

**RIO DELL PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
NOVEMBER 25, 2025**

CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Angeloff called the regular meeting of the Rio Dell Planning Commission to order at 6:03 p.m.

Present were Commissioners Angeloff, Knight, Arsenault, Gurney, and Millington.

Others present were Community Development Director Caldwell, and City Clerk Dunham.

CONSENT CALENDAR

Approve Minutes of September 9, 2025, Special Meeting

A motion was made by Knight/Arsenault to approve the minutes of the September 9, 2025, special meeting. The motion carried 5-0.

PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

Commissioner Angeloff called for public comment on any matter not on the agenda. No public comment was received.

SCHEDULED MATTERS/PUBLIC HEARINGS/STUDY SESSIONS

Adopt Resolution No. PC 189-2025 Recommending that the City Council Approve Amendments to the Zoning Ordinance Regarding Freeway-Oriented Billboards, Establish a Definition and Use Type for Community Oriented Billboards, and Rezone a Portion of the Wastewater Disposal Field Parcel

Community Development Director Caldwell provided a staff report and said that at the City Council meeting on October 7, 2025, Wally Coppini, representing the Chamber of Commerce, addressed the Council requesting the Council agendize a discussion on billboards, in particular community-oriented billboards that promote the city and its businesses.

At the City Council meeting on October 21, 2025, staff presented background on the current billboard regulations, including zones allowing billboards. location, number, and size standards. Staff pointed out at the meeting that in addition to limiting the placement of billboards to the east side of Highway 101 (at the Humboldt Rio Dell Business Park) (HRDBP), the current regulations require a $\frac{1}{2}$ mile between each billboard and a maximum of three billboards. There are currently two existing billboards, one at the south

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entrance to the HRDBP and one at the north entrance and the current regulations eliminate the potential for a third billboard.

Community Development Director Caldwell said that Jesse Jeffries, one of the owners at the HRDBP advocated amending the sign regulations to facilitate a third billboard. He said in order to allow for a third billboard at that location, staff is recommending amending the separation distance from $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to 1,000 feet.

He explained that the city's current sign regulations limits billboards to the HRDBP and on parcels zoned Industrial commercial (IC) or Commercial (C). In order to allow a billboard across the freeway on the city's Wastewater Disposal parcel, the city would need to amend the sign regulations and rezone the area for the signs from Public Facility (PF) to Industrial Commercial (IC). He pointed out that it would make sense to allow billboards/signs at the city's Wastewater Disposal parcel, visible to southbound traffic to promote city events and local businesses.

Community Development Director Caldwell said that because the Industrial Commercial (IC) zone allows a wide variety of uses staff is recommending establishing a Qualified (Q) Combining Zone, limiting uses on the city's wastewater disposal parcel to billboards.

He noted that staff sent approximately 30 public notices to neighboring properties and there were no comments or objections received regarding the placement of billboards at the noted locations.

Community Development Director Caldwell reviewed the proposed performance standards to be incorporated into the city's Sign Regulations to minimize potential visual impacts which included:

- Spacing billboards 400 feet apart on the west side of Highway 101.
- Limiting billboard height to 35 feet on the east side (HRDBP) and 25 feet on the west side of Highway 101.
- Requiring non-reflective, earth-tone finishes on poles and rear panels.
- Implementing strict performance standards for LED signs concerning brightness (maximum 0.3 footcandles above ambient lighting at night), display time (minimum 10 seconds), transition time (maximum 2 seconds), and light spill (full-cutoff fixtures/visors)

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He then referred to pictures of the locations for the proposed billboards and examples of potential advertising. In corresponding with Lamar and All Points Signs, he learned that there may not be a huge demand for a third billboard, but market conditions will dictate whether anyone moves forward with a proposal.

Community Development Director Caldwell noted that the local fire district commented on the LED billboards and the need for brightness control to reduce the intensity of the light at night.

Commissioner Knight asked what the reason was for restricting the spacing of billboards to 400' on the west side as opposed to 1,000 on the east side and asked why more billboards couldn't be allowed on the east side at the HRDBP where the road is straight.

Community Development Director Caldwell explained that there is not a lot of length on the west side, and you want to avoid putting billboards in areas where the road starts to bend because you don't want to take driver's eyes off the road on a curve. He said that the Commission could make a recommendation to the City Council that the 1,000-foot separation be reduced. However, the City Council wanted to limit the number of billboards and avoid creating the "Birma Shave" effect which was a brushless shaving cream famous for its advertising gimmick of posting humorous rhyming poems on small sequential highway roadside signs.

Commissioner Millington asked if the property owner would receive a fee for the advertisement and asked if the proposed advertisement would come back to the Commission for approval.

Community Development Director Caldwell explained that the property owner would charge a fee for the advertising, and any billboard would need to come to the commission for approval through the Conditional Use Permit (CUP) process.

Commissioner Arsenault said that he understood that the proposed billboards were strictly for community promotion.

Community Development Director Caldwell explained that one billboard would be a dedicated community-oriented billboard, and the others would be free-market billboards.

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Commissioner Arsenault expressed opposition to any LED billboards and said that it would be a dangerous distraction to drivers, especially at night. In addition, he said it doesn't fit the community and would look tacky.

Community Development Director Caldwell said that one advantage of an LED billboard, is in the event of an emergency critical information could be provided on the billboard.

Commissioner Gurney agreed that LED billboards are not what Rio Dell is about but also agreed that the city needs to evolve and that LED billboards attract the younger generation.

Commissioner Arsenault said the city needs to decide what it wants to be, whether it's to continue as a bedroom community or something else but thought it would be tacky to come up with a hodge-podge mixture of billboards. He suggested a theme be established for the billboards.

Commissioner Knight asked if the city would generate revenue from the billboards on the west side.

Community Development Director Caldwell explained that the city would generate revenue from advertising on the commercial billboard but not on the community-oriented billboard.

Commissioner Gurney asked if the rezoning would affect any other parcels.

Community Development Director Caldwell said that there would only be three small, 20' x 50' areas redesignated to Industrial Commercial (IC) with a Qualified (Q) combining zone limiting future uses on the city's wastewater disposal parcel to billboards. No other parcels would be affected by the rezone.

Commissioner Arsenault asked what the cost would be to the city to erect the billboards.

Community Development Director Caldwell explained that the city would not erect the billboards so there would be no cost to the city. The developer would incur the cost for erecting the billboard, then the city would receive a share of the revenue received from the advertising through a revenue sharing agreement with the vendor.

Commissioner Angeloff called for public comment on the proposed resolution.

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Jesse Jeffries addressed the Commission and said that he came to the city in 2021 and asked about putting up an LED billboard at the HRDBP. He explained that he purchased one of the parcels there about 7 years ago at the height of the real estate market and now it's worth significantly less. In attempt to try and generate some revenue at that site, he explored the idea of putting up an LED billboard. He researched the idea to see if it was feasible and said in 2021 the billboard market was hot. He said that he rented space on a billboard and it was very expensive by the time you paid to put the advertising up and take it down etc. unlike an LED billboard that can be managed remotely.

He noted that the County of Humboldt currently has a moratorium on billboards and that the HRDBP is an ideal location for billboards. He said that the demand for billboards is probably significantly less than it was in 2021 and very expensive to build (around \$300,000) and as such, he doesn't know if or when he would be able to build one but would love to have that option.

He commented that he is not very fond of billboards being constructed on the west side of the freeway since the city would be competing with him for business but does like the idea of a sign promoting the city. He commented that the separation distance for billboards of 400 feet on the west side and 1,000 feet on the east side was unfair and thought the playing field should be equal.

He said if the city were to build LED billboards and collect a little revenue, it would be good for the city but bad for him since he has millions of dollars invested in the city of Rio Dell and would like the opportunity to recoup some of his investment. He said that the city has been wonderful to work with and definitely gives the city credit for where he is today with his businesses at the HRDBP. He noted that although LED billboards are more expensive to construct, they are less expensive to operate and maintain.

Commissioner Arsenault asked which parcel Mr. Jeffries owned.

Jesse said that he actually owns 4 parcels at the HRDBP, three of which are developed.

Commissioner Knight asked Jesse if his hope is to construct an LED billboard.

Jesse said that he would like to put up an LED billboard although the cost is around \$300,000 so it might not be the right time. He indicated that LED billboards typically generate \$9,000-10,000 a month in revenue.

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A motion was made by Commissioner Knight to adopt the Resolution as presented.

Commissioner Angeloff suggested a modification to the motion to reduce the 1,000-foot separation between billboards on the east side to 500 feet, which would increase the number of allowed billboards from three to four or five.

Jesse commented that he is a Rio Dell citizen and pays a lot of taxes to the city and he doesn't want to see someone come in and manage signs for Rio Dell. He approached the idea of billboards to the city approximately five years ago and was shot down and it would have worked economically then, now he is not so sure how profitable it would be.

Community Development Director Caldwell recommended leaving the maximum number to three with the separation left at 1,000 feet. If there is a greater demand for billboards down the road, the Commission could revisit the regulations for possible revision.

Jesse Jeffries recommended the maximum number of billboards to remain at three on the east side.

Commissioner Arsenault agreed with three billboards on the east side because it is a business district and reiterated that the billboards on the west side should promote Rio Dell with a consolidated message that urges people to come such as the trail, the bluffs, and the dog park. He wanted to be reassured that the billboards would be maintained.

Jesse agreed that promoting any business in Rio Dell is good.

Jesse said that the first phase of his project to see if it is plausible would be to install the billboard going north. Phase 2 would be to install an LED sign on the back side of the billboard but indicated that there may not be that big of a demand. He said that the advantage of an LED sign is that you are not going to see the same advertisement there for months because it would be easy to run multiple ads. He pointed out that the LED sign would be available to the city for any emergency use or to promote special events.

Commissioner Angeloff said that he didn't think the city would be competing with the billboards on the east side because it would be for northbound traffic and the city billboard would be for southbound traffic coming into Rio Dell.

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Commissioner Gurney said as a realtor she knows that lenders are willing to pay a lot for advertising and that she had a client looking into putting up a billboard in Eureka and it was not allowed.

Commissioner Angeloff withdrew his modification to the motion.

A motion was made by Knight/Angeloff to adopt Resolution No. PC 189-2025 *Recommending that the City Council Approve Amendments to the Zoning Ordinance Regarding Freeway-Oriented Billboards, Establish a Definition and Use Type for Community Oriented Billboards, and Rezone a Portion of the Wastewater Disposal Field Parcel.* The motion carried 4-1, with Commissioner Arsenault dissenting.

STAFF COMMUNICATIONS/UPDATES

Community Development Director Caldwell recommended cancelling the next regularly scheduled meeting on December 23, 2025, due to the holidays and said, if necessary, a special meeting could be called.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Knight/Arsenault to adjourn the meeting at 6:57 p.m. to the next regularly scheduled meeting on January 27, 2026.

Nick Angeloff, Chair

Attest:

Karen Dunham, City Clerk