



Planning and Development Department
Land Use Planning Division

STAFF REPORT

DATE: September 17, 2026
TO: Members of the Design Review Committee
FROM: Alene Pearson, Deputy Director, Planning & Development Department
SUBJECT: Digital Billboard – Pole Cover Design

RECOMMENDATION

Staff requests that the Design Review Committee (DRC) review and comment on the design of a proposed digital billboard proposed to be constructed at 1285 Eastshore Highway adjacent to Interstate 80 (I-80). Comments provided by the DRC will be incorporated into a formal billboard relocation agreement that will be considered by City Council.

BACKGROUND

The City of Berkeley currently has over 25 legally nonconforming off-premises signs (billboards) within its commercial and residential zoning districts. State law, under California Business and Professions Code Section 5412 (the Outdoor Advertising Act), limits a municipality's authority to compel the removal of legally established billboards without paying just compensation to their owners. Municipalities use billboard relocation agreements, a legal contract between a city and an outdoor advertising company, to facilitate the removal of one or more existing billboards in exchange for permission to build a new billboard structure.

Billboard relocation agreements can serve as a mechanism to reduce visual blight in areas where existing billboards negatively affect the community and/or the neighborhood. Under a standard agreement, an advertising operator agrees to dismantle multiple existing billboard structures (usually static, not digital) in residential neighborhoods or along commercial corridors. In exchange, the city grants permission to the outdoor advertising company to erect fewer structures, often upgrading to digital billboards, consolidated along a high-traffic corridor. Beyond blight mitigation, these agreements allow cities to negotiate financial and community benefits, such as long-term revenue sharing arrangements, annual fees to support public infrastructure projects, and dedicated, free digital airtime for city-sponsored emergency messaging and public service announcements.

In the City of Berkeley, new billboards are only allowed in the manufacturing zoning districts located along the Eastshore Freeway and they must be approved with a billboard relocation agreement authorized by the City Council.

Currently, there is one digital billboard in operation on Eastshore Freeway in Berkeley. This structure was constructed by CBS Outdoors, Inc. (now Outfront Media) in 2007 after entering into a billboard relocation agreement with the City. Under the terms of that 2007 agreement, the operator removed six existing static billboards and in exchange, the City allowed for the construction of one new double-sided, 14-foot by 48-foot digital LED billboard at 1695 Eastshore Highway. As a Condition of Approval and public benefit contribution, CBS Outdoors, Inc. provided the City of Berkeley with a \$2,000,000 cash contribution that was used to fund and open three new sports fields in Berkeley.

In 2023 and 2024, the City was approached by multiple outdoor advertising companies interested in entering into billboard relocation agreements. Some companies reached out directly to City Council members while others applied for permits through the Planning and Development Department. The City did not choose to act on any of those offers at that time.

The Outdoor Advertising Act imposes buffers that regulate allowable distances between billboards. These regulations provide that static billboards may not be placed within 500 feet of another billboard and digital billboards may not be placed within 1000 feet of another billboard. Due to these buffer requirements, as well as local restrictions within the BMC, the number of new billboards that could be allowed in the City of Berkeley is very limited.

To manage this constrained capacity, the City decided to launch a transparent and competitive public process to evaluate billboard relocation proposals and identify a vendor to work with. The City Council authorized the City Manager to issue a formal Request for Proposals (RFP) in March 2025. The RFP moved forward according to this schedule:

- Issue RFP to Potential Bidders: April 2, 2025
- Questions Due: April 21, 2025
- Proposals Due from Potential Bidders: June 3, 2025
- Interviews with Bidders: September 2025
- Complete Selection Process: February 2026

The City received two proposals and the selection committee recommended the proposal by Clear Channel Outdoor LLC .

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed project consists of two interrelated components: (1) the construction and operation of one new double-sided digital billboard at 1285 Eastshore Highway; and (2) the removal of six existing billboard faces on five structures at various locations throughout the City of Berkeley, resulting in the permanent elimination of 2,172 square feet of existing billboard signage in the city.

Sign Removal Sites. The project involves the removal of six billboard faces on five structures at various locations throughout the City of Berkeley. The removal sites are located along Sacramento Street, San Pablo Avenue, Telegraph Avenue, and University Avenue.

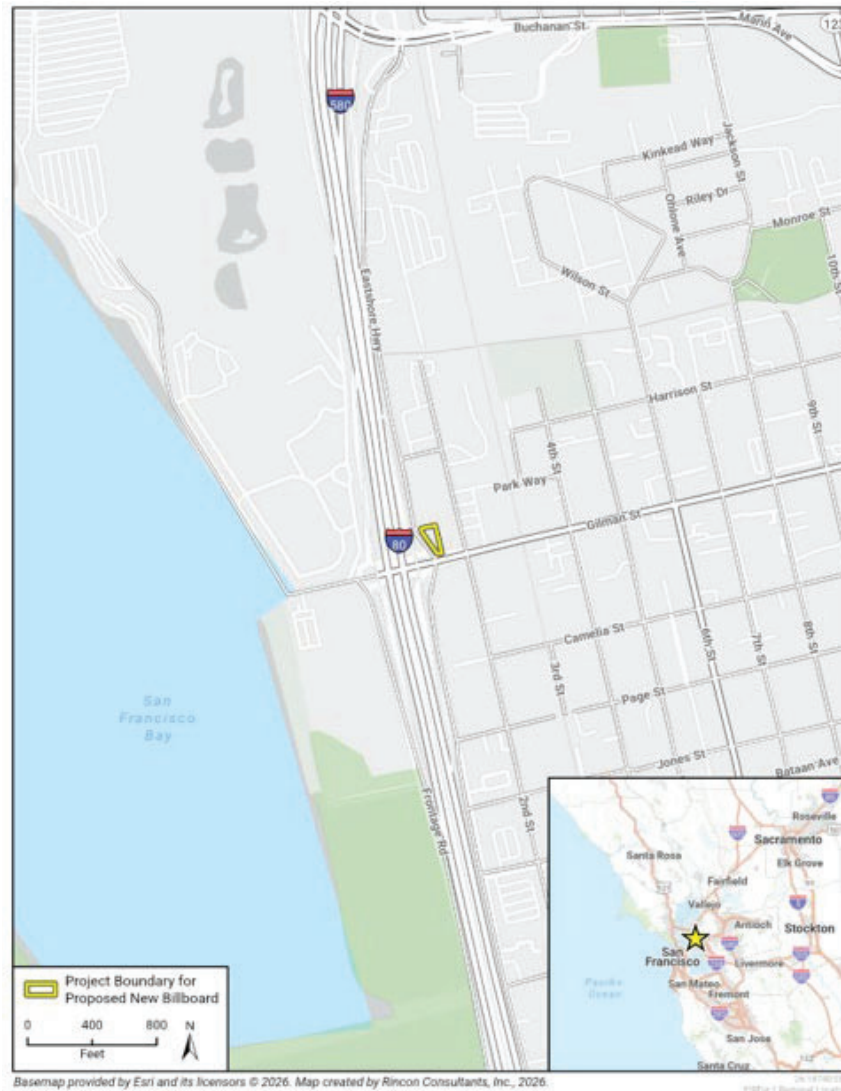
New Sign. The project site for the proposed new digital billboard is located at 1285 Eastshore Highway (Assessor's Parcel Number [APN]: 060-2363-003-07), near the northeast corner of the intersection of Gilman Street and I-80. The proposed billboard site is located east of I-80, approximately 130 feet east of the northbound lanes (see Figure 1).

The proposed sign location is near the northern edge of the property, adjacent to an existing commercial building with frontage on Eastshore Highway, behind an existing cell tower utility facility, and near a surface drainage inlet (see Figures 2 and 3). The project site is paved with asphalt concrete and is used as a parking lot and vehicle access area serving the existing commercial building on the property.

The proposed billboard will involve construction of one new, double-sided steel monopole structure that supports two digital light emitting diode (LED) display faces oriented towards motorists traveling on I-80. Construction details are provided in Figure 4 and the key physical characteristics of the proposed sign are as follows:

Characteristic	Specification
Display Face Dimensions	14 feet (height) by 48 feet (width), each face
Number of Display Faces	Two (double-sided; one face oriented in each direction of I-80 travel)
Total Display Area	1,344 square feet (672 sq. ft. per face)
Overall Structure Height	Approximately 65 feet above grade
Support Column Diameter	Approximately 6 feet, with decorative cladding
Foundation	Single-drilled cast-in-place concrete pier, 7 feet in diameter and 40 feet in length; maximum excavation depth approximately 45 feet (final dimensions dependent on subsurface conditions)
Structural Material	Galvanized steel (to resist salt air corrosion given proximity to San Francisco Bay)
Display Technology	LED digital panels with automatic brightness control sensors
Message Rotation	Eight messages, each displayed for eight seconds

Figure 1: Regional Map and Site Location



The digital billboard will be equipped with integrated ambient light sensors for automatic brightness control, alongside a fully redundant backup system. The sensors will continuously monitor ambient light conditions and adjust LED panel brightness to maintain a glare-free, readable image appropriate for current lighting conditions. This system will help ensure the sign brightness responds to changes throughout the day caused by the position of the sun, cloud cover, and weather patterns.

Each digital panel will be equipped with an operating system and IP address that allows advertising content to be uploaded remotely and for the sign to communicate operational monitoring data back to an operations center. The panels will be programmed to operate on an 8:8 model, which means that each advertising message will be displayed for eight seconds in a rotation of eight total messages.

Figure 2: Site Map and Sign Location



Figure 3: Existing Site Conditions

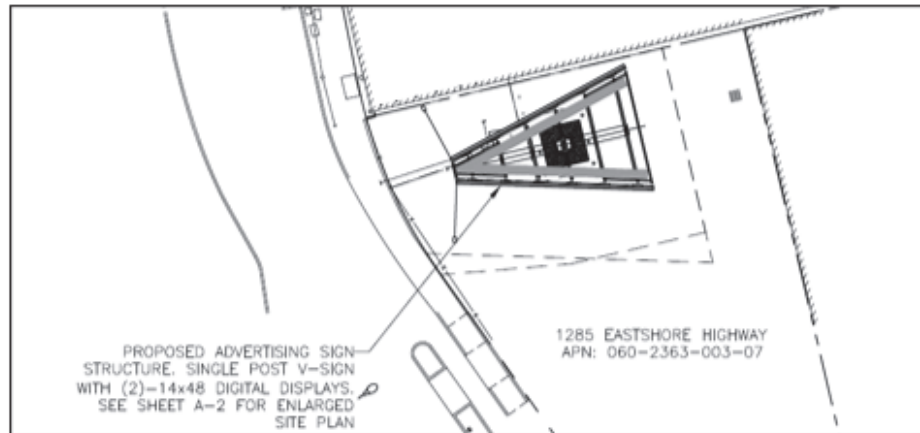


Photograph 1. Proposed site of new billboard, looking northeast from the Gilman Street/Eastshore Highway roundabout.

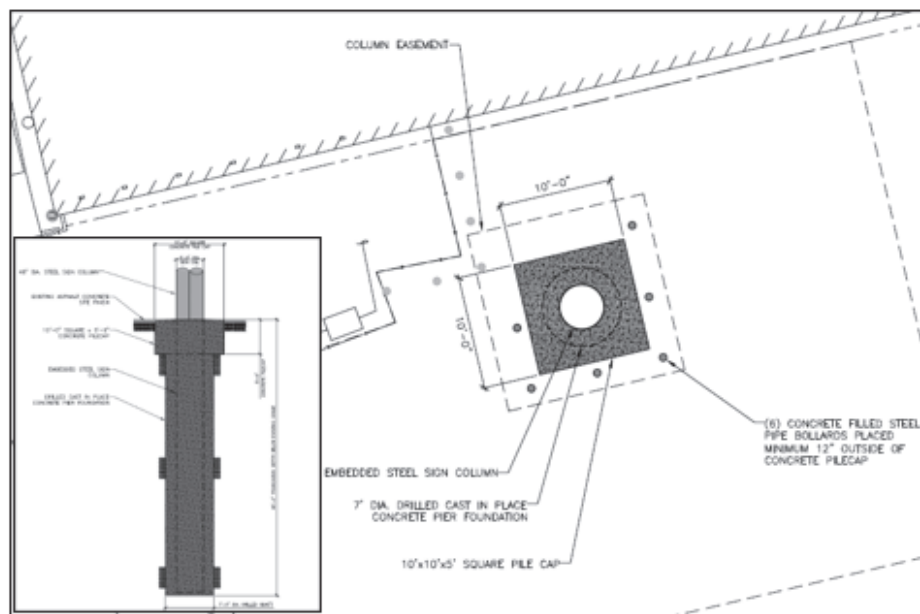


Photograph 2. Proposed site of new billboard, looking north from the northeast corner of Gilman Street and Eastshore Highway. The billboard would be located in the paved area adjacent to the building wing near the left of the frame.

Figure 4: Proposed Construction Details



Proposed Sign Placement



Proposed Foundation Design

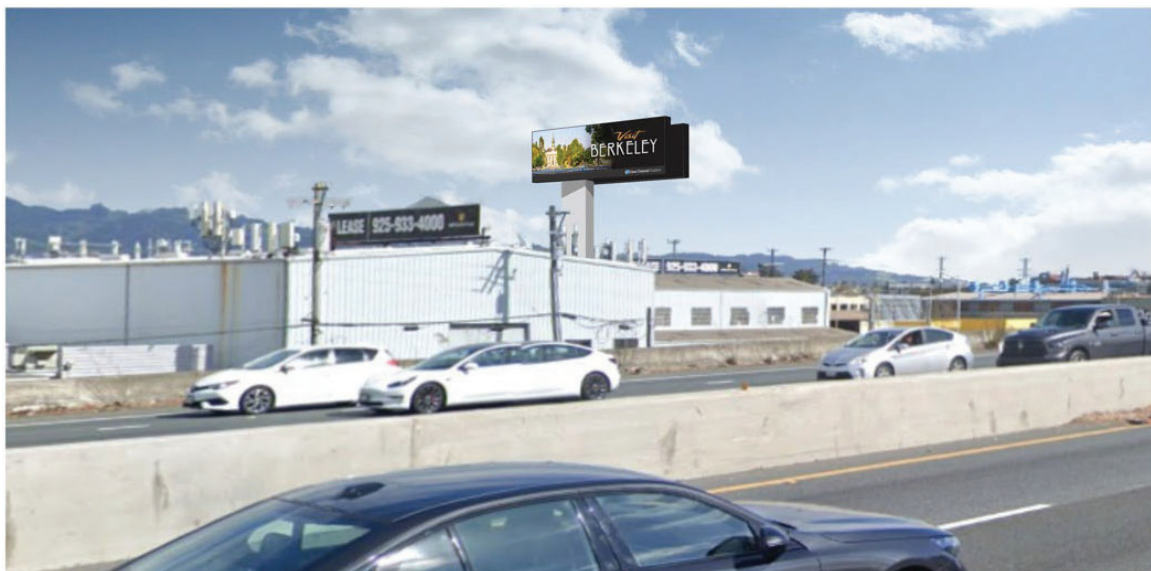
DISCUSSION

Clear Channel Outdoor LLC and the City Manager's Office have been actively negotiating business terms to be included in the final billboard relocation agreement that will come before City Council. At this meeting, the Design Review Committee is asked to review simulations of the billboard structure (see Figure 5) and the two proposed pole cover designs (see Figures 6 and 7) and provide comments specifically focused on the architectural design of the Pole Cover. Attachment 1 provides additional photos of the two pole cover options. Although the example images show a seal of the City on the face of the pole cover, this billboard is not City-property and will not include a City of Berkeley logo.

Figure 5: Visual Simulations of New Billboard



Simulation 1: View from northbound I-80.
Source: Encore Image Signs 2026



Simulation 2: View from southbound I-80.
Source: Encore Image Signs 2026

Figure 6: Proposed Pole Cover Design – Option A (preferred)



Option A (Rectangular Grid) features a simple geometric grid pattern on a rectangular cover to add texture and visual interest.

Figure 7: Proposed Pole Cover Design – Option B



Option B (Diagonal Lines) offers a more contemporary design with a sense of movement. The pole cover is split into three segments (bottom, middle and top) with the top and bottom sections colored light gray and the middle segment colored dark gray. Diagonal lines separate the sections.

NEXT STEPS

DRC is asked to review the proposed designs and provide comments and direction on the pole cover design. Staff will use DRC's feedback to finalize the elements included in the billboard relocation agreement, which will be presented to City Council for consideration.

ATTACHMENT

1. Additional Pole Design Images

Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4



Photo 5



Photo 6



Photo 7



Photo 8



Photo 9



Photo 10

