



Community Development Department

675 Wildwood Avenue

Rio Dell, CA 95562

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For Meeting of: May 26, 2026

Consent Item; Public Hearing Item

To: Planning Commission

From: Kevin Caldwell, Community Development Director

Through: Kyle Knopp, City Manager

Date: May 12, 2026

Subject: Jeffries Billboard Conditional Use Permit
File No. 205-111-057; Case No. CUP 2026-01
350 Northwestern Avenue

Recommendation:

That the Planning Commission:

1. Receive staff's report regarding the proposed Conditional Use Permit;
2. Open the public hearing, receive public input, close the public hearing and deliberate;
3. Assuming that public testimony is substantially in support of the proposal, find that:
 - (a) The proposed use is allowed within the applicable zoning district and complies with all other applicable provisions of this title and all other City ordinances;
 - (b) The proposed use is consistent with the general plan and any applicable specific plan;
 - (c) The design, location, size, and operating characteristics of the proposed activity are compatible with the existing and future land uses in the vicinity;

(d) The site is physically suitable for the type, density and intensity of use being proposed, including access, utilities, and the absence of physical constraints;

(e) Granting the permit would not be detrimental to the public interest, health, safety, convenience, or welfare, or materially injurious to persons, property, or improvements in the vicinity and zoning district in which the property is located; and

(f) The Conditional Use Permit has been processed in accordance with the applicable provisions of the California Government Code and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA);

4. Adopt Resolution No. PC 191-2026 approving the Conditional Use Permit, subject to the Conditions of Approval, Exhibit A.

Summary

The applicant requests approval of a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) to allow the installation and operation of one double-faced, V-type, illuminated digital LED freeway oriented billboard on property located at 350 Northwestern Avenue within the Humboldt Rio Dell Business Park.

The proposed billboard would consist of a steel monopole structure with a maximum height of 35 feet above finished grade. The billboard would contain two advertising faces, each measuring approximately 475.22 square feet. The sign is proposed adjacent to U.S. Highway 101 and oriented toward northbound and southbound traffic lanes.

According to the applicant's submitted Plan of Operations (Attachment 1), the billboard would:

- Operate continuously;
- Utilize automatic dimming technology;
- Change displays no more frequently than every 10 seconds;
- Include no flashing, blinking, rotating, or animated lighting;
- Be located entirely on private property;
- Utilize existing access improvements;
- Be maintained on a routine basis; and
- Comply with applicable California Building Code and Caltrans requirements.

Required Findings/Staff Analysis

Section 17.35.030 Rio Dell Municipal Code (RDMC) Conditional Use Permits.

1. Zoning Consistency

(a) The proposed use is allowed within the applicable zoning district and complies with all other applicable provisions of this title and all other City ordinances;

Land Use:

The proposed location is designated Industrial Commercial (IC). The purpose of the Industrial Commercial zone is to provide for industrial and commercial uses. Freeway oriented billboards are conditionally permitted within the Industrial Commercial zoning district subject to compliance with RDMC Section 17.30.320(5)(j).

Development Standards

1. Location

Section 17.30.320(5)(j)(i) of the RDMC requires freeway oriented billboards to:

- Be located within 100 feet of State Highway 101;
- Be located on property zoned Industrial Commercial within the Humboldt Rio Dell Business Park;
- Maintain a minimum separation distance of 1,000 feet between freeway oriented billboards within the Humboldt Rio Dell Business Park;
- Not be located on or within a public right-of-way.

The applicant proposes to locate the billboard on Industrial Commercial zoned property within the Humboldt Rio Dell Business Park at 350 Northwestern Avenue.

The submitted site information indicates the billboard would be located approximately 42 feet from the edge of Highway 101 pavement and approximately 53 feet from the northbound fog line, thereby complying with the location requirement.

The applicant further states that there is an existing freeway oriented billboard approximately 1,255 feet north of the site and another billboard approximately 1,375 feet south of the site. Staff finds the proposed billboard satisfies the minimum 1,000-foot spacing requirement applicable to freeway oriented billboards within the Humboldt Rio Dell Business Park. The billboard would be located entirely on private property and outside of any public right-of-way.

Therefore, staff finds the project complies with the location requirements of RDMC Section 17.30.320(5)(j)(i).

2. Maximum Number of Freeway Oriented Billboards

RDMC Section 17.30.320(5)(j)(ii) limits the City to:

- No more than three freeway oriented billboards within the Humboldt Rio Dell Business Park; and

As indicated above there are two existing billboards within the Humboldt Rio Dell Business Park. As such, approval of the proposed billboard would not exceed the maximum number of freeway oriented billboard permits authorized within the Humboldt Rio Dell Business Park.

3. Height

RDMC Section 17.30.320(5)(j)(iii) limits freeway oriented billboards to a maximum height of 35 feet measured from existing grade.

The applicant proposes a billboard structure with a maximum height of 35 feet above finished grade. Staff finds the project complies with the applicable height limitation.

4. Size of Signage

RDMC Section 17.30.320(5)(j)(iv) limits freeway oriented billboards to:

- A maximum advertising surface area of 480 square feet per advertising face;
- No more than two advertising surfaces; and
- No more than two advertisements per advertising surface.

The proposed billboard includes two advertising faces measuring approximately 475.22 square feet each. The application materials indicate the billboard would contain no more than two advertising surfaces.

Staff finds the project complies with the size limitations established by the Municipal Code.

5. Lighting

RDMC Section 17.30.320(5)(j)(v) permits illuminated freeway oriented billboards provided no blinking, flashing, rotating, animated lighting, or movement occurs.

For LED signs, the Municipal Code further requires:

- Automatic brightness controls limiting nighttime brightness to no more than 0.3 footcandles above ambient nighttime lighting;
- A minimum display time of 10 seconds;
- A maximum transition time of 2 seconds; and
- Full-cutoff fixtures or visors to prevent light spill.

The applicant proposes:

- Automatic brightness controls and dimming technology;
- Display changes no more frequently than every 10 seconds;
- Transition periods no greater than 2 seconds;
- No blinking, flashing, rotating, or animated lighting; and

- Full-cutoff shielding and visors.

The applicant further states nighttime illumination would not exceed 0.3 footcandles above ambient nighttime lighting conditions.

Staff finds the proposed billboard lighting system complies with the lighting standards established in RDMC Section 17.30.320(5)(j)(v).

6. Approval by State of California

RDMC Section 17.30.320(5)(j)(vi) requires freeway oriented billboards receiving a Conditional Use Permit from the City to obtain a permit from the California Department of Transportation pursuant to the California Outdoor Advertising Act.

The applicant acknowledges that a Caltrans permit must be obtained prior to construction. A condition of approval requires the submission of all required State approvals prior to issuance of building permits.

7. Structural Design

RDMC Section 17.30.320(5)(j)(vii) requires Planning Commission review and approval of the structural design, including review of the location, color, materials, and details to ensure compatibility with surrounding land uses and the City's rural hometown image.

The applicant proposes:

- A single steel monopole structure;
- Non-reflective earth-tone finishes on the pole and rear panels; and
- Engineered structural components designed in compliance with the California Building Code.

The proposed billboard would be located within the Humboldt Rio Dell Business Park adjacent to Highway 101 in an area characterized by commercial and industrial development.

Staff finds the structural design, materials, and finishes are compatible with the surrounding area and consistent with the intent of the Municipal Code.

8. Maintenance

RDMC Section 17.30.320(5)(j)(viii) requires freeway oriented billboards and their supporting members to be maintained in good condition at all times and authorizes the City to require repair or removal of dilapidated structures within 30 days.

The applicant proposes routine inspections, regular maintenance, prompt repair of damaged components, and compliance with City directives regarding maintenance and removal.

General Plan Consistency

(b) The proposed use is consistent with the general plan and any applicable specific plan;

The General Plan designation is also Industrial Commercial (IC). Below is an excerpt from the General Plan regarding the Industrial Commercial designation:

This designation provides for industrial and commercial uses. It will be applied to land bordering U.S. Highway 101 that has historically been industrial, but has potential for commercial establishments.

The proposed freeway oriented billboard is consistent with the economic development policies of the Rio Dell General Plan because the project supports highway-oriented economic activity, business visibility, tourism promotion, and commercial investment within an area specifically designated for industrial and commercial development.

The proposed billboard would be located within the Humboldt Rio Dell Business Park adjacent to U.S. Highway 101, one of the primary transportation corridors through the region. The General Plan encourages economic development activities that capitalize on Highway 101 exposure and support commercial and industrial uses capable of strengthening the City's economic base. By providing high-visibility advertising opportunities for businesses, services, lodging, dining, retail, and regional attractions, the billboard would enhance commercial exposure and improve the ability of local and regional businesses to reach the traveling public.

The project is also consistent with General Plan policies intended to encourage investment and economic activity within planned commercial and industrial districts. The site is located within an Industrial Commercial zoning district where freeway oriented commercial activity is anticipated and regulated by the Municipal Code. The billboard would represent a revenue-generating commercial use that supports continued utilization and economic viability of property within the Business Park without requiring substantial public infrastructure expansion or municipal services.

In addition, the proposed billboard may assist in promoting tourism-related economic activity by providing advertising opportunities for local businesses, community events, lodging, recreation, dining, and regional attractions serving travelers along the Highway 101 corridor. Increased business visibility can contribute to local economic activity, transient occupancy tax generation, sales tax generation, and broader economic development objectives identified in the General Plan.

The project is further consistent with the General Plan's objective of directing more intensive commercial activities toward established transportation corridors and existing developed areas. The billboard would be located within an already developed highway commercial environment adjacent to existing transportation infrastructure, thereby avoiding pressure for commercial encroachment into residential neighborhoods or environmentally sensitive areas.

Finally, the project supports economic utilization of privately owned commercial property while remaining subject to operational, lighting, maintenance, and design standards intended to preserve public safety and compatibility with the City's hometown character. As conditioned, the billboard balances economic development objectives with community design considerations reflected in the General Plan and Municipal Code.

Based on the proposed use and a review of the General Plan policies, staff believes the proposed use is consistent with the General Plan.

Land Use Compatibility

(c) The design, location, size, and operating characteristics of the proposed activity are compatible with the existing and future land uses in the vicinity;

The design, location, size, and operating characteristics of the proposed freeway oriented billboard are compatible with the existing and future land uses in the vicinity because the project is located within an established highway-oriented industrial and commercial corridor specifically designated for commercial and industrial activities within the Rio Dell Humboldt Rio Dell Business Park.

The surrounding area is characterized by Highway 101 transportation infrastructure, industrial and commercial development, utility-related uses, and other highway-oriented activities. The proposed billboard is consistent with the visual and functional character of this corridor, where larger-scale signage and transportation-oriented commercial uses are anticipated. The site is not located within or immediately adjacent to established residential neighborhoods or sensitive land use areas where billboard development could create substantial land use conflicts.

The proposed billboard's size and height comply with the limitations established by Rio Dell Municipal Code Section 17.30.320(5)(j), which specifically regulates freeway oriented billboards within the Business Park. The proposed structure would not exceed the maximum permitted height of 35 feet or the maximum advertising surface area of 480 square feet per face. The project also complies with the required separation distances between freeway oriented billboards, ensuring that billboard development remains limited in scale and does not create visual overconcentration along the Highway 101 corridor.

The structural design is compatible with surrounding land uses because the applicant proposes a single monopole structure utilizing non-reflective earth-tone finishes and engineered materials intended to reduce visual clutter and maintain consistency with the City's rural hometown image. The Planning Commission retains discretionary review authority over the final structural design, materials, colors, and appearance to ensure compatibility with surrounding development patterns.

The operating characteristics of the billboard are also designed to minimize potential impacts on surrounding properties and future development. The digital LED display would utilize automatic brightness controls and dimming technology to limit nighttime illumination. The billboard would not include blinking, flashing, rotating, animated, or moving displays, and display changes would occur no more frequently than every 10 seconds with transition times limited to a maximum of 2 seconds. These operational limitations substantially reduce the potential for glare, distraction, or incompatibility with surrounding uses.

The proposed use is also compatible with future planned land uses because the General Plan and zoning regulations contemplate continued commercial and industrial development within the Humboldt Rio Dell Business Park and along the Highway 101 corridor. Freeway oriented billboards are expressly authorized within this area through approval of a Conditional Use Permit, reflecting the City's determination that such uses may be appropriate when designed and operated in compliance with Municipal Code standards.

Additionally, the project represents a low-intensity use that does not generate substantial traffic, noise, wastewater, population growth, or demands on public services that could interfere with surrounding or future land uses. The billboard would function as a passive commercial advertising structure with only periodic maintenance activity.

For these reasons, the design, location, size, and operating characteristics of the proposed billboard are compatible with both the existing development pattern and the future planned land uses within the surrounding area.

Site Suitability

(d) The site is physically suitable for the type, density and intensity of use being proposed, including access, utilities, and the absence of physical constraints;

The proposed billboard site is physically suitable for the type, density, and intensity of use proposed because the project involves a relatively low-intensity commercial sign structure located on a developed Industrial Commercial property within the Humboldt Rio Dell Business Park adjacent to U.S. Highway 101.

The proposed use consists of a single monopole freeway oriented billboard with limited physical infrastructure requirements. Unlike more intensive commercial or industrial development, the project does not involve occupied buildings, substantial traffic generation, large-scale utility demands, wastewater generation, or significant site disturbance. The operational characteristics of the billboard are limited primarily to passive advertising display and periodic maintenance activities.

The property has direct access from existing improved roadways within the Business Park and can accommodate construction and ongoing maintenance access without requiring new public streets, driveways, or circulation improvements. Maintenance vehicles can access the site

utilizing existing site improvements and can park on-site without obstructing public roadways or creating circulation conflicts.

Adequate utilities are available to serve the project. The billboard requires only a limited electrical connection for LED illumination and display operation. The project does not require water service, sewer service, stormwater system expansion, or other substantial public utility infrastructure improvements.

The site is physically suitable due to its relatively flat and previously disturbed condition within an existing developed industrial/commercial area adjacent to Highway 101. The project site does not contain known environmentally sensitive habitat, wetlands, riparian corridors, steep slopes, geologic hazards, or other significant physical constraints that would limit development of the proposed structure. The proposed monopole billboard can be accommodated within the site while remaining outside of public rights-of-way and maintaining required setbacks and spacing requirements established by the Rio Dell Municipal Code.

The scale and intensity of the proposed use are also appropriate for the surrounding area. The billboard is located within a highway-oriented commercial and industrial corridor where large-scale commercial signage, transportation infrastructure, and industrial development are existing and anticipated land uses. The proposed billboard height, sign area, lighting controls, and structural design are specifically regulated by the Municipal Code to ensure compatibility with the surrounding environment and to avoid over-intensification of the site.

Additionally, the proposed project does not create substantial demands on public services or infrastructure and does not result in permanent population growth, increased occupancy, or expanded operational activity typically associated with more intensive commercial development.

Accordingly, the site is physically suitable for the proposed freeway oriented billboard use based upon the site's location, access, available utilities, surrounding development pattern, and absence of significant physical or environmental constraints.

Public Interest, Health, Safety and Welfare

(e) Granting the permit would not be detrimental to the public interest, health, safety, convenience, or welfare, or materially injurious to persons, property, or improvements in the vicinity and zoning district in which the property is located;

Granting the Conditional Use Permit for the proposed freeway oriented billboard would not be detrimental to the public interest, health, safety, convenience, or welfare, nor materially injurious to persons, property, or improvements in the vicinity and zoning district, because the project has been specifically designed and conditioned to comply with the operational, structural, and safety requirements established by the Rio Dell Municipal Code for freeway oriented billboards.

The proposed billboard is located within the Humboldt Rio Dell Business Park adjacent to U.S. Highway 101 in an area designated and zoned for industrial and commercial uses where highway-oriented development and commercial signage are anticipated land uses. The project is not located within a residential neighborhood or near sensitive land uses such as schools, parks, or hospitals where operational characteristics could create incompatibilities or adverse impacts on the public welfare.

The project incorporates multiple operational limitations intended to protect public safety and minimize potential impacts. The digital LED billboard would utilize automatic brightness controls limiting nighttime illumination to no more than 0.3 footcandles above ambient lighting levels. Display transitions would occur no more frequently than every 10 seconds with transition periods limited to a maximum of 2 seconds. The project specifically prohibits blinking, flashing, rotating, animated, or moving displays that could create excessive distraction or safety concerns for motorists traveling along Highway 101.

The structural design of the billboard would be engineered in compliance with the California Building Code and all applicable structural safety standards. The billboard would require review and approval through the City's building permit process, including verification of structural integrity, foundation design, wind load resistance, and compliance with applicable state and local regulations. The project would also require approval from the California Department of Transportation pursuant to the California Outdoor Advertising Act prior to construction.

The project would not create substantial traffic, circulation, noise, air quality, or public service impacts. The billboard is a low-intensity passive advertising use that does not generate permanent occupancy, customer traffic, wastewater generation, or demands for municipal services typically associated with more intensive commercial development. Construction and maintenance access would occur utilizing existing site access improvements without the need for new roadways or public infrastructure expansion.

The proposed billboard would also be subject to ongoing maintenance requirements established by the Municipal Code and conditions of approval. The applicant proposes routine inspections, prompt repair of damaged components, and continued compliance with lighting and operational standards. The City retains authority to require repair or removal of dilapidated or unsafe billboard structures within 30 days if necessary to protect public safety and community appearance.

In addition, the project complies with the spacing, height, sign area, and location limitations established by Rio Dell Municipal Code Section 17.30.320(5)(j), which were specifically adopted to ensure freeway oriented billboards remain limited in number and compatible with the surrounding community character.

Because the project complies with applicable development standards, incorporates operational safeguards, utilizes existing infrastructure, and would be located within an appropriate industrial commercial corridor, granting the Conditional Use Permit would not be detrimental

to the public interest, health, safety, convenience, or welfare, nor materially injurious to persons, property, or improvements in the vicinity.

California Environmental Quality Act

The primary purpose of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is to inform the decision-makers and the public of the potential environmental effects of a proposed project.

The proposed project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15303 (New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures), which includes the construction and location of limited new small facilities or structures.

Additionally, the project involves development within an existing industrial commercial area adjacent to an established transportation corridor and does not involve significant grading, expansion of roadway infrastructure, or intensification beyond the existing zoning designation.

Attachments:

Attachment 1: Plan of Operations, and Site Plan.

Attachment 2: Exhibit A, Conditions of Approval.

Attachment 3: Resolution No. PC 191-2026.