

# UC San Diego's i4X and City of Carlsbad Storefront Improvement Program Proposal

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## Problem Statement and Scope

This initiative will involve researching past city programs and best practices to design an effective program that offers financial support to small businesses for aesthetic enhancements, aligns with Carlsbad's community values and existing ordinances, and contributes to the city's long-term economic and community development objectives.

Developing the SIP required research into past programs, a clear understanding of Carlsbad's current financial situation, and thoughtful program design that aligned with both the city's strategic goals and its legal framework. This ensured that the SIP was not only viable but that it contributed to the city's long-term economic and community development objectives. Key outcomes included: Comprehensive Research, Financial Assessment, Program Design Framework, Policy Recommendations, Program Funding Strategy, Stakeholder Engagement Plan, Implementation Roadmap, and an Impact Evaluation Framework. By delivering on these key components, the City of Carlsbad will have a solid foundation to launch the Storefront Improvement Program, ensuring it is well-researched, financially viable, and aligned with the city's long-term strategic and economic goals.

## Methodologies

### 1. Document Analysis

Review of official websites and public documents, with the goal of creating a general understanding of the Storefront Improvement Programs that exist in the cities.

The units of analysis were 12 cities in the State of California: Mountain View, Santa Cruz, Santa Monica, Carson, National City, La Mesa, San Francisco, Long Beach, Vista, Anaheim, Vista, El Cajon, and Escondido. In the first part of the analysis, eight areas of analysis were established to study the programs in each city: Program Overview, Eligibility and Program Requirements, Program Types, Program Procedures, Administration, Challenges, Success Strategies, and Takeaways. A collaborative document was created by the team members to compile all the information from the cities. Once this general framework was in place, the study moved on to the second stage of the qualitative study.

### 2. City Department Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with staff from the planning departments of each city, which allowed for direct perspectives on the implementation and functioning of the programs.

This part consisted of conducting interviews with all the economic development and planning departments of the cities via Zoom, each lasting 40–50 minutes. The interviewers were the student participants in the program and a member of the City of Carlsbad's planning team. The questions used as a guide for the interviews can be found in "Appendix A" (Interview Guide Questions). The interviews focused on gaining more detailed insight into the structure of the programs. Topics discussed included funding, successful strategies, challenges, and recommendations. Each city was asked to share documents. Notes were taken during each meeting, and a joint document was created to compile all the notes. Based on this research work, the storefront program proposed for Carlsbad began to take shape.

### 3. Field Visit

Visit to City of Carlsbad by student team for useful contextual observations to complement the findings.



## Official Proposal

### Program Structure

The City of Carlsbad Storefront Improvement Program is a comprehensive program that provides monetary support for signage, facade, design, safety, and miscellaneous improvements for the goal of improving the overall appearance of the Carlsbad commercial front.

#### Signage Program

Up to \$5,000 for signage development per business. The total grant amount provided by the city is based on a 1-1 match from the amount provided by the business owner. Carlsbad will assist up to 10 businesses under the signage program.

#### Facade Improvement Program

Up to \$2,000 for facade improvement per business. The total grant amount provided by the city is based on a 1-1 match from the amount provided by the business owner. Note that due to a higher number of additional eligibility criteria for the facade improvement program, (see program criteria) it may be necessary to distribute the allocated amount for other purposes.

## Program Criteria

#### Eligibility

- Small Businesses (25 or fewer employees)
- Located within the City of Carlsbad - (subject to city approval)
- Public right of way (must be visible)
- Valid & Active Business Tax certificate
- No outstanding property taxes, fees, judgments, liens, or felony convictions (past 7 years)
- Obtain written approval from the property owner if the applicant is a tenant
- Priority for new businesses (subject to city approval)

#### Fund Uses

- Signage Compliance
  - New signage
  - Sign removal
  - Sign repair/replacement
  - Lighting/illumination
- Facade Improvements
  - Windows, doors, storefronts, glass, trims, awnings
  - Landscaping, fencing, and patios
  - Painting
  - Tile/other decorations
  - Safety Measures
  - Murals/artwork
  - Restoration of historical architectural features

#### Fees

- Misc. application fees & other permitting fees (subject to city discretion)
- Design services
- Permit fees
- Contractor consultation

## Impact Evaluation

To provide a more comprehensive understanding of the SIP's impact, many of these metrics include a comparison between the baseline status and the post-program status. There are three main categories of metrics the SIP should feature: Economic Impact, Social Impact, and Program Statistics.

#### Economic Impact

- Comparing sales revenue for participating businesses before and after the program
- Comparing property value estimates before and after the program
- Ratio of SIP program investment to private investment from small business

#### Social Impact

- Foot traffic analysis
- Photo documentation - "feel good vibes"
- Customer experience surveys

#### Program Statistics

- Total number of applications
- Total number of businesses benefiting from the program
- Timeline for typical applicant through program completion
- Satisfaction of businesses in the program

## Budget Recommendations

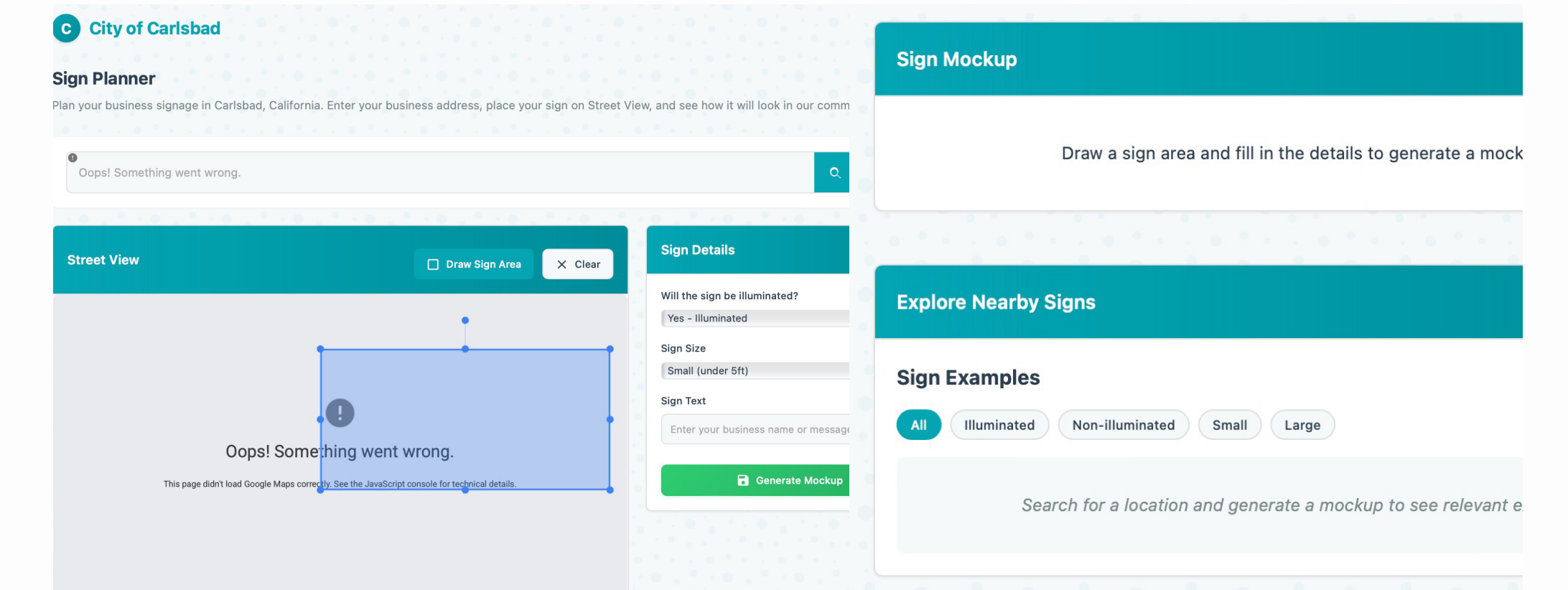
	Allocated Amount	Per Business	Comments
Signage	\$50,000	\$5,000 limit per business = \$10,000 total signage budget	1-1 match Aim to help 10 businesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>\$8,000 for signage with \$2,000 for higher end features</li></ul>
Facade Improvements	\$20,000	\$2,000	1-1 match Not all businesses may utilize this option so may be able to put this money elsewhere or help more businesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Paint, awnings, minor improvements etc.</li></ul>
Design	\$5,000	Around \$500	Design consulting services for code compliance and aesthetic <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Allows government to approve/make changes to designs before application approval</li><li>Cohesiveness throughout community without loss of unique business character</li></ul>
Safety Measures	\$15,000	\$1,500	Anti-Graffiti Paint & Fire Prevention <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>\$15 to \$30 per square foot for sealant</li></ul>
Permit Fees	\$5,000	Around \$500	Covers permit processing fees to fast-track process
Miscellaneous	\$2,500		Marketing, application processing, progress tracking etc.
Total	\$100,000	\$9,500	

## External Components

We identified that one of the key obstacles was the lack of a centralized and an easily understandable system for municipal requirements, such as signage regulations and other business permits. This lack of access to easy-to-understand information difficulties the adaptation process and the success of small businesses. Two key communication tools were designed to strengthen the connection between the city government and the small business community.

#### Website for Information

A prototype website has been conceptualized to serve as a centralized digital hub for small businesses in the City of Carlsbad. The site aims to streamline access to critical information about permits, procedures, and city support services. It allows new entrepreneurs who may be unfamiliar with local regulations to navigate city requirements with greater ease. The platform could potentially integrate artificial intelligence, City of Carlsbad resources, and tools that reduce administrative friction.



#### Signage Rules Brochure

In response to the need for simple and easy-to-understand resources to provide an overview of government requirements and procedures, we designed a brochure that describes the city's general signage regulations. We focus on this specific regulation because during our visit to Carlsbad, small business owners expressed that this procedure was difficult to understand and had complicated the initial phase of establishing themselves in the city. The brochure summarizes the general requirements and key steps, using accessible language and visual elements.

#### General Information

Address signs shall be provided on all buildings.

**Exemptions for signage permit:**  
Signs not requiring a sign permit include:  
address signs, window signs and all other signs as identified in CMC Section 21.41.040.

Link: <https://ecode360.com/#401202844012004>

#### Permitted Signs

The following signs are some of the permitted signs that you can use for your small business:

A-frame sign  
Bike and Street Property  
Address sign  
Awning sign  
Directional sign  
Directory sign  
Gas station sign\*  
Marquee sign  
Monument sign

Neon sign  
with incandescent application  
Plaque sign\*  
Projecting sign  
Restaurant menu sign\*  
Suspended sign  
Wall sign  
Window sign  
Fascia & Pole

#### How to apply for a permit?

- Fill out the City Planner's P-11 Form:**  
Link: <https://www.carlsbadca.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/474/63794342113830000>
- Information needed for application**  
A drawing with design, size, materials, colors (for commercial signs), lighting, and how it's attached.  
A site plan showing exactly where the sign goes on your property.  
A list of other signs already on your property.  
Construction and electrical plans if needed.
- Pay the Sign Permit Fee:**  
Plan review fees may also apply/fees are set by the City Council and vary by sign type.

**Review Process:**  
The City will review your application to ensure your sign follows local codes. Signs that are part of a larger sign program (like in a shopping center) follow a different process.

#### Welcome to Carlsbad!

#### Here's Your Easy Guide to Business Sign Rules

<https://www.carlsbadca.gov/businessresources>

Learn more about this i4X project

