

Revenue Proposal: *Commercial Advertising on City Street Poles*

Proposal Overview

This proposal introduces a plan to allow commercial advertisements on City-owned street poles, which would be a shift from current restrictions that only permit banners for civic events or neighborhood promotions with limited sponsor recognition. Implementing this change would require updating [Section 10-8-340](#) of the Municipal Code and revising the Department of Transportation's [\(CDOT\) banner policies](#). The goal is to create a new revenue stream through banner sponsorships while giving local businesses more opportunities for visibility on certain City-owned street poles.

Context

Currently, Chambers of Commerce administer streetlight advertising across Chicago neighborhoods. For example, the Lincoln Park Chamber of Commerce uses street pole advertising, priced as [\\$275](#) per year per banner. Lincoln Park also charges a \$50 set up fee and a \$150 annual renewal fee for banners. Greater Ravenswood Chamber of Commerce charges [\\$310-\\$350](#) for a two-year period per banner, with lower costs available for Chamber members. In Greater Ravenswood, these prices include installation, permitting, and maintenance.

Other organizations across the country representing business interests operate similar revenue-generating programs. For example, [San Diego's Downtown Partnership](#), a nonprofit focused on economic prosperity of the downtown area, operates a [streetlight banner program](#) that permits full commercial advertising. The program bundles all associated costs – such as printing, installation, removal, and city permit fees – into one monthly package price. The program is structured by corridor, with pricing varying by location based on visibility, traffic, and desirability. San Diego Partnership provides both single and double banner options for advertising – hosting over 250 banners across its available locations. The average across all five San Diego advertising locations is approximately ***\$200 per banner per month***.

However, while the City of Chicago operates [300,000 streetlights](#) across the City, its advertising program only allow “decorative banners or other decorations that promote or celebrate the City, its civic institutions, or large, festive public activities or events in the City of Chicago” on City-owned streetlight. Current City [policy](#) notes City-owned streetlight “shall not be used for commercial advertising or for promoting any political or social advocacy organization or political or religious message.” This proposal suggests expanding the types of advertisements to include commercial activity allowed on certain City streetlights, generating additional revenue.

Estimated Revenue

The below estimate assumes Chicago deploys advertisements on 3,000 street poles -- 1% of the City's streetlights -- with each pole carrying double banners. This is a simplified revenue estimate, the City may consider additional

fees, alternative fee schedules, or annual renewal charges to generate additional revenue from commercial streetlight advertising. With these assumptions, monthly and annual revenue collections for the City would be:

Table 1. Annual revenue from commercial streetlight advertising

<i>Monthly cost per banner</i>	<i>Banners per pole</i>	<i>Annual revenue</i>
\$200	Single-banner	\$7,200,000
\$200	Hybrid*	\$10,800,000
\$200	Double-banner	\$14,400,000

*1,500 single-banner, 1,500 double-banner; the City may consider additional distributions of single-, double-banner poles, or choose to allocate more of the City-owned street poles to the commercial advertising program.

Implementation & Stakeholders

As noted, allowing commercial street pole advertising would require revisions of Chicago Department of Transportation's policies, and the City will need to consider number of poles allocated to commercial advertising, number of banners allowed per pole, and fee amount and schedules.

Implementation will likely prove simple -- existing Department of Transportation staff and equipment can be responsible for installation and maintenance of the advertisements, and the commercial advertisements could leverage similar processes already in place that allow civic advertisements on City street poles. However, there will be departmental costs, including marginal costs related to using CDOT equipment, development of promotional materials, and processes to collect applications and determine pole allocation to applicants.

Responsible departments

- ***Department of Transportation:*** primary oversight authority; responsible for permitting and payment collection from businesses, maintenance, and installation costs

Discussion

Proponents

This proposal is likely to gain support from local businesses, members of Chambers of Commerce, and advertising firms eager for new marketing opportunities. City departments focused on finance and economic development may also back the plan for its potential to generate up to new revenue. If reinvested locally, the program could also appeal to community organizations interested in neighborhood revitalization. Proponents may address critiques of commercial advertising on public street poles by pointing out that Chicago already [operates commercial advertising](#) on bus stops and other public street signage through an existing public-private partnership agreement.

Opponents

At the same time, some aldermen, residents, and urban planning advocates may oppose the change due to concerns over visual clutter, especially in residential or historic areas. Chambers of Commerce with existing street pole advertising initiatives may oppose the City-administered advertising opportunity, with the potential for a loss of revenue for their own operations. Further, nonprofits and civic groups may fear being edged out of valuable banner space, and certain civic groups or City officials may oppose the use of public street poles of commercial advertising.

Concluding commentary

Addressing concerns related to public infrastructure used to promote commercial interests can be mitigated through clear regulations, transparent decision making on pole allocation, and equitable access to all businesses. While relatively simple to implement, using existing City property, further evaluation and stakeholder input would be necessary to assess the feasibility, public response, and long-term implications of this proposal.

Deliberative and Predecisional