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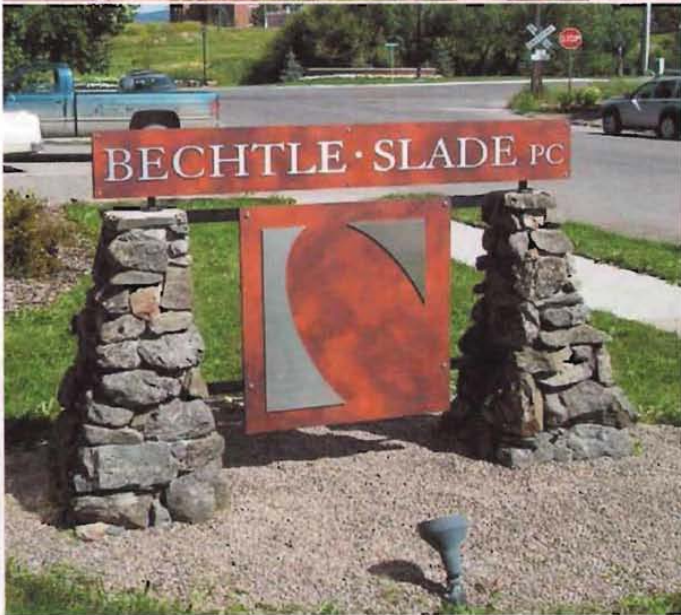
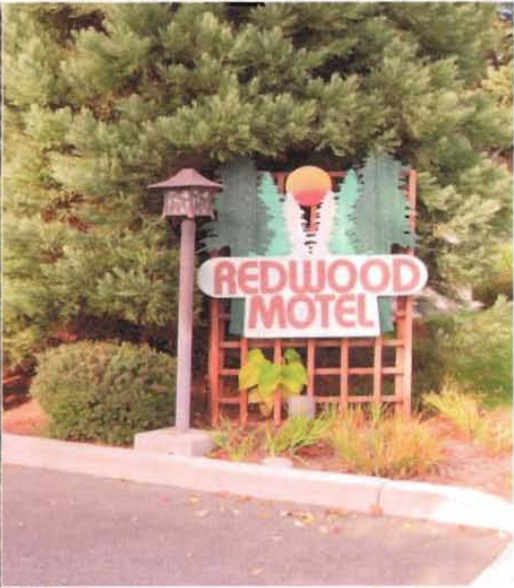
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Rancho Cordova again delays digital billboard vote

BY BRAD BRANAN - BBRANAN@SACBEE.COM

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The Rancho Cordova City Council voted Tuesday night to again delay making a decision on two proposals for a digital billboard near Highway 50.

Council members said they want time to consider questions raised by residents about visual blight and safety.

The council will reconsider proposals April 6. Sierra Outdoor/CBS Outdoor and Clear Channel Outdoor each want to put a sign on Folsom Boulevard in an area where a city ordinance allows only one digital billboard.

In meetings last year, the council tried to resolve the legal issues over the proposals and considered which company was making the best proposal for the city. Each company has offered to pay the city money for agreements covering 25 years and will take down traditional billboards in exchange for the right to put up a digital billboard.

The council voted in December to have city staff write findings in favor of the Sierra/CBS proposal, but when it came back last month, public concern about the proposals had mounted and another public hearing was scheduled.

About a half-dozen residents spoke against digital billboards Tuesday. In addition, council members said they received numerous emails from residents opposing either proposal.

Resident Mary Nesel compared digital billboards to smoking, saying that authorities are ignoring the safety risks with the signs. She said distracted driving is the leading cause of automotive deaths.

"The signs are designed to make you look at them instead of the car in front of you, when you're driving 70 miles per hour," she said.

A Clear Channel representative disputed that argument, and noted that a 2013 federal highway study found no link between digital billboards and traffic safety.

However, residents presented council members with a 14-page letter from a Berkeley traffic safety consultant, Jerry Wachtel, who said the new digital signs can create safety risks and questions about risks associated with the Rancho Cordova proposals have not been adequately answered.

Some council members said they weren't sure that the city has a role in legislating highway safety, a matter controlled by the state.

Mayor Robert McGarvey said the issue had become complex. "There is so much information that is difficult for us to handle," he said.

Most council members seemed more concerned with visual blight than safety. Councilwoman Linda Budge said the location on Highway 50 is not good for signs and will block views of the mountains on clear days.

Councilman Dan Skogland also questioned the proposals. "I know they say they're good for businesses," he said. "Is this good for the entire community?"

Donald Terry was the only council member to vote against delaying a decision. He clarified later that he voted that way because he wanted to reject the Clear Channel proposal last night and leave only the Sierra/CBS billboard on the table. He said he has not decided whether to approve the Sierra/CBS billboard.

Editor's note (Feb. 18): This story was updated to clarify the intent of Councilman Donald Terry's vote.

Call The Bee's Brad Branan, (916) 321-1065. Follow him on Twitter @BradB_at_SacBee (https://twitter.com/BradB_at_SacBee).

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