



October 10, 2024

Sunset Arts & Advertising Subcommittee Briefing Memo Current and Historic Preservation Planning

8760 Sunset Boulevard

Sunset Arts & Advertising

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Project Planner: Jennifer Davis, (Current and Historic Preservation Planning)
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Proposed Billboard Application: The purpose of this meeting is to give initial feedback on design aspects of the proposed billboard structure at this location. This includes one sided, full-motion animated billboard both facing west. This site currently has no billboards.

Applicant's Team:

Media Company

Big Outdoor

Architect

Office Untitled (OU)

Applicant Representative

Jeff Seymour, Seymour Consulting Group, on behalf of owner: Mutato Muzika, LLC

Sunset Boulevard Design Excellence Review and Award

A key prerequisite of the new billboards authorized by the Sunset Boulevard Off-Site Signage Policy (the "Policy") was to demonstrate a high level of creativity and achievement of specific design excellence principles. This design excellence was determined by a screening and award process that spanned from November 2019 to June 2020. Once selected, applicants were eligible to apply for a billboard application and to negotiate a development agreement to allow the new billboards.

The design principles of the Policy build on the existing creative energy of the Sunset Strip to provide for new and modified off-site signage that synthesizes advertising, urban design, architecture, public art, entertainment, and the latest in billboard technology.

All proposals were reviewed to ensure they met the following principles: design excellence (including clarity, cohesiveness, and timelessness), innovation, compatibility with the context of the Strip, sustainability, economic development, and community benefits. Top-scoring submissions were granted a “concept award,” which made their initial proposal eligible to file for the Development Agreement and entitlement application. See Section 2 of the Sunset Boulevard Off-Site Signage Policy and <https://www.weho.org/city-government/city-departments/planning-and-development-services/billboards-on-the-sunset-strip> for more details on the design excellence awards. This webpage provides a link to the document entitled Sunset Boulevard Arts and Advertising Program, dated July 7, 2020, which goes into detail about the Program – a groundbreaking effort to reimagine the world’s premier locations for outdoor advertising. After the competitive vetting process, the City selected 21 projects in Round 1. This application is part of Round 1.0.

Project Summary

The proposed project consists of a new 1,000 square foot, single-faced full-motion animated billboard positioned adjacent to the sidewalk at the northwest corner of the site at 8760 Sunset Boulevard and pedestrian improvements along the front plaza area. The metal-cladded billboard structure and surface layers rise 90’ from grade. There is 19 feet clearance from the top of the building’s roof to the bottom of the billboard (the billboard does not overhang the building but is offset). The billboard is of a tall cylindrical design, positioned on the site to have minimal impact on the historic building – the Mutato Muzika building, which currently houses the entertainment company of Mark Mothersbaugh. Originally built in 1967 by Dr. Richard Alan Franklyn, a well-known cosmetic surgeon, its historic name is “The Beauty Pavilion.” The billboard advertising side faces west and the back of the billboard structure, with a perforated decorative pattern, faces east. The sides of the cylinder – between the sign face and decorative pattern - will be solid metal cladding.

Although it has changed to address adjacencies, protect viewsheds, and better conform with the intent of the billboard policy, the design of the billboard still retains some of the inspiration from the original design excellence *concept* award, which featured a set of three rings above the roofline of the building, playing off the unique circular building below. (See Original Concept Award Design below). This concept design, creative though it was, was determined to be infeasible given that it greatly obstructed a new billboard to the east, an existing tall wall to the east, and the project’s preservation expert determined that the proposal would likely have adverse impacts to the building which is considered a local cultural resource. Therefore, the billboard was repositioned and reconceived with a more vertical structure situated away from the building.



Original Concept Award Design

The new billboard structure will be fitted with soft lighting within so that the perforated pattern or design on the rear of the billboard will be visible. The applicant has provided three options for the rear of the billboard and requests input from the Subcommittee on these options.

There is currently no billboard at this location. There is one media logo sign that will be on the bottom of the west elevation of the billboard. The project will be required to add one street tree along Sunset Boulevard.

Billboard Analysis

The revised design, while still curvilinear, will reduce off-site advertising obstructions and preserve the historic expression of the existing building, fitting well into the visual landscape of this portion of Sunset Boulevard. Situated along the westerly property line and adjacent to the access driveway, the free-standing structure represents one of the few vertically oriented signs currently in the program. The benefit of this location is visibility and minimization of visual obstructions. However, the location tucked at the side of the driveway does make it more difficult to experience the billboard structure as an object or urban folly much like the Sunset Spectacular experience for example.

The applicant team has identified two options for the non-billboard portion of the cylindrical structure. Option 1 is comprised of a tall cylindrical drum with its base and top lifted off the drum and its central body broken up with incisions or cuts to break up the mass. Option 2 uses a stretched coiled ring approach that opens up and exposes the inside of the structure more. Of the two options, the latter seems to be the most engaging to the pedestrian who might be interested in exploring the inner workings of the tubular volume. It might be interesting for the applicant team to explore ways of creating some form of content on the inner surface (through

inscriptions, a graphic form of musical notation, or a captured, internal light display) that would reward the curious onlooker who might investigate. Regardless, how the structure is illuminated and the lighting levels will be important to consider as well.



Proposed Billboard Design looking east

PRE
STAFF

The measurement table below shows the relevant measurements of the proposed billboard in relationship to the existing building.

Measurement	Existing Billboard	Proposed Billboard (West Face)	Proposed Decorative Pattern Area on Rear Face (East Face)
Height to top of billboard, measured from grade (allowable height is 35' - SSP Geo Area 6C)	NA	90'-0"	
Height to top of billboard measured from roof surface	NA	74'-6 1/2"	
Distance between top of roof and lower edge of billboard	NA	18'-11"	
Dimensions of billboard (sign area)	NA	25'-9" W x 39' H	
Square footage of sign area (advertising sign area)	NA	1,000 SF	500 SF (Decorative Pattern Area on Rear Face/ Not Sign Area)
Size of billboard frame and sign area together (total)	NA	1,432 SF	
Angle of billboard in relationship to Sunset	NA	90°	

Plaza Enhancements

All billboard projects are required to provide meaningful public realm enhancements that actively engage and augment the pedestrian experience along Sunset Boulevard. This particular billboard project proposes two components to a new pedestrian plaza in the front of the building. A "paint by number" landscape plan, or "landscaping as painting," surrounds the plaza which contains three sculptural "phonoflowers." These "phonoflowers" project the sound of plants (or other option as discussed below). The surrounding landscaping will change colors as the seasons change. The plaza enhancements include increasing the width of the sidewalk to 10 feet, replacing and moving back the short wall and handrail along the edge of the repositioned plaza area. The height and slope of the new wall and railing will mirror that of the previous one. The existing driveway from Sunset, at the easternmost portion of the property, will be eliminated and the area will be landscaped.

As stated by the architect, the plaza improvements “envision Mutato Muzika as a living artwork where nature, music, and art converge to create a media-activated public space on Sunset Boulevard.” The landscaped area is inspired by Burle Marx’s “landscape as canvas” concept and Mark Mothersbaugh’s iconic style. The project integrates native Californian flora with the sculptural “phonoflowers.” These trumpet-shaped forms emit music derived from plant biorhythms, creating an immersive soundscape that invites public interaction. Visitors can engage with the space, transforming the plaza into an interactive, harmonious blend of natural beauty and artistic expression. The applicant currently has three options for the sounds of the phonoflowers and is seeking input from the Subcommittee on these options. Attachment A of this report provides sound sample links. The three options are:

OPTION A: SOOTHING SOUND BATH

Prerecorded plant frequencies are played simultaneously to create a sonic sound bath. Each “phonoflower” emits a different frequency and sound oscillates from each flower to create and spatial sound experience that blankets the plaza.

OPTION B: SONIC SYMPHONY

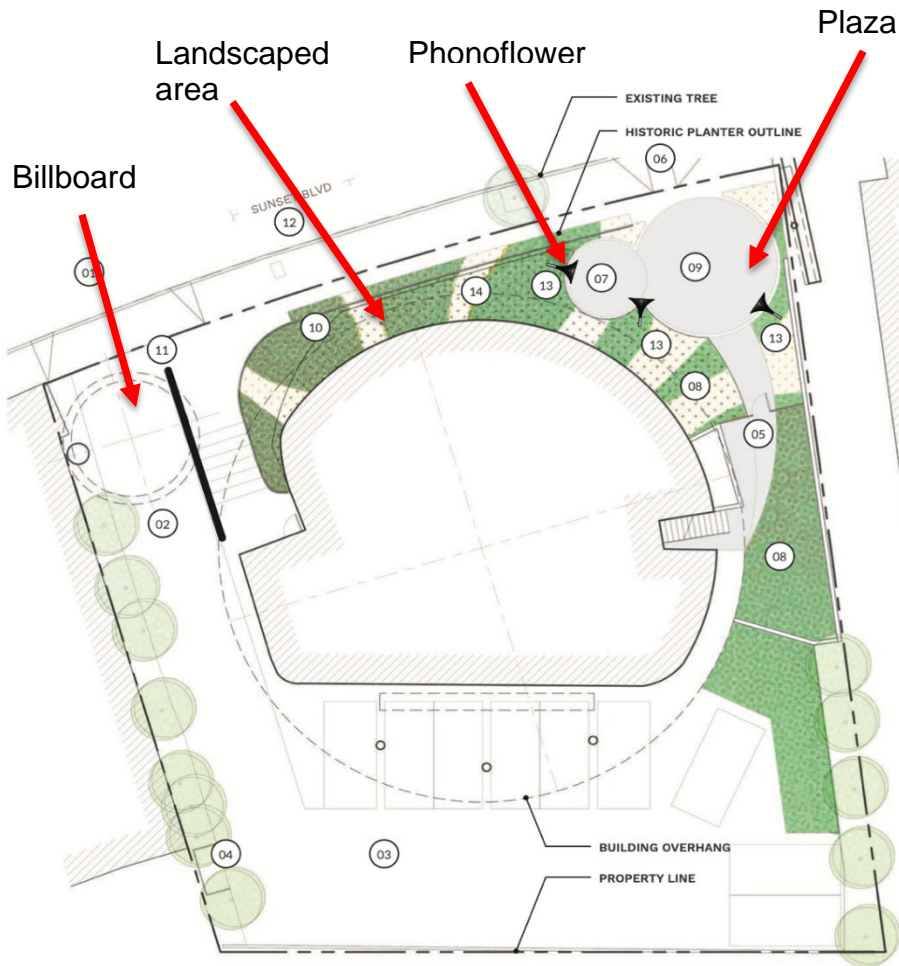
Using prerecorded plant frequency audio, a complete musical piece or track is composed by Mutato Musika owner, Mark Mothersbaugh, or derived from PlantWave’s¹ technology, blanketing the plaza in a calming musical arrangement emitted from the “phonoflowers.”

OPTION C: PLAYING THE PLANTS

By connecting their phone to an app through a virtual QR code, visitors are able to control the music and sounds coming from the phonoflowers - changing the tones and frequencies of the music - in effect, playing the plants.

Regardless which option is recommended, it will be important to have some analog means (not merely a QR code) that tells the story of the relationship between the music and nature and how that translation will take place. Similar consideration should be given to the telling of the story of the “landscape as canvas” and the long-term maintenance of this area.

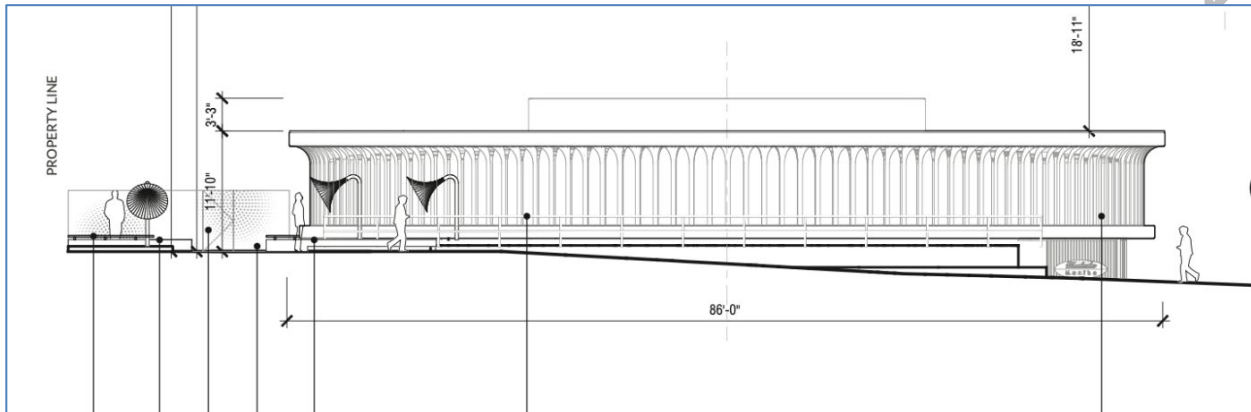
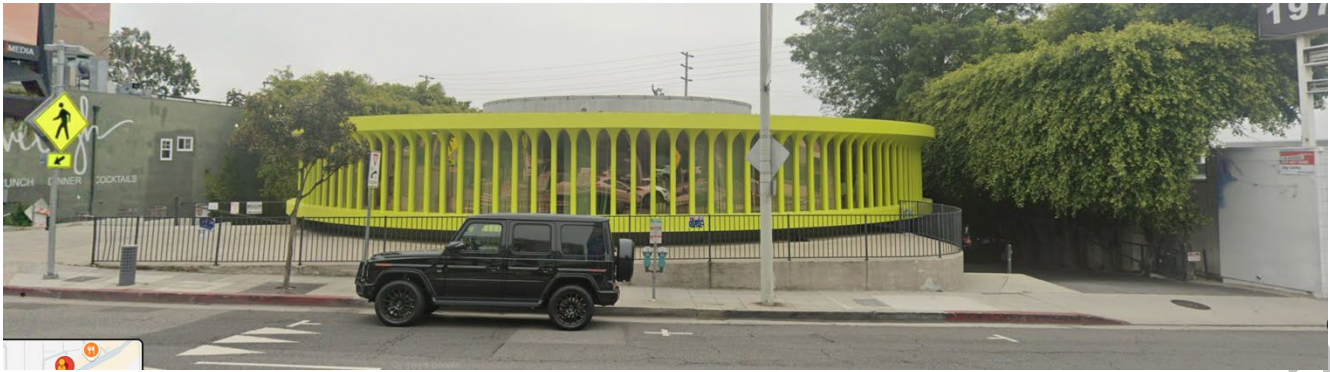
¹ “PlantWave uses patented sonification technology to convert the biorhythms of plants into real-time music. The result is a continuous stream of pleasing music that gives a sonic window into the secret lives of plants.” <https://plantwave.com/>



Proposed Site Plan

The plaza itself will contain bench seating and be finished with gray, 4" thick narrow modular pavers. The benches should be carefully designed to promote the types of activity desired. Contrasting the concrete sidewalk, the pavers will help distinguish the private plaza from the sidewalk. Alternating colors or paving or the introduction of creative patterns would further help mark the plaza as a unique place. Lighting of the plaza should be soft and subdued but account for nighttime safety considerations.

As a welcomed revision to the property, the applicant team has researched the historic entry sequence into the building and plans to recreate the original by removing a later addition and bring back the wall height and geometry as well as the original guardrail.



Approval under the Billboard Policy

The proposed billboard is permitted under the Sunset Boulevard Off-Site Signage Policy (the "Policy"), Chapter 8 of the Sunset Specific Plan, which governs the location, type, and standards for new billboards on Sunset Boulevard.

This is a new billboard granted a design excellence award under Round 1 of the Sunset Arts & Advertising Program. The proposed billboard exceeds the height limit for this site and therefore is an alternative standards project under the Policy.

The Policy ensures that all lighting and operations are addressed. The applicant will be providing lighting and operations details that will cover:

- hours of operation;
- luminance (amount of light emitted from billboard);
- illuminance (light falling on a given surface from billboard);
- digital sign control and transitions;
- visual comfort and contrast control; and
- the use of renewable energy.

The application includes a viewshed/sightline analysis to show the proposed billboard project in context with existing billboards, proposed billboards and cultural resources. The billboard design was revised to reduce obstruction of the existing tall wall and billboard to the east.

Pursuant to this Policy, every billboard is subject to a development agreement which details the public benefits derived from each new billboard. Those public benefits, among others, include:

- Minimum annual payments - there will be substantial annual payments based on value and capital costs.
- Alternative standards request benefit – this is required due to the project being over the height limit for this site.
- Requirement that building remains occupied - or significant payment increase are required.
- Requirement to use the latest in green energy practices and to conduct periodic technology updates.
- Requirement for City Content and Public and Arts Programming.

Next Steps:

The proposed billboard project will require review and recommendation from the Historic Preservation Commission. Should the phonoflower option with Mark Mothersbaugh created pieces be used, a review by the Arts Commission is required. Thereafter, a recommendation will be required from Planning Commission on a development agreement, zoning map amendment, and sign permit and will be part of the application package brought forth for review to the full Planning Commission. Thereafter the City Council reviews all permits and the development agreement for final approval.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Sound Examples (Bio-Sonification) with hyperlinks
- B. Project Plans