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**Community Development Department**

675 Wildwood Avenue

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**For Meeting of: May 5, 2026**

Consent Item;  Public Hearing Item

To: City Council

From: Kevin Caldwell, Community Development Director

Through: Kyle Knopp, City Manager

Date: April 27, 2026

Subject: Discussion and Direction on the Chamber of Commerce's proposed Community Oriented Billboard.

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**Recommendation:**

That the City Council:

1. Receive a brief presentation regarding the Chamber of Commerce's proposed Community Oriented Billboard on the City's Wastewater Disposal parcel; and
2. Open the public hearing, receive public comment and deliberate; and
3. Provide direction to staff.

**Discussion:**

As the Council is aware the City recently amended the sign regulations to allow a community oriented billboard in the northeast corner of the City's wastewater disposal field.

The Rio Dell Chamber of Commerce has proposed installing a community-oriented billboard on the City-owned property. The goal is to enhance community identity, promote tourism, and provide directional and informational signage for visitors traveling through the area.

The Chamber’s proposed billboard features a stylized, highway-oriented design intended to capture the attention of passing motorists. As depicted in the submitted concept:

- The top panel reads “Next Exit – River Access,” suggesting nearby recreational opportunities.
- The central graphic includes a prominent “Rio Dell” logo set against a scenic background of redwood trees and a river motif, reinforcing the City’s natural setting.
- The bottom panel includes the phrase “Gateway to the Redwoods,” emphasizing the City’s role as northern entry point to the Humboldt Redwoods State Park.

The design uses bold colors and large, legible text consistent with highway signage standards. Below is a copy of the proposed sign.



Although staff finds the proposal to be aesthetically pleasing, the Council may want to consider including local services and businesses on the, but it needs to be done carefully so the sign doesn’t become cluttered or lose its primary function as a quick-read, highway-oriented message.

Right now, the concept mainly promotes identity (“Gateway to the Redwoods”) and river access. Adding a small, curated set of local services (e.g., fuel, food, lodging) gives

travelers a concrete reason to exit, which is far more likely to translate into spending within the City.

Highway travelers typically make split-second decisions based on immediate needs—gas, restrooms, food. Signs that clearly communicate available services tend to outperform purely branding-focused signage in prompting exits.

A shared, community-managed sign provides exposure for local businesses that may not otherwise afford individual highway advertising. This can be especially valuable in a smaller community like Rio Dell. Below is a modified version of the Chamber’s proposal which includes some local services.



The City Manager believes including local available services on the billboard is critical to get travelers to pull-off the Highway and come into town and hopefully patronize some of our local businesses. According to Caltrans, the Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) on Highway 101 in the Rio Dell area is between 17,000 and 20,000 vehicles per day.

The Humboldt Redwoods State Park contains more than 180 mi (290 km) of hiking trails and receives almost 600,000 visitors annually. According to data from Visit Humboldt, the official tourism organization for the region, Humboldt County attracts approximately **2.5 million visitors per year.**

When a City is facing declining tax revenues, attracting more visitors isn't just a nice idea—it becomes a practical economic strategy. For a small community like Rio Dell, even modest increases in visitor traffic can have an outsized impact.

Visitors translate directly into dollars spent on fuel, food, retail, and services. Unlike long-term development projects, this is **instant economic activity** that supports existing businesses and helps stabilize sales tax revenue.

As other revenue sources decline (e.g., property tax fluctuations, reduced state funding), sales tax becomes more critical. Visitors expand the customer base beyond local residents, helping offset those losses. Small businesses in rural communities often operate on thin margins. Increased visitor traffic can:

- Keep businesses open
- Prevent vacancies
- Encourage longer operating hours or expanded services

Many travelers may not even know Rio Dell exists or what it offers. A strong visual identity (“Gateway to the Redwoods”) builds recognition and curiosity, including local services only helps get travelers to come into Rio Dell. Small towns often struggle not because they lack amenities, but because people don't know those amenities are there. A well-designed billboard solves that problem directly. The City Manager prepared a simple concept that includes local services and the fact that the next City south is 109 miles away.



The proposed billboard will be 10' x 20', approximately 25' tall, wooden posts/poles with aluminum panels over solid weather resistant 2X surface. The Chamber is hoping to get most of the materials and labor (other than the painting of the sign) donated. It is anticipated that a muralist would paint the image/signage on the aluminum panels.

A Conditional Use Permit is required. Since it appears to be a Public – Quasi Public effort, costs would include staff time for review and permitting. Because of the potential wind loads, structural calculations by licensed Engineer would be required.

### **Potential Talking Points**

- **Maintenance and Liability:** An agreement will be necessary to define responsibility for installation, upkeep, and possible insurance coverage.
- **Ad Hoc Committee:** The Council may want to establish an Ad Hoc Committee to establish a consensus on the format/design of the billboard
- **RFQ/RFP:** The Council may want to issue an RFQ/RFP requesting proposals for the billboard.