CITY OF PALO ALTO

Architectural Review Board

Staff Report

Agenda Date: **October 17, 2013**

To: **Architectural Review Board**

From: **Elena Lee, Senior Planner** **Department: Planning and Community Environment**

Subject: **3445 Alma Street [13PLN-00421]:** Request by MCG Architecture, on behalf of Alma Trestle LLC, for Architectural Review and a Sign Exception, to allow to the installation of two projecting signs and two wall signs on a 50,500 sq. ft. two-story mixed use building at the Alma Village development. Zone District: PC-4956. Environmental Assessment: Exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental quality Act (CEQA) per CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 (Existing Facilities).

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Architectural Review Board (ARB) recommend approval of the proposed master sign program to the Director of Planning and Community Environment (Director), based upon the ARB Approval Findings in Attachment A and as modified by the conditions of approval in Attachment C.

BACKGROUND

Project Description

The applicant is requesting Architectural Review and Sign Exception approval for two internally illuminated projecting signs for the large mixed use building (Building A) at Alma Village. The application also includes two halo illuminated wall signs that are consistent with the master sign program approved for this site. The applicant is requesting the Sign Exceptions for two projecting signs per July 18, 2013 ARB Subcommittee recommendations regarding the signage. The second blade sign was incorporated into the application in direct response to ARB Subcommittee feedback. The signage would be for the new tenant, Grocery Outlet, who will occupy the first floor of the building, previously occupied by Miki's Market. The site's Planned Community Zoning (PC 4956) requires that the first floor of the mixed use building be occupied by a grocery store. The commercial component of the 4.21 acre site is developed with (1) Building A, the 50,500 square foot two story mixed use building which includes a 17,000 square foot first floor for a grocery store, an 18,200 square foot basement/garage, a 1,757 square foot second floor community room and 14 below market rate rental units on the second floor, (2) Building B, a smaller 5,580 square foot two story retail/office building, and (3) a small park. The residential component of the site is developed with 37 single family residential units at the rear of the site.

Entitlement History
The City Council adopted Planned Community (PC) Ordinance (Ordinance 4956) on May 14, 2007 (effective July 19, 2007) to allow the redevelopment of Alma Plaza into a residential and commercial mixed use project. PC 4956 set forth land use types, commercial floor area, housing density, and number and location of below market rate (BMR) units, public benefits, including an approximately 9,000 sq. ft. park, grocery store and the community living room. A Site and Design Review application and Tentative Map application were approved by the City Council on January 26, 2008, consistent with the PC ordinance.

A master sign program was approved for the site on August 8, 2012 following a hearing by the ARB for Buildings A and B. The sign program specifically included provisions for three wall signs and a sign exception for a fabric blade sign for Building A. The non illuminated fabric blade sign is located on the northwest corner of the Alma Street frontage identifying "Alma Village". A sign exception was required for the 104 square foot fabric blade sign because it exceeded the maximum size allowed by the sign code for projecting signs and extended over both the sidewalk and the top of the building. A subsequent approval was granted on November 8, 2012 following an ARB hearing to allow the "Alma Village" banner to be replaced with a "Miki's Market" banner. However, the second banner was never installed before the business was closed.

DISCUSSION
The Alma Village Master Sign Program was approved to provide design standards for all signage on the subject site to follow and streamline the approval process. Signs that are consistent with the master program would be permitted with a building permit, subject to planning review. Both wall signs are consistent with the master sign program and would be approvable with a building permit. However, they are being included with this application to provide context. A new Sign Permit Exception is required for the two projecting signs because of the increase in the number of projecting signs and changes to the materials and appearance.

Wall Signs
The applicant is proposing to replace existing wall signs on Building A on the east elevation facing the interior parking lot and the south elevation that would be visible to drivers going northbound on Alma Street. The applicant is proposing to remove the wall sign on the Alma Street (west) frontage with no replacement. Sign A is a 47.1 square foot channel letter sign proposed for the east elevation. Sign B is a larger 72.1 square foot channel letter sign that is otherwise identical for the south elevation to ensure better visibility to motorists driving northbound on Alma Street. The channel letters are to be constructed of a three inch deep aluminum letters and spaced one inch from the face of the building to allow the halo illumination with LED lights. Both signs would consist of two parts. The top part of the sign would read "Grocery Outlet" painted in a dark red (#3630-73) and "bargain market" would be placed directly below painted in golden yellow (#3630-125), matching the corporate identity of the market. The signs are illuminated in a way so that they will appear black with a soft glow around the edges as shown on page 1 of the plan set.

The master sign program would allow a variety of sizes for the building. All wall signs are required to be halo illuminated. The table below shows what the sign code permits, the master sign permit allows and what the applicant is proposing for Building A.

	Wall size (sq. ft.)	Sign Code Max. (sq. ft.)	Master Sign Program Max (sq. ft.)	Proposed Sign (sq. ft.)	Conforms
East Elevation	6976	195	151	47.1 (Sign A)	Yes
South Elevation	2937	110	95	72.1 (Sign B)	Yes
West Elevation	6976	195	151	None	N/A

As shown above, both proposed wall signs are consistent with the Alma Village Master Sign Program and the sign code.

Projecting Signs
As discussed above, the application proposes two projecting signs (Signs C and D) that would require sign exceptions. The Sign Code allows projecting signs provided that they meet the following criteria:

Height:
- Shall not exceed a height of twelve (12) feet
- Shall not extend above the top level of the wall upon or in front of which it is placed
- Shall have a minimum clearance of seven (7) feet to the sidewalk below.

Area:
- Shall not exceed three (3) square feet in area

Location:
- Shall not extend over or above any public sidewalk or place unless situated under a covering structure, such as a porch.

Number:
- Shall be only one projecting sign per building face.

A Sign Exception for the existing non-illuminated 104 square foot fabric banner sign was approved previously because it exceeded the maximum size and height and extended above the sidewalk and roof the building. The "Alma Village" banner is a red fabric banner with white letters mounted on the corner by metal brackets. The applicant is now requesting approval to install two projecting signs, both measuring 76 square feet, replacing the existing fabric banner. The signs will be approximately 16 inches deep and extend approximately ten feet above the building. A Sign Exception is required for the two signs because there are two projecting signs proposed for the Alma Street face, both are larger than three square feet in area, are taller than 12 feet in height and extend over the sidewalk and above the building.

The two signs are the same size and similar in appearance. Sign C would be placed where the existing banner sign is located and the Sign D would be placed on the southwest corner of the building in a parallel location. Both signs, to be constructed primarily of a dark red (#3630-73) painted aluminum, would consist of three pieces. The sign would consist of a 66 square foot (2 feet 10 inches by 23 feet 6 inch) long rectangle above and a smaller 10 square foot (2 feet 6 inch

by 4 foot) rectangle below, separated by a thin black painted aluminum reveal. The signs would be secured to the building by four aluminum brackets offset by approximately 14 inches from the wall and trellis. Similar to the existing sign, the new projecting signs would each be 26 feet tall and would extend above the building roof.

The signs differ in their copy. Sign C would include 14 inch tall, one inch thick clear acrylic push through letters in white that read "Grocery Outlet" on the top portion and "bargain market" on the smaller bottom portion in golden yellow. Sign D would function as an identifier for the development. The larger top component of the sign would include letters that read "Alma Village" also with 14 inch tall 1 inch deep push through letters in white. There would not be any copy on the smaller bottom rectangle. The signs are designed with push through letters and will be conditioned so that only the letters are illuminated. Staff believes that the signs are compatible with the building and provide additional interest to the Alma Street elevation. The signs would serve to provide better identification to the center, as well as the business.

Comprehensive Plan

The project design, as conditioned, and project intent are in general conformance with the Comprehensive Plan and supported by Policy L-50. Policy L-50 encourages high quality signage that is attractive, appropriate for the location and balances visibility needs with aesthetic needs. The ARB is requested to weigh in on the balance between the business visibility and aesthetics during discussion of the requested sign exceptions. Policy L-48 promotes high quality, creative design and site planning that is compatible with surrounding development and public spaces.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Pursuant to the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the project is categorically exempt from CEQA, per Section 15301.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A:	ARB Findings
Attachment B:	Conditions of Approval/Sign Exception Findings
Attachment C:	Location Map
Attachment D:	Development Plans (Board Members Only)*

* Prepared by Applicant; all other attachments prepared by Staff

COURTESY COPIES

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ATTACHMENT A
FINDINGS FOR APPROVAL
ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD STANDARDS FOR REVIEW
3445 Alma Street/Alma Village – Grocery Outlet
File No. 13PLN-000421

Architectural Review Findings

The design and architecture of the proposed improvements, **as conditioned**, complies with the Findings for Architectural Review as required in Chapter 18.76 of the PAMC.

(1) The design is consistent and compatible with applicable elements of the Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan. The project is consistent with Policy L-50: Encourage high quality signage that is attractive, appropriate for the location and balances visibility needs with aesthetic needs. The design of the signs, materials, and colors are attractive and appropriate for the buildings and the surrounding area.

(2) The design is compatible with the immediate environment of the site. The design and placement of the signs are consistent with the existing architectural style of the building. The colors and materials have been designed to be compatible with the building.

(3) The design is appropriate to the function of the project, in that the signs provide identification for the business for customers and visitors who are pedestrians or drivers.

(16) The Design is consistent and compatible with the purpose of architectural review as set forth in subsection (a) in that the proposed sign promotes a visual environment which is of high aesthetic quality and variety and which, at the same time, is considerate of others.

Architectural Review findings 4 through 15 are not applicable to the project.

SIGN CODE EXCEPTION
ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD STANDARDS FOR REVIEW
3445 Alma Street/Alma Village – Grocery Outlet
File No. 13PLN-000421

The following findings have been made to support the sign exception request to exceed the maximum signage, as modified by the ARB approval conditions. The specific exception that has been requested is for the following standard:

- To exceed the maximum size of three (3) square feet for projecting signs.
- To allow projecting signs that are more than twelve (12) feet in height
- To allow projecting signs to be extend over a public sidewalk without being placed under a covering.
- To allow more than one projecting sign on a building face

(1) There are exceptional or extraordinary circumstances or conditions applicable to the property involved that do not apply generally to property in the same district in that the mixed use building is located directly adjacent to the public sidewalk along a very busy intersection. The site has been granted a special site specific zoning designation recognizing the uniqueness of the property and its location. This property serves as one of the few neighborhood shopping centers within the City.

(2) The granting of the application is necessary for the preservation and enjoyment of a substantial property right of the applicant and to prevent unreasonable property loss or unnecessary hardships in that the visibility of signage is important for a retail business to be easily identifiable and to attract customers. Because the building is located directly adjacent to the public sidewalk, along a very busy intersection, there is limited visibility for typical signs. The proposed signs have been carefully designed for compatibility with the buildings and were reviewed and found consistent with the Architectural Review findings as required by the Municipal Code.

(3) The granting of the application will not be detrimental or injurious to property or improvements in the vicinity and will not be detrimental to the public health, safety, general welfare or convenience in that the placement and appearance of the projecting signs do not pose safety hazards nor do they detract from the subject building or surrounding properties. The signs will not be detrimental to public health, safety, general welfare or convenience. They will be securely placed in a location that will not provide any conflicts with pedestrians, drivers, occupants, visitors or employees.

ATTACHMENT B
DRAFT CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL
3445 Alma Street/Alma Plaza Projecting Signs
File No. 13PLN-000421

Department of Planning and Community Environment

Planning Division

1. The plans submitted to obtain all permits through the Building Inspection Division shall be in substantial conformance with the revised plans, project details and materials received on October 10, 2013, except as modified to incorporate these conditions of approval.

2. All conditions of approval shall be printed on the cover sheet of the plan set submitted to obtain any permit through the Building Inspection Division.

3. Construction details, colors, materials, and placement of the shopping center signs shall be submitted to the Planning Division for review prior to submittal of the building permit.

4. Wall signs shall consist of halo illuminated channel letters, except for logo signs.

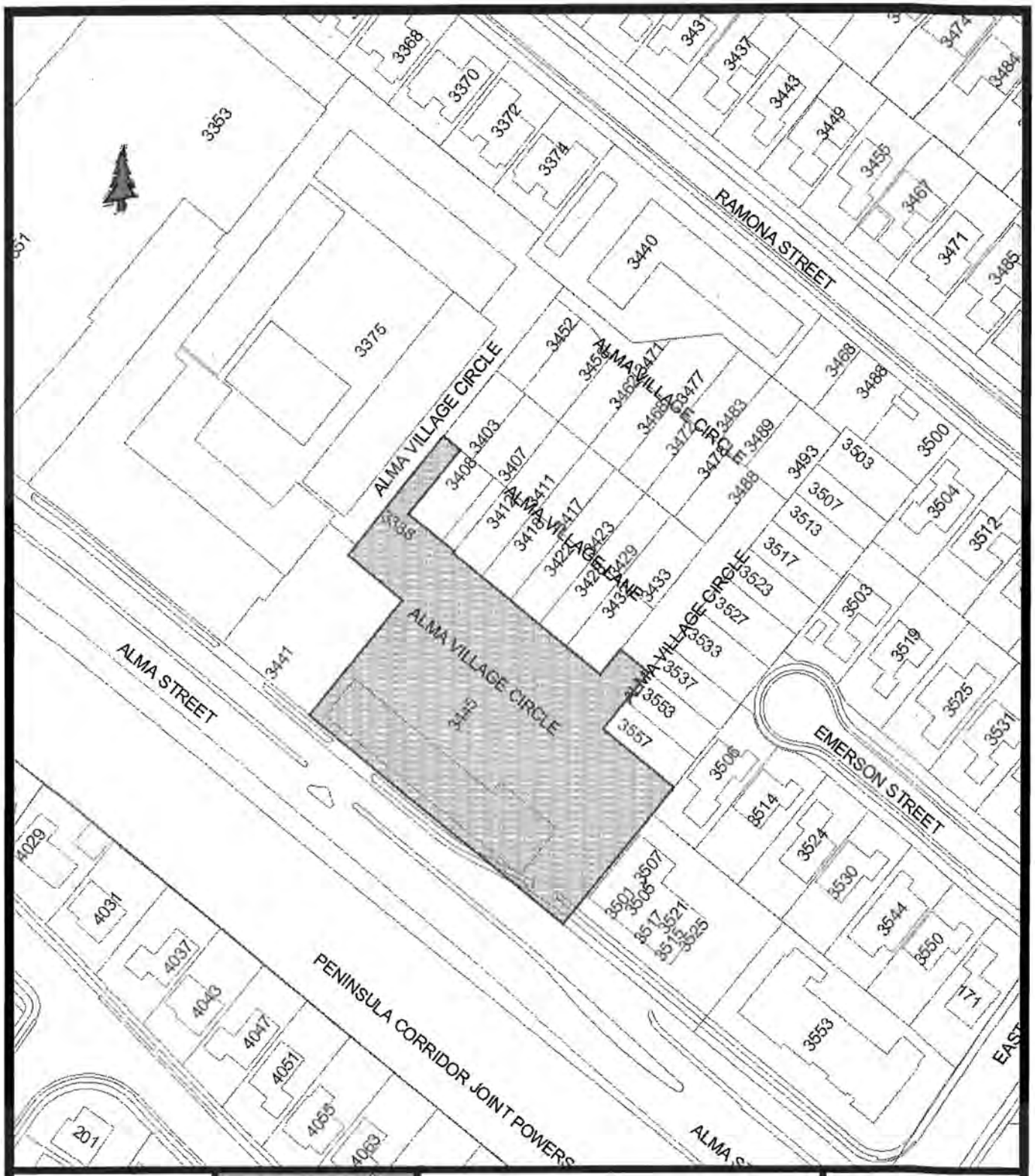
5. Only the letters of the projecting signs shall be illuminated. The background shall consist of an opaque material so that it is not illuminated.

<u>Ongoing Condition</u>

6. Each tenant shall conform to the provisions of the Master Sign Program, as illustrated in the plans dated received July 26, 2012. Any variation from this program would need to be approved via the Architectural Review process.

Public Works Engineering

7. The contractor is required to obtain an encroachment permit if the sidewalk/ROW will be used for the installation of the signs



The City of Palo Alto

Attachment C
Location Map

This map is a product of the City of Palo Alto GIS

0' 120'

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