



**PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**

**STAFF REPORT**

**DATE:** April 18, 2018

**TO:** Hearing Officer

**SUBJECT:** Sign Exception # 11880

**LOCATION:** 837 South Fair Oaks Avenue

**APPLICANT:** Huntington Orthopedics Institute

**ZONING DESIGNATION:** IG-SP2 (Industrial General – South Fair Oaks Specific Plan)

**GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION:** Medium Mixed-Use

**CASE PLANNER:** Jennifer Driver

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Adopt the Environmental Determination and the Specific Findings in Attachment A to **approve** Sign Exception #11880 with the conditions in Attachment B.

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**PROJECT PROPOSAL:** Sign Exception: To allow a 48 square-foot wall sign, facing Bellefontaine Street, to locate the sign above the lowest second story window, where wall signs shall be located below the second story window or have a maximum height of 25 feet, whichever is lower. The request also includes locating the sign at the easternmost portion of the tenant space, where wall signs shall otherwise be located within the middle 70% of the tenant space. A Sign Exception is required to deviate from Zoning Code regulations governing height and a Zoning Administrator's approval is required to deviate from the Zoning Code regulations governing the horizontal location of a wall sign.

**ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION:** This project has been determined to be exempt from environmental review pursuant to the guidelines of the

California Environmental Quality Act (Public Resources Code §21080(b)(9); Administrative Code, Title 14, Chapter 3, § 15311 (Class 11, Accessory Structures) and there are no features that distinguish this project from others in the exempt class; therefore, there are no unusual circumstances. This section specifically applies to the construction or replacement of minor structures such as on-premise signs.

**BACKGROUND:**

**Site characteristics:** The site is a rectangular shaped lot measuring approximately 19,318 square feet and is currently developed with a 21,906 square-foot, two-story commercial building. The site has three street frontages: Allesandro Place to the south, South Fair Oaks Avenue to the east and Bellefontaine Street to the north.

**Adjacent Uses:**

- North - Commercial – Medical (Hospital)
- South - Commercial – Medical Office
- East - Commercial – Plant Nursery
- West - Surface parking lot

**Adjacent Zoning:**

- North - PS (Public and Semi-Public)
- South - IG-SP2 (Industrial General – South Fair Oaks Specific Plan)
- East - IG-SP2 (Industrial General – South Fair Oaks Specific Plan)
- West - PD5 (Allesandro Place/Fair Oaks)

**Previous zoning cases on this property:** PLN2018-00061 – Zoning Letter request and approval to allow one wall sign facing Allesandro Place at the easternmost portion of the tenant space, where wall signs shall otherwise be located within the middle 70% of the tenant space. Approved 2/22/2018

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION:**

The subject site is a rectangular shaped lot with approximately 136 feet of street frontage on South Fair Oaks Avenue to the east and 144 feet of street frontage on both Bellefontaine Street and Allesandro Place, to the north and south respectively. The property is developed with a 21,906 square-foot, two-story building occupied by a single medical office tenant, Huntington Orthopedic Institute.

The applicant, Huntington Orthopedic Institute, has submitted a Sign Exception application to allow one 48 square-foot wall sign facing Bellefontaine Street to be installed above the lowest second story window and at the easternmost portion of the building façade. Per Zoning Code Section 17.48.090.D.1 (Table 4-21 — CL, CG, and IG Zoning District Sign Standards), wall signs are permitted to be placed at a maximum height of 25 feet, or below the second story window,

whichever is lower. The proposed wall sign would be installed above the second story window and not in compliance with the height requirement. A Sign Exception is required to allow a wall sign to deviate from an applicable development requirement.

The proposed wall sign facing Bellefontaine Street consists of individual, halo-lit, illuminated, reverse, channel letters with the words "Huntington Orthopedic Institute" and a logo. The sign would be 13'-4 ½" x 3'-7", with a depth of not more than 4.5 inches, for a total area of approximately 48 square feet.

The individual letters would be aluminum faced with white channel LED illumination, backed by clear polycarbonate for the halo light effect, and affixed to the wall with 5-inch metal bolts encased with a 1.5-inch back stud spacer. The face and return would match in color (polyurethane polymers eggshell sheen paint). The logo would be made with 15 individual pieces installed separately. The pieces would also be made out of aluminum with white channel LED illumination. Conduit to electrify the sign would be run on the interior of the building wall, and would not be visible from the street. The proposed sign, as conditioned, would be architecturally and aesthetically compatible with the office building on the subject site and is harmonious with the character of the Specific Plan and general environment.

## **ANALYSIS**

A "wall sign" is defined as a sign that is attached to or painted on the exterior wall of a structure with the display surface of the sign approximately parallel to the building wall. Wall signs are a permitted sign type in the IG-SP2 (Industrial General – South Fair Oaks Specific Plan) zoning district and may be placed at a height or location outside the area permitted under the Zoning Code subject to the review and approval of a Sign Exception or a Zoning Administrator's approval.

The purpose of the City's sign ordinance is to provide standards for signs to safeguard life, health, property, safety, and public welfare, while encouraging compatibility, creativity, variety, and enhancement of the City's visual image and economic activity. The sign standards are designed to provide each sign user an opportunity for effective identification by regulating the number, size, location and height according to standards consistent with each zoning district. However, not all buildings are designed to accommodate the sign standards set forth in the zoning code. In these cases, a Sign Exception may be granted to allow proposed signage to deviate from certain development standards due to unique, historical, and/or architectural features associated with existing buildings. A Sign Exception is a form of a Minor Variance, which allows the deviation from the specific sign standards. A Sign Exception may be approved provided all required findings identified in Attachment A of this report are met.

In addition, per Zoning Code Section 17.48.090.H.5, wall signs shall be located within the middle 70 percent of the building or occupancy's frontage measured from lease line to lease line. Per Section 17.48.110.H.5, the Zoning Administrator may allow for a sign to deviate from the "middle 70%" location requirement where it can be clearly demonstrated that conforming severely limits proper sign placement. As analyzed in the "Location Requirement" section further below in this report, the Zoning Administrator recommends that the location requirement be modified and be included as part of the approval of the Sign Exception.

With the exception of the requested Sign Exception, and the location requirement within the middle 70 percent, the proposed wall sign facing Bellefontaine Street complies with the remainder of the applicable standards contained in Section 17.48.110.H (Wall Signs). Such standards

include, but are not limited to: (1) being located on a secondary building frontage facing Bellefontaine Street; (2) not extending above an eave or parapet; (3) being comprised of individual channel letters that are externally illuminated; (4) having no exposed raceways; (5) not projecting more than 12 inches from the wall; (6) not blocking any windows or architectural features; and, (7) not exceeding 200 square feet (1.5 square feet per foot of a building with a 133-foot building frontage).

In addition, the proposed wall sign complies with the illumination requirements in Section 17.48.100.D that apply to all signage: (1) signs shall not have exposed fluorescent tubes or incandescent bulbs exceeding 15 watts, and the brightness of luminous or backlighted signs shall not exceed 250 foot lamberts; and, (2) signs with electrical components shall be constructed, inspected, and approved by the Underwriters Laboratory (UL), or equal, and a label of approval from the laboratory shall be affixed to the sign in plain view.

*Sign Exception – To allow a Business Identification Wall Sign to be placed above the second story window at a height of 21'-10", where the maximum permitted height for a wall sign is 25 feet or below the bottom of the second story window, whichever is lower.*

Huntington Orthopedic Institute is the only tenant that occupies the two-story building. Three of the building's facades face public streets, each of which are permitted a wall sign (signs for the two other facades have already been granted approvals). The façade facing Allesandro Place is approximately 23 feet tall and is a 58-foot long, blank wall with zero windows. Through PLN2018-00061, a Zoning Administrator's Approval was granted to allow for a 48 square-foot wall sign at a location outside the middle 70-percent of the building façade at the same height and east/west location as the proposed sign—essentially, it mirrors the location of the proposed sign on Bellefontaine Street. The façade facing Fair Oaks Avenue, the most differentiated façade, has a composite face of a blank wall, a vertical tower element and then a row of windows on the second floor. Permit BMN2017-01614 has been issued for a 48 square-foot wall sign that complies with the Pasadena Zoning Code height and location requirements on the central vertical tower element.

The subject façade facing Bellefontaine Street is also 23 feet tall and is a 133-foot blank wall with windows only on the second floor. The tenant wishes to place an approximately 48 square-foot wall sign on this façade mirroring the sign on the Allesandro Place frontage, but at a location not permitted by the Zoning Code because of the location of the windows. The subject sign facing Bellefontaine Street is a new 3'-7" tall business identification wall sign for Huntington Orthopedic Institute that would be positioned above the second story windows, the top of which would be no more than 21'-10" from the ground and the bottom of which would be approximately 18'-3" above sidewalk grade. The proposed sign would be located at the eastern end of the Bellefontaine Street frontage. The wall sign would be visible to commuters and pedestrians traveling south along Fair Oaks Avenue, and East and West on Bellefontaine Street.

Per the Zoning Code, business identification wall signs are permitted to be placed at a maximum height of 25 feet or below the second story window, whichever is lower. The subject two-story building has windows facing Fair Oaks and Bellefontaine Street, but not facing Allesandro Place. In this case, the bottom of the second story window facing Bellefontaine Street is approximately 13'-3" above existing grade from the ground floor. Strict adherence with the requirements for a wall sign would limit the height of the sign to only 13'-3" and would greatly limit the visibility of the sign to those driving on Fair Oaks Avenue. The proposed location on the wall, above the second story window, places the sign at a location that would be visible to patrons or members of the

proposed business, and allow for a more appropriate sign size. Furthermore, if the Bellefontaine Street façade did not have windows like on the parallel façade on Allesandro Place, the proposed height would be permitted. As a result, permitting the sign above the second story windows would be both aesthetically compatible with the other signs on the building and would promote visibility to patrons.

*Zoning Administrator's Approval, Location Requirement – To allow a Business Identification Wall Sign to be located outside of the middle 70 percent of the building façade, where the sign would otherwise be required to be located.*

Pursuant to Pasadena Zoning Code Section 17.48.110.H.5 (Standards for Specific Types of Permanent Signs – Wall Signs) wall signs shall be located within the middle 70-percent of the building or occupancy's frontage measured from lease line to lease line. The Zoning Administrator may allow for a sign to deviate from the “middle 70%” location requirement where it can be clearly demonstrated that conforming severely limits proper sign placement. The subject wall sign is proposed outside this middle 70-percent area at the easternmost edge of the building that is more readily visible to vehicles traveling south on South Fair Oaks Avenue and in either direction on Bellefontaine Street. Alternative locations on the frontage are limited due to the placement of Ficus street trees that partially cover the face of the building within the middle 70-percent of the frontage and due to abutting structures that block the view from the street.

In this case, staff finds that the proposed location is the most optimal, as the sign would be located at the eastern edge of the northern frontage of the building in an effort to be readily visible to drivers and pedestrians approaching the building from the north on Fair Oaks Avenue, and west and east on Bellefontaine Street. In addition, the proposed location is situated in such a way as to be complimentary to the architecture and the other signs on the primary (Fair Oaks Avenue) and other secondary (Allesandro Place) frontages.

As such, placement within the middle 70 percent of the subject building frontage limits proper sign placement and the visibility of the sign from the street. Therefore, the Zoning Administrator recommends that the location requirement be modified and that the request be included as part of the approval of the Sign Exception.

#### **GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY:**

The proposed Sign Exception is in conformance with the goals, policies, and objectives of the General Plan, the purpose and intent of the South Fair Oaks Specific Plan, and the purposes of this Zoning Code and would not constitute a grant of special privilege inconsistent with the limitations on other properties in the vicinity and the same zoning district in that the intent of the Sign Ordinance is to maintain and enhance the quality of a sign in the City, which this sign accomplishes.

Granting the Sign Exception would be consistent with several General Plan Land Use Element Goals and Policies that focus on creating a cohesive design of buildings (Policy: 4.11 – Development that is Compatible) as well as Land Use Element Policies that focus on the fostering of economic vitality within the City (Policies: 11.1 – Business Expansion and Growth and 37.2 – Medical Supporting Uses) by encouraging targeted development of medical businesses and uses in an aesthetically compatible manner to promote Pasadena as a center of such activities in our region.

**ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:**

This project has been determined to be exempt from environmental review pursuant to the guidelines of the California Environmental Quality Act (Public Resources Code §21080(b)(9); Administrative Code, Title 14, Chapter 3, §15311, Class 11, Accessory Structures) and there are no features that distinguish this project from others in the exempt class; therefore, there are no unusual circumstances. This section specifically applies to the construction or replacement of minor structures such as on-premise signs.

**COMMENTS FROM OTHER DEPARTMENTS:**

This Sign Exception application has been reviewed by the Design and Historic Preservation Division of the Department of Planning and Community Development, as well as the Public Works and Transportation Departments. There were no concerns expressed. The sign would be subject to the City's plan check process where it would be required to be designed and installed in compliance with building and safety code requirements.

**CONCLUSION:**

The proposed Sign Exception would permit the placement of a wall sign at a location higher than allowed and outside the middle 70-percent of the building façade. In consideration of the context of signage in the IG-SP2 zoning district, staff is recommending conditions of approval, which would ensure that the sign is compatible with other signage within the South Fair Oaks Specific Plan area. Therefore, staff recommends that the Hearing Officer approve the application with the findings in Attachment A and the Conditions of Approval in Attachment B.

Attachments:

Attachment A: Specific Findings for Approval

Attachment B: Conditions of Approval

**ATTACHMENT A**  
**FINDINGS FOR SIGN EXCEPTION #11880**

Sign Exception - To allow a Business Identification Wall Sign to be placed above the second story windows, where the maximum permitted height for a wall sign is 25 feet or below the bottom of the second story window, whichever is lower.

1. *The proposed sign is architecturally and aesthetically compatible with the major structures on the subject site and the adjacent sites and is compatible with the character of the established neighborhood and general environment.* Approval of the Sign Exception will allow the sign to be located at a position that is more visible to patrons or members of the proposed business, and it will allow for a more appropriate sign size. The medical building on the property is a two-story commercial office building with a vernacular style that fits modestly into its environment without attracting attention. The proposed sign will be the only sign for the business facing Bellefontaine Street. This is a case where a prominent, attractive sign will enhance the character of the building and promote economic activity. Strict adherence with the requirements for the wall sign would limit the vertical height of the sign to only 13'-3" and would greatly limit the visibility of the sign to both pedestrians and vehicular traffic. The design of the building provides a logical area for the sign above the second-floor windows on the north elevation, whereas locating the sign below the windows would be disjointed from the overall design. Thus, it is an aesthetic improvement to locate the sign above the windows, and it will enhance the readability of the sign with an appropriate location and size.

In addition, the South Fair Oaks Specific Plan specifically recommends this type of channel letter signage. The proposed sign is comprised of individual channel letters that are internally illuminated with opaque faces that give a halo effect at night. Two other similar signs are proposed on the building and meet the Zoning Code. A sign on the southern elevation is placed at the same location as the one proposed for the northerly elevation. The only difference is that they northerly elevation happens to have a set of second floor windows that are not found on the mirrored location of the southerly elevation. The proposed location will be most compatible with the other two signs that are installed and permitted by the Zoning Code.

2. *Granting the application is in conformance with the goals, policies, and objectives of the General Plan and the purpose and intent of any applicable specific plan, and the purposes of this Zoning Code and would not constitute a grant of special privilege inconsistent with the limitations on other properties in the vicinity and the same zoning district.* The proposed sign both meets the objectives of the General and Specific Plans to maintain and enhance the quality of signs in the City and would also not result in the granting of a special privilege to the tenant because the neighborhood has a number of wall signs that depart from the height limit requirement. When the Zoning Code is strictly applied in placing the wall sign at 25 feet or below the second floor window, whichever is lower, the location would be impractical, as it would result in a wall sign in a location incompatible with the building design. Granting the Sign Exception would allow the proposed wall sign to be placed on the building in a visible location for patrons traveling south on Fair Oaks Avenue.

The approval is also in line with the General and Specific Plans Goals and Policies as follows:

*General Plan: Land Use Element*

Granting the Sign Exception would be consistent with several General Plan Land Use Element Goals that focus on creating a cohesive design of buildings (Goal 4 – Elements Contributing to Urban Form) as well as Land Use Element Goals that focus on the fostering of economic vitality within the City (Goal 11 – Job Opportunities and Goal 37 – South Fair Oaks Avenue) by encouraging targeted development of medical businesses and uses in an aesthetically compatible manner to promote Pasadena as a center of such activities in our region. The pertinent Goals are as follows:

“Goal 4 – Elements Contributing to Urban Form:

A safe, well-designed, accessible City with a diversity of uses and forms. These diverse forms include distinct, walkable districts, corridors, and transit and neighborhood villages and cohesive, unique single and multi-family residential neighborhoods and open spaces where people of all ages can live, work, shop and recreate.

Goal 11 – Job Opportunities:

Provide land use capacities that accommodate a diversity of job opportunities for Pasadena’s residents.

Goal 37 – South Fair Oaks Avenue:

Concentration of mixed-use development adjoining the Fillmore Metro Gold Line station; expanded housing opportunities for seniors, students, or employees of the major institutions; and redevelopment of underutilized industrial areas for new businesses and job-generating uses leveraged by the medical and creative office uses.”

The approval would be consistent with the following Land Use Element Policy that encourages complimentary design of buildings, including the reuse of existing buildings for burgeoning businesses and the installation of harmonious business identification signage:

“Policy 4.11 – Development that is Compatible:

Require that development demonstrates a contextual relationship with neighboring structures and sites addressing such elements as building scale, massing, orientation, setbacks, buffering, the arrangement of shared and private open spaces, visibility, privacy, automobile and truck access, impacts of noise and lighting, landscape quality, infrastructure, and aesthetics.”

The approval would allow this medical use to develop a sign that is appropriate to the unique characteristics of this building and to encourage a graphic identity on a building for both vehicular and pedestrian oriented signs.

In addition, the approval would satisfy several policy aims that are conducive to furthering economic growth and job opportunities within the City, such as:



“Policy 11.1 – Business Expansion and Growth:

Support the growth and success of businesses that create new job opportunities and productive and satisfying employment for Pasadena residents; and,

Policy 37.2 – Medical Supporting Uses:

Capitalize on the Huntington Memorial Hospital through opportunities for new and expanded medical facilities, medically-oriented businesses and increased housing so that hospital employees are able to live close to jobs.”

The approval would support a strong, healthy business community in order to provide jobs for Pasadena residents, and a broad revenue base for the City. In addition, by encouraging targeted development of cultural, scientific, educational, entertainment and, in this case, medical businesses, it promotes Pasadena as a center of such activities in our region.

Because of the approval, a better designed sign will be installed and will bring attention to the City’s businesses, which brings jobs to the community and increased tax revenues to the City.

*South Fair Oaks Specific Plan*

In addition, the third Goal of the South Fair Oaks Specific Plan is to “support the retention and enhancement of local businesses.” This Sign Exception supports the expansion of a local medical establishment that has been in Pasadena for over 40 years. This expansion will bring more jobs to the economy. Further, the Specific Plan states, “it is the express intent of the Specific Plan to allow existing business to continue to operate and expand consistent with the Pasadena Municipal Code.”

The proposal also furthers Goal four of the Specific Plan, “mitigate related traffic impacts in the Specific Plan area in adjacent residential neighborhoods” by making it easier for motorists to realize they have reached their destination and safely make the right turn at Bellefontaine Street (north of the project site) in order to reach the building’s parking lot.

In regards to the second part of the required finding, approval of the Sign Exception will not constitute a grant of special privilege inconsistent with the limitation on other properties in the vicinity and the same zoning district as the neighborhood already has a number of signs that are above the second floor windows on the buildings. For example, the Shriners’ building immediately to the south of the project site has two logo signs at the northwest corner of the building that are higher than permitted. In addition, just two blocks to the north, the Huntington Pavilion building, which has similar medical uses, has signs that are above the second floor windows.

3. *Granting the application would not be detrimental or injurious to property or improvements in the vicinity of the subject site, or to the public health, safety, or general welfare.* The Sign Exception application has been reviewed by the Design and Building Divisions of the Department of Planning and Community Development, Public Works, Fire, and Transportation Departments. There were no concerns expressed regarding the safety of the sign. The sign will be subject to the City’s plan check process where it will be required to be designed and installed in compliance with building and safety code requirements.

In addition, because the second floor projects closer to the street than the first floor, the higher location allows the sign to be closer to the street, which makes it easier for patients to see the sign and react safely to their arrival at the building and turn right at Bellefontaine Street to access the parking lot. Thus, the proposed location promotes the general welfare by allowing people to make a safe right turn to reach the parking for the site after seeing the wall sign.

**ATTACHMENT B**  
**CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL FOR SIGN EXCEPTION #11880**

The applicant or successor in interest shall meet the following conditions:

General

1. The site plan and elevations submitted for building permits shall substantially conform to the plans submitted with this application labeled "Received at Hearing April 18, 2018," except as modified herein.
2. The applicant or successor in interest shall meet the applicable code requirements of all other City Departments. The applicant shall submit building plans for approval prior to the installation of the sign
3. The Decision Letter and Conditions of Approval shall be incorporated into the submitted building plans as part of the Plan Check process.
4. This approval is for a Sign Exception to allow a proposed wall sign to exceed the maximum wall sign height and location requirements. The wall sign shall have a maximum sign height of 21'-10" to the top of the sign, as measured from existing grade, and shall be at the eastern edge of the building facade outside the middle 70-percent of the building façade where the sign would otherwise be required to be located.
5. The proposed project, Activity Number **PLN2017-00623**, is subject to a Final Zoning Inspection. The Final Zoning Inspection is required for the project prior to the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy. Contact Jennifer Driver at [jdriver@cityofpasadena.net](mailto:jdriver@cityofpasadena.net) or (626) 744-6756 to schedule an inspection appointment time.
6. In accordance with Section 17.64.040 of the Pasadena Municipal Code, the exercise of the right granted under this application must be commenced within three years (April 23, 2018) of the effective date of the approval. This approval is eligible for two one-year extensions. Each one year extension is required to be reviewed and approved by the Hearing Officer at a noticed public hearing. In order for a project to be eligible for a time extension, the applicant is required to submit the required fee and time extension application to the Permit Center prior to the expiration date of the land use entitlement. The right granted by this approval may be revoked if the entitlement is exercised contrary to the conditions of approval or if it is exercised in violation of the Zoning Code.

Planning

7. Any future alterations to the signage that is not part of this Sign Exception shall be subject to the review and approval of the Zoning Administrator.
8. The wall sign shall not exceed 48 square-feet, 13'-4 ½" x 3'-7", with a depth of not more than 4 ½".
9. The sign height shall not exceed 21'-10".