



PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

STAFF REPORT

DATE: October 17, 2018

TO: Hearing Officer

SUBJECT: Sign Exception #11894

LOCATION: 39 Congress Street

APPLICANT: Anthony J. Palazzola, Inc.

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

GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION: Medium Mixed-Use

CASE PLANNER: Jamie Peltier

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Adopt the Environmental Determination and the Specific Findings in Attachment A to **approve** Sign Exception #11894 with the conditions in Attachment B.

PROJECT PROPOSAL: Sign Exception: To allow the following applications for three wall signs to exceed the maximum height for a wall sign, as follows:

1. Sign Exception: to allow a wall sign on the east elevation (private driveway) of the building to be placed at a height of approximately 40 feet, where wall signs are permitted to be placed at a maximum height of 25 feet, or below the second story window, whichever is lower;
2. Sign Exception: to allow a wall sign on the south elevation (Congress Street) of the building to be placed at a height of approximately 40 feet, where wall signs are permitted to be placed at a maximum height of 25 feet, or below the second story window, whichever is lower; and

3. Sign Exception: to allow a wall sign on the west elevation (Fairmount Avenue) of the building to be placed at a height of approximately 40 feet, where wall signs are permitted to be placed at a maximum height of 25 feet, or below the second story window, whichever is lower.

A Sign Exception is required for a sign that deviates from the maximum allowable height. The request also includes locating the east and west side wall signs at the southernmost edge of the building, where wall signs shall otherwise be located within the middle 70% of the building. 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 onsite signs.

BACKGROUND

Site characteristics:

The subject property is located on the north side of Congress Street (private street) between Fairmount Avenue (private street) and South Fair Oaks Avenue. The 23,257-square-foot property is irregular in shape and generally flat in topography. The site is currently improved with an existing three-story, 17,500-square-foot, medical office building with 70 on-site parking spaces. A 17,105-square-foot addition is under construction, which when complete, will add a fourth floor to the building and result in 78 on-site parking spaces. The building is occupied entirely by Huntington Orthopedic Institute. The site is surrounded by other medical facilities and the Huntington Memorial Hospital.

Adjacent Uses:

North – Huntington Pavilion Medical Building Parking
South – Huntington Memorial Hospital Parking
East – Huntington Pavilion Medical Building
West – Huntington Memorial Hospital Campus

Adjacent Zoning:

North – IG-SP-2 (Industry General, South Fair Oaks Specific Plan Overlay)

- South – PS (Public and Semi-Public) / Huntington Memorial Hospital Masterplan
- East – IG-SP-2 (Industry General, South Fair Oaks Specific Plan Overlay)
- West – PS (Public and Semi-Public) / Huntington Memorial Hospital Masterplan

Previous zoning cases on this property:

Conditional Use Permit #6560: To establish a Medical Services-Hospitals land use within a 2,650-square-foot portion of a 34,605-square-foot, four-story medical office building that is currently under construction. Also included a Minor Conditional Use Permit to reduce the parking requirement with a parking study, and a Minor Change To Minor Conditional Use Permit #6376 to allow a 675-square-foot, fourth-floor addition (35,280 gross square feet proposed overall) to extend to a height of 55 feet, where the maximum permitted is 45 feet. Approved October 7, 2017.

Minor Conditional Use Permit #6376: To allow a 17,105-square-foot, four-story addition to an existing three-story, 17,500-square-foot medical office building. Also included a Minor Conditional Use Permit to reduce the required number of parking spaces with a parking study, and a Variance to allow the addition to reach a height of 55 feet, where the maximum permitted was 45 feet. Approved March 16, 2016.

Tentative Parcel Map #15306: To consolidate two lots into one lot to facilitate the construction of a medical office building. Approved September 22, 1982.

Variance #10065: Construction of a three-story, 17,500 square-foot, medical office building. Approved April 21, 1982.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The applicant, Anthony J. Palazzola, Inc., has submitted a Sign Exception application on behalf of Huntington Orthopedic Institute to allow for three 48 square-foot wall signs to be installed above the lowest second story windows. The signs would be located on the east elevation of the building fronting an on-site private driveway, on the south elevation fronting Congress Street, and on the west elevation fronting Fairmount Avenue. 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 signs would be installed above second story windows and a Sign Exception is required to allow a wall sign to deviate from an applicable development requirement.

The proposed wall sign specifications are the same for the three signs consisting of individual, halo-lit, illuminated, reverse, channel letters with the words “Huntington Orthopedic Institute” and

a logo. Each sign would be 13'4" x 3'7", with a depth of not more than 4.5 inches, for a sign 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 signs, as conditioned, would be architecturally and aesthetically compatible with the office building on the subject site, is harmonious with the character of the Specific Plan, and consistent with the general surroundings.

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. The two signs located on the sides of the building facing Fairmont Avenue and the private driveway are placed at the edges of each sidewall closest to Congress Street. 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 Exceptions for height and the location requirement within the middle 70 percent for two of the signs, the proposed wall signs comply 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) Not exceeding the maximum number of signs of two signs per ground floor occupancy per frontage;
- (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 the sign area (1.5 square feet per foot of a building per primary or secondary building frontage).

Additionally, the proposed wall signs comply with the illumination requirements in Section 17.48.100.D that apply to all signage.

Sign Exception – To allow Business Identification Wall Signs to be placed above the second story window at a height of 40 feet, where the maximum permitted height for a wall sign is 25 feet or below the bottom of the second story window, whichever is lower.

Pursuant to Zoning Code Section 17.48.090.D.1, wall signs are permitted on building elevations that have frontages that abut a street, alley, driveway, parking area, or pedestrian plaza, courtyard, or arcade on the same site. Each building shall have one elevation designated as the primary building frontage and remaining elevations are designated secondary building frontages. In addition, wall signs are permitted to be placed at a maximum height of 25 feet or below the second story window, whichever is lower.

Huntington Orthopedic Institute is the only tenant that occupies the approximately 41-foot tall, three-story building. The building has two building elevations that have frontages that abut a street (Congress Street and Fairmount Avenue), and a third building elevation that has frontage that abuts a private driveway. Congress Street is the designated primary building frontage and the remaining elevations would be designated secondary building frontages. Each elevation would have a wall sign placed at a height of 40 feet. The height of the signs would be above second story windows and exceed the maximum height of 25 feet and would not be in compliance with the height requirement.

The primary building façade abutting Congress Street has a linear length of 50 feet with windows expanding the entire length on all three floors. The first floor contains a driveway access to the parking garage and the entry to the lobby from the sidewalk. The applicant proposes to place the wall sign on the uppermost area of this façade, with a height of 40 feet, for optimal visibility from the front entry for vehicles and pedestrians.

The building façade abutting Fairmount Avenue has a linear length of 156 feet with windows expanding the entire length on all three floors. The second sign would be positioned above the third floor windows, with an overall height of approximately 40 feet from the ground. The proposed sign would be located at the southernmost end of the west elevation facing Fairmount Avenue. The wall sign would be visible to commuters and pedestrians traveling north and south on Fairmount Avenue and east on Congress Street.

The building façade abutting the private driveway has a linear length of 131 feet. On this side of the structure, the wall is blank, with no window openings, for approximately 45 feet of the southernmost end of this elevation; windows on all three floors are provided thereafter. The proposed sign would be located at the southernmost end of the east elevation facing the private driveway. The sign would be positioned above the third floor windows, the top of which would be approximately 40 feet from the ground. This elevation provides ground floor entry to the

subterranean garage. The entry is provided with an architectural wing projection that would block visibility of the sign, if the sign were proposed below the second story windows. As proposed, the wall sign would be visible to commuters and pedestrians traveling on Fair Oaks Avenue and west on Congress Street.

Strict adherence with the wall sign requirements would limit the height of the signs to be placed below the second story windows, and below a height of 25 feet. The proposed locations on the walls, above the second story window, places the signs at a location that would be visible to patrons and members of the proposed business, and allow for more appropriate sign locations. In addition, permitting the signs above the second story windows would be both aesthetically compatible with the building dimensions and would promote visibility to vehicle and pedestrian traffic, as the building is modest in size compared to the surrounding taller buildings.

Zoning Administrator's Approval, Location Requirement – To allow two Business Identification Wall Signs to be located outside of the middle 70 percent of the building façade, where the signs 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. Two of the subject wall signs, on the east and west elevation, are proposed outside this middle 70-percent area at the southernmost edges of their respective elevation. Strict adherence with the location requirement would limit the location of the sign to the "middle 70%" of the east and west elevations and would limit views of the signs due to adjacent multi-story structures that would block views from surrounding streets. The proposed sign placement would allow the signs to be more readily visible to vehicles traveling on Fair Oaks Avenue and in either direction on Congress Street.

In this case, staff finds that the proposed location is the most optimal, as the signs would be located at the southern edges of the east and west elevations of the building in an effort to be readily visible to drivers and pedestrians approaching the building from Fair Oaks Avenue, and Congress Street. As such, placement within the middle 70 percent of the subject building limits proper sign placement and the visibility of the sign from the streets. 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 Exceptions are 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. The proposed signs 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 these signs accomplish. Granting the Sign Exceptions would be consistent with General Plan Land Use Element Policy: 4.11 (Development that is Compatible) and Policy 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 the 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 onsite signs.

COMMENTS FROM OTHER DEPARTMENTS:

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

CONCLUSION:

The proposed Sign Exceptions would permit the placement of three wall signs at a location higher than allowed and outside the middle 70-percent of the building façades. 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 #11894

Sign Exception - To allow a Business Identification Wall Sign on the south elevation (Congress Street) of the building with a height of 40 feet, 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 of the business from multiple streets. The medical building on the property is a three-story commercial office building with a style that fits modestly into its built environment. The proposed sign will be the one sign for the business facing Congress 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 below the second story window and would greatly limit the visibility of the sign to both pedestrian and vehicular traffic. The design of the building provides a logical area for the sign above the third-floor windows on the south elevation, whereas locating the sign below the second story 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.

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 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. The proposed sign 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 General Plan Land Use Element Policy: 4.11 (Development that is Compatible) and Policy 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 the region.

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 Building Division, Public Works Department, and Department of Transportation. 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.

Sign Exception - To allow a Business Identification Wall Sign on the east elevation (driveway) of the building with a height of 40 feet, 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 of the business from Congress Street, but also Fair Oaks Avenue, which is the main thoroughfare through the medical use corridor. The medical building on the property is a three-story commercial office building with a style that fits modestly into its environment. The proposed sign will be the one sign for the business facing the driveway. Strict adherence with the requirements for the wall sign would limit the vertical height of the sign to below the second story window and would greatly limit the visibility of the sign to both pedestrian and vehicular traffic. The proposed location will promote visibility from vehicular activity from Fair Oaks Avenue and will enhance the character of the building to promote economic activity. If the sign were to be located with strict adherence to the height requirements, it would not be visible from the surrounding streets due to the sign being blocked by the architectural projection extending over the garage entry. The proposed location is an aesthetic improvement, as it will enhance the readability of the sign at an appropriate height, location, and size.
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 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. The proposed sign 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 General Plan Land Use Element Policy: 4.11 (Development that is Compatible) and Policy 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 the region.
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 Building Division, Public Works Department, and Department of Transportation. 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.

Sign Exception - To allow a Business Identification Wall Sign on the west elevation (Fairmount Avenue) of the building with a height of 40 feet, 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 of the business at different street perspectives. The proposed sign will be the one sign for the business facing Fairmount Avenue. Strict adherence with the requirements for the wall sign would limit the vertical height of the sign to 25 feet. The proposed location increases the visibility of the sign to both pedestrian and vehicular traffic from travelers moving east on Congress Street and north and south on Fairmount Avenue. The design of the building provides a logical area for the sign above the third-floor windows on the west elevation, whereas locating the sign below the second story windows would be disjointed from the overall design. The proposed location is an aesthetic improvement, as it will enhance the readability of the sign at an appropriate height, location, and size.
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 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. The proposed sign 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 General Plan Land Use Element Policy: 4.11 (Development that is Compatible) and Policy 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 the region.
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 Building Division, Public Works Department, and Department of Transportation. 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.

ATTACHMENT B
CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL FOR SIGN EXCEPTION #11894

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 "Approved at Hearing October 17, 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 the proposed wall signs to exceed the maximum wall sign height and location requirements. The wall signs shall have a maximum sign height of 40 feet to the top of the sign, as measured from existing grade, as depicted in the approved plans. The signs on the east and west elevations (secondary frontages) will be located at the southernmost edge of their respective elevation and outside the middle 70-percent of the building façade, as depicted in the approved plans.
5. The proposed project, Activity Number **PLN2018-00379**, 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 Jamie Peltier at jpeltier@cityofpasadena.net or (626) 744-7096 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 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 require the modification of this Sign Exception or a new Sign Exception.
8. The wall signs shall not exceed 48 square-feet, 13'-4 ½" x 3'-7", with a depth of not more than 4 ½" from the building.
9. The sign heights shall not exceed 40 feet to the top of the signs.