOARD OF RECREATION AND PARK COMMISSIONERS

SUBJECT: HOLLYWOOD SIGN ALTERATION

J. Combs _____
*A. Corrales _____
J. Duggan _____
H. Fujita _____

J. Kolb _____
M. Tamuri _____
M. Matthews _____



General Manager

Approved _____

Disapproved _____

Withdrawn _____

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board uphold the existing administrative policies governing use of the Hollywood Sign, to wit, that no alteration or lighting of the Sign is allowed, pending further information and public input on security and non-commercialization.

SUMMARY:

The world-famous Hollywood Sign, Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument #111, is owned by the City of Los Angeles. The Sign is located on Griffith Park land and is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Recreation and Parks. The Hollywood Chamber of Commerce owns the trademark of the Hollywood Sign, however, and licenses it for income through its agent, Global Icons. While use of the image is, therefore, the business of the Chamber of Commerce, use of the actual Sign itself falls under the purview of the City. The City has the right to utilize the image of the Sign only for promotion of the City of Los Angeles without paying licensing fees to the Chamber. The Chamber cannot use the physical Sign without permission of the City through the Department.

In the early 1990s, Department and City Council District 4 staff (in whose district the sign and Griffith Park are located) jointly convened a neighborhood advisory group to assist in compiling policies and procedures for use of the Hollywood Sign and environs. These policies, which prohibit any alteration or lighting of the Sign for any purpose, have been in place since 1992. The only exception granted by the Board was in 1999, when the City itself elected to light the Sign for New Years. About that time, the Department also reinstated the Hollywood Sign Advisory Committee

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with representatives from three key homeowners' associations, the Executive Director of the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, and staff from the Mayor's office, Council District 4, and the Department. Among other tasks, this Committee receives information about proposals to alter or light the Sign and in turn provides input to the Department.

In administering issues relating to the Hollywood Sign, the Department balances a number of concerns. Foremost, the Sign is a historic landmark, a symbol of the uniqueness of Los Angeles. It represents the entertainment industry of yesterday and today, an industry vital to the City. As a consequence, the Department is obligated to physically protect the Sign and respect its landmark status. Mounted on a sheer hillside, in an environmentally sensitive area that is also a Mountain Fire District, the Sign and its environs likewise need the exercise of prudent judgement as to the particulars of authorized activity in the area. The section of Griffith Park where the Sign stands is adjacent to several residential neighborhoods. By its nature the Sign is a visible attraction, but the Department has a responsibility as a good neighbor to limit collateral activities that could compound negative community impact or jeopardize public safety. Other factors that influence decisions in regard to the Sign include easements to the Department of Water and Power and operations of the contiguous Mt. Lee Repeater Station.

A proposal has been made recently to modify the Sign to look like an American flag. After the terrorist attack on the United States of September 11, 2001, the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce received suggestions that the Sign be draped with flags or painted like a flag, and forwarded the suggestions to the office of Council District 13.

The Chamber provided the Department with a proposal on Friday afternoon to sheathe all nine letters of the Hollywood with custom-made mesh draping to simulate a painted U.S. flag pattern on the Sign. They feel this procedure can be feasibility completed by the weekend of November 10-11, 2001. The objective is to have the Sign patriotically outfitted for Veterans Day 2001. The Chamber's representative, Global Icons, states that the mesh draping will be non-invasive, in contrast with painting the Sign or otherwise attaching something to the face of the Sign. They would like the mesh to be in place for one full week, but would accept draping it just for Veterans Day. No provision for extra security near or at the Sign has been included in the proposal.

To allow this use under these circumstances sets both a precedent for alteration and a technique for accomplishing it that may pave the way for future requests of a commercial nature. In this case, the alteration is proposed by the Chamber and its licensing agent, who are in a position to gain licensing revenue due to increased publicity in the short term and from the flag-cloaked image itself in the longer-term. Also, this display, although itself a purely patriotic expression, is to be sponsored by a commercial business, Universal Studios, who will accrue sponsorship visibility for this effort.

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Permitting alteration of the Sign reinforces a mistaken perception that the Sign is accessible, not dangerous to climb, and relatively easy to modify, a false notion when faced with its commanding 45' height and hillside location. Both trespassers and professional steelworkers have fallen from the Sign and been hurt, with liability consequences for the Department. In this particular circumstance the proposal has come together very quickly, and actual execution, should it be permitted, may be more time-consuming, risky, and damaging to the hillside than anticipated. Also, past alterations have had the effect of increasing visitors to the Hollywoodland residential area. Any major alteration activity should be safeguarded with live security, as supplement to the existing electronic security system. Because of the heightened demand of recent events, the capability of the Los Angeles Police Department to cover this added duty is unknown.

A fundamental question is the appropriateness of creating a flag-like image on the landmark Sign—whether it is respectful of the national emblem and suitable for the Sign with its nine-letter configuration. The Sign is a landmark of the City of Los Angeles, not a billboard. While this proposed use is a civic expression of pride in the nation, it must be clearly understood that non-civic alteration proposals will not be considered in the future.

The Hollywood Sign Advisory Committee is scheduled to meet prior to the Board meeting, and staff will verbally report on their deliberations.

If permission to exempt this proposal from the Sign policies is granted, the Board would have to direct staff to issue a right-of entry-permit to the Chamber to do the work specifying appropriate installation, removal, insurance and security provisions as approved by staff and direct staff to closely monitor activity.

Prepared by Linda Barth.