



## **STAFF REPORT**

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### **Discussion and Direction Regarding City of Belmont Signage on Northwest Corner of El Camino Real and Ralston Avenue**

Honorable Mayor and City Council:

#### **Summary**

Staff is seeking direction from Council for repair or replacement of the “City of Belmont” gateway sign on the Ralston at El Camino Real northern retaining wall. Vandals recently stripped nine of the thirteen letters off the wall. This is the second time in the past year that letters have been stolen from this sign and it is apparent that the stud-mounted letters will continue to be vulnerable to vandalism.

#### **Background and Discussion**

In 2000, the two concrete retaining walls on the northwest and southwest sides of the Ralston Avenue at El Camino Real intersection were constructed when the roadways were lowered for the Grade Separation project. The Redevelopment Agency directed staff to complete projects improving the appearance of this Gateway intersection by adding stone fascias to the concrete walls, landscaping, and signs. RDA approved placing “Belmont Village Center” on the south wall and “City of Belmont” on the north wall and selected a custom font, color and texture for the sign letters as designed by Blair Signs. The signs are stud-mounted 13-inch tall aluminum letters standing approximately one-half inch off the face of the irregular stone façade. The textured “blackberry bronze” powder coat was selected to contrast with the underlying stone and harmonize with the landscaping.

The original gateway signs cost about \$20,000. Blair Signs designed and installed the southern "Belmont Village Center" in 2001 at a cost of \$13,227. That included the letter design mockup and landscape lights to uplight the sign. Blair installed the northern "City of Belmont" sign in 2002 at a cost of \$7,142. The installation technique is the same on north and south walls and the lighting and access are also about the same. Installation of the second sign was delayed because the northern wall is on private property.

In 2003, the "L" and "M" were stolen from the northern sign. Staff asked Blair Signs for a bid to replace the letters but they no longer work in northern California. They recommended their subcontractor, JC Graphix, who had the design specifications and remaining "blackberry bronze" powder coat. JC Graphix fabricated and installed the two letters for \$1,255. Much of this cost is mobilization/travel from their Vacaville shop.

Options to address the sign include the following:

1. Removing the City of Belmont sign on the northern wall.
2. Replacing the sign with matching custom fabricated letters.
3. Replacing the sign with "off-the-shelf" letters.
4. Redesigning the type of sign such as to flush-mounted letters less vulnerable to theft.

Option 1, removing the "City of Belmont" sign, was completed by Public Works at the direction of Council given at the September 28 Council meeting. The only remaining work would be to patch the small mounting holes. The downside to this option is that the City loses its gateway identifier. The southern wall will continue to identify the gateway intersection as "Belmont Village Center."

Option 2, replacing the missing letters, would require finding a new vendor able to fabricate matching letters. This option is expensive (\$7000 to \$10,000) and will take several months to complete. Staff had difficulty finding a vendor willing and qualified to do this work when the sign was vandalized a year ago and was not fully satisfied with the replacement work. The "standoff" stud-mounted installation is necessary to straighten the letters on the irregular stone surface, but it will continue to leave the letters vulnerable to removal with a pry bar.

Option 3, replacing the sign with off-the-shelf letters, is much less expensive than Option 2 but is not likely to result in an exact match. An internet search showed that aluminum, brass, bronze, and enamel-coated aluminum letters in various colors are available in similar size and font for about \$15 a piece. Off-the-shelf materials for the entire "City of Belmont" sign would cost less than \$300. Public Works staff could install these letters. The stud-mounting technique is the same as for Option 2, meaning that these letters could also be removed with a pry bar. Blackberry bronze does not appear to be an off-the-shelf color, which means that the southern sign will not match unless it also is replaced. Staff could order a sample letter if Council is interested in checking the appearance.

Option 4 would require the services of an architect to change the type of sign. Other designs could use flush-mounted letters on a backing in a large frame (i.e., a single unit) or inverse lettering on a new solid backing. Again, this would not match the southern sign unless it too was replaced. A designer is needed to assure that a heavy sign does not damage the stone facade. Such a sign would need to be installed into and supported by the underlying concrete wall. The cost of designing and installing this option is unknown but is likely to be several thousand dollars, or an amount comparable to the original design and installation.

**Fiscal Impact**

The fiscal impact depends on the option selected and ranges from negligible to about \$20,000. No funds are specifically budgeted for this purpose but RDA “Gateway Improvement” funds are available.

**Recommendations**

Staff recommends Council provide direction on the preferred option of those outlined in the report.

**Alternatives**

1. Provide alternate direction to staff
2. Take no action at this time

Respectfully submitted,

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