



**PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**

**STAFF REPORT**

**DATE:** June 3, 2020

**TO:** Hearing Officer

**SUBJECT:** Sign Exception #11923

**LOCATION:** 60 W. Bellevue Drive

**APPLICANT:** Alex Weber of Nott & Associates Inc. on behalf of *IdeAttack*

**ZONING DESIGNATION:** CD-6 (Central District Specific Plan, Arroyo Corridor/Fair Oaks Subdistrict)

**GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION:** R&D Flex Space

**CASE PLANNER:** Katherine Moran

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Adopt the Environmental Determination and Specific Findings in Attachment A to **approve** Sign Exception #11923 with the conditions in Attachment B

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**PROJECT PROPOSAL:** Sign Exception: To allow a wall sign on an existing building to be placed above the second story window where wall signs are permitted to be placed at a maximum height of 25 feet, or below the second story window, whichever is lower.

**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 that there are no features that distinguish this project from others in the exempt class and, 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 site is located on the south side of West Bellevue Drive between Herr Alley and Tenhaeff Alley. The subject site is a rectangular 7,136 square-foot lot developed with a 3,702-square-foot, two-story commercial building and ancillary parking lot in front of the building. The building is set back 98.5 feet from West Bellevue Drive.

**Adjacent Uses:**  
North: Public and Semi-Public/Private School  
South: Public and Semi-Public/Schools Specialized Education and Training  
East: Commercial/Office & Service Uses  
West: Public and Semi-Public/Child Day-Care Center

**Adjacent Zoning:**  
North: CD-6 (Central District Specific Plan, Arroyo Corridor/Fair Oaks Subdistrict)  
South: CD-6 (Central District Specific Plan, Arroyo Corridor/Fair Oaks Subdistrict)  
East: CD-6 (Central District Specific Plan, Arroyo Corridor/Fair Oaks Subdistrict)  
West: CD-6 (Central District Specific Plan, Arroyo Corridor/Fair Oaks Subdistrict)

**Previous Cases:** None

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION:**

The applicant, Alex Weber of Nott & Associates Inc, has submitted a Sign Exception application on behalf of IdeAttack to allow for one, 32 square-foot wall sign to be installed above the second story windows on an existing commercial building. The sign would be located on the north elevation fronting West Bellevue Drive. Per Zoning Code Section 17.48.090.C.1 (Table 4-20 - CD 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. Instead of windows at the second story, the subject building has glass doors opening onto a second-story balcony. Therefore, signage shall be required to be placed at a maximum height of 25 feet, or below the second story glass doors, whichever is lower. The proposed wall sign would be installed above the second story glass doors and a Sign Exception is required to allow a wall sign to deviate from an applicable development requirement.

The subject site is a rectangular-shaped lot with approximately 50 feet of street frontage on West Bellevue Drive. The subject site is bounded on the east and west by one- and two-story commercial buildings. The property is developed with a 3,702-square foot, two-story commercial building, that is setback 98.5 feet from the Bellevue Drive public right-of-way, and was constructed in 1986. The second story glass doors and balcony facing the street are located above the pedestrian entryway and enclosed with a stucco guardrail.

The proposed wall sign specifications consists of individual halo-lit, illuminated channel and reverse channel letters spelling the tenant’s name “IdeAttack”. The sign area would be approximately 32 square feet in area through measurement of eight perpendicular lines with letter heights ranging from 25.5 inches (or 2’-1½”) to 40 inches (or 3’-4”), an overall length of 163.5 inches (or 13’-7½”), and maximum depth of four inches.

The IdeAttack sign is primarily comprised of aluminum-faced, black, reverse channel letters except for the acrylic-faced red capital "A" in Attack. All letters would feature white LED internal illumination with clear Lexan backs for a halo effect and would be affixed to the wall with four-inch metal bolts encased with a two-inch back stud spacer. The trim caps and returns would match the color of each respective letter's face (with either red or black paint). Conduit to electrify the sign would be run on the interior of the building wall, and would not be visible from the street.

## **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 CD-6 (Central District Specific Plan, Arroyo Corridor/Fair Oaks Subdistrict) 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.

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.

With the exception of the requested Sign Exception for height, the proposed wall sign 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) 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 of 1.5 square feet per foot of a building per primary or secondary building frontage.
- (8) Located within the middle 70 percent of the building or occupancy's frontage measured from lease line to lease line.

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

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.

*Sign Exception – To allow a Wall Sign above the second story windows*

IdeAttack is the only tenant that occupies the approximately 26-foot tall, two-story building. The building is set back approximately 100 feet from the street and has one designated street frontage which is located on the north elevation along West Bellevue Drive. The proposal consists of one 40-inch high business identification wall sign positioned above glass doors opening to the second-story balcony, which for the zoning code's height restrictions would be considered above the second story windows. The top of the sign would be no more than 24.3 feet from the ground, the bottom of which would be approximately 21 feet from sidewalk grade. The Zoning Code stipulates that all signs shall be located at a maximum height of 25 feet or below the second story windows, whichever is lower. The uppermost height of the second-story glass doors opening to the balcony, as measured from existing grade to the topmost portion of the doors, is approximately 20 feet. Therefore, signage would be required to be located below the glass doors. In order to comply with the height requirement, the sign would be limited to placement either on the balcony's stucco guardrail or on the limited fascia area below it. Placement of the sign on the stucco balcony railing would constrict the overall sign size as it would be limited to the railing's height. Placement on the railing would also limit proper sign placement in terms of visibility, given the building's nearly 100-foot setback from the public right-of-way. Placement of the sign on the fascia below the balcony's guard rail would also constrict the sign height and prevent the business from having prominent business identification. As proposed, the sign would be placed on the uppermost area of the building's façade. The design of the building provides a logical area for the sign above the second-story doors on the north elevation, whereas locating the sign on the balcony railing or on the fascia below the balcony railing, would be disjointed from the overall design. Thus, it is an aesthetic improvement to locate the sign above the second-story doors, and it will enhance the readability of the sign with an appropriate location and size.

**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 Central District 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 (GPLU) Element *Policy 4.11 - Development that is Compatible* and GPLU Element *Policy 11.1 - Business Expansion and Growth*, which support the growth and success of businesses that create new job opportunities and productive and satisfying employment for Pasadena residents.

In addition, the project is also compatible with GPLU Element *Policy 11.3 - New and Complementary Businesses* by encouraging targeted development of new businesses promoting Pasadena as a center of such activities in the region. It would bolster a diverse economy base and would be a long-term economic contribution to the City and CD-6 zoning district which encourages a full range of retail, service, and office uses.

**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.

**REVIEW BY OTHER CITY 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 Design and Historic Preservation Section has provided a comment which is incorporated in Attachment B of this report as recommended conditions of approval. The sign 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 Exception would permit the placement of a wall sign to be located at a height exceeding the maximum allowed requirement. In consideration of the context of signage in the CD-6 zoning district, staff is recommending conditions of approval, which would ensure that the sign is compatible with other signage within the Central District Specific Plan area. The proposed sign, as conditioned, would be architecturally and aesthetically compatible with the existing building on the subject site, is harmonious with the character of the Specific Plan, and consistent with the general surroundings. 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: Recommended Specific Findings
- Attachment B: Recommended Conditions of Approval

**ATTACHMENT A**  
**SPECIFIC FINDINGS FOR SIGN EXCEPTION #11923**

Sign Exception - To allow a Wall Sign above the second story windows

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. The building on the property is a two-story commercial office building that fits modestly into its environment without attracting attention. The proposed sign will be the only business identification sign. The proposed height and prominent location will enhance the character of the building and promote economic activity. Strict adherence with the requirements for the wall sign would limit the sign placement to a height of 13 feet, constrain the size to that of the balcony railing, and would greatly limit the visibility of the sign to both pedestrians and vehicular traffic due to the building's 100-foot setback from the street. The design of the building provides a logical area for the sign above the second-story doors on the north elevation, whereas locating the sign on the balcony railing or on the fascia below the balcony railing, would be disjointed from the overall design. Thus, it is an aesthetic improvement to locate the sign above the second-story doors, 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 Central District 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 (GPLU) Element *Policy 4.11 - Development that is Compatible* and GPLU Element *Policy 11.1 – Business Expansion and Growth*, which supports the growth and success of businesses that create new job opportunities and productive and satisfying employment for Pasadena residents. In addition, the project is also compatible with GPLU Element *Policy 11.3 - New and Complementary Businesses* by encouraging targeted development of new businesses promoting Pasadena as a center of such activities in the region. It would bolster a diverse economy base and would be a long-term economic contribution to the City and CD-6 zoning district, which encourages a full range of retail, service, and office uses.
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 Historic Preservation Division, 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**  
**RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL FOR SIGN EXCEPTION #11923**

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, June 3, 2020," 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 sign to be located above the second-story door. The wall sign shall have a maximum sign height of 24.3 feet to the top of the sign, as measured from existing grade, as depicted in the approved plans.
5. The proposed project, Activity Number **PLN2020-00060**, 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 Katherine Moran at kmoran@cityofpasadena.net or (626) 744-6740 to schedule an inspection appointment time.
6. In accordance with Section 17.64.040 of the Pasadena Municipal Code and in accordance with City Council Resolution No. 9774, the right granted under this application must be enacted within 48 months from the effective date of approval. It shall expire and become void, unless an extension of time is approved in compliance with Section 17.64.040 C 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 sign shall not exceed 32 square-feet, with a depth of not more than four inches from the building.
9. The sign height shall not exceed 24.3 feet to the top of the sign.

Design and Historic Preservation

10. Design review will be required for new signs on the property, whether or not the sign exception is approved (staff-level).