



CITY OF
**PALO
ALTO**

Architectural Review Board Staff Report

From: Jonathan Lait, Planning and Development Services Director
Lead Department: Planning and Development Services

Meeting Date: January 19, 2023

TITLE

PUBLIC HEARING / QUASI-JUDICIAL. 900 Welch Road [22PLN-00328]: Recommendation on Applicant's Request for Approval of a Sign Exception and Modification to an Existing Master Sign Program to add Two New Vehicular Directional (aka Freestanding) Signs Along a New Road. Environmental Assessment: Exempt from CEQA per Guidelines Section 15311 (Accessory Structures). Zoning District: MOR (Medical Office and Medical Research). For More Information Contact the Project Planner Emily Foley at emily.foley@cityofpaloalto.org

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Architectural Review Board (ARB) take the following action(s):

1. Recommend approval of the proposed project to the Director of Planning and Community Development based on findings and subject to conditions of approval.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Stanford University Medical Center (SUMC) is requesting a Modification to their Master Sign Program to allow two new signs in the existing freestanding "vehicular directional" typology along the new Blake Wilbur Road Extension, currently on the 900 Welch Road parcel. The two new signs will meet the design requirements of the current Master Sign Program, however a Sign Exception and Modification is required because all vehicular directional signs size and locations exceed the allowances of the Sign Code.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Applicant proposes installing two new freestanding "vehicular directional" signs at the SUMC site, with no removal of existing signs (See Page 14 and 15 of the plan set for details). The new signs will match the existing typology for vehicular direction signs. The purpose of these new signs is to provide drivers with directional information along the soon to be constructed Blake Wilbur Road Extension (20PLN-00299). The road extension was previously approved as a part the overall SUMC Master Plan. Because it did not involve modification to any buildings, and was fully in conformance with the SUMC Master Plan, it was processed at the staff level. The road construction itself is currently under review for a Public Works Streetwork Permit.

A Sign Exception is requested because the freestanding vehicular directional signs are 7'6" tall, and less than 20 ft from a property line. Under the Sign Code, freestanding signs taller than 5ft are only allowed in the Hospital zone, GM zones and on El Camino Real in the CN and CS zones

and for service stations, restaurants and shopping centers. While this project is associated with hospital use, the property is in the MOR zone. There are 16 signs of this typology existing in the campus vicinity today, and 3 of them are in the MOR zone. The two new proposed signs are in keeping with the intent of previous similar approvals, to provide necessary wayfinding in potentially emergency situations where signage must be clear and functional.

As Shown on Sheet 17 and 18 of the plan set, the project also includes wording modifications to three existing signs. These meet the existing Master Sign Program, and are not under the purview of the ARB.

Requested Entitlements, Findings and Purview:

The following discretionary applications are being requested:

Architectural Review – Minor (AR): The process for evaluating this type of application is set forth in PAMC 18.77.070. AR applications are reviewed by the ARB and recommendations are forwarded to the Planning & Development Services Director for action within five business days of the Board’s recommendation. Action by the Director is appealable to the City Council if filed within 14 days of the decision. AR projects are evaluated against specific findings. All findings must be made in the affirmative to approve the project. Failure to make any one of the findings requires project redesign or denial. The findings to approve an AR application are provided in Attachment C.

BACKGROUND

Project Information

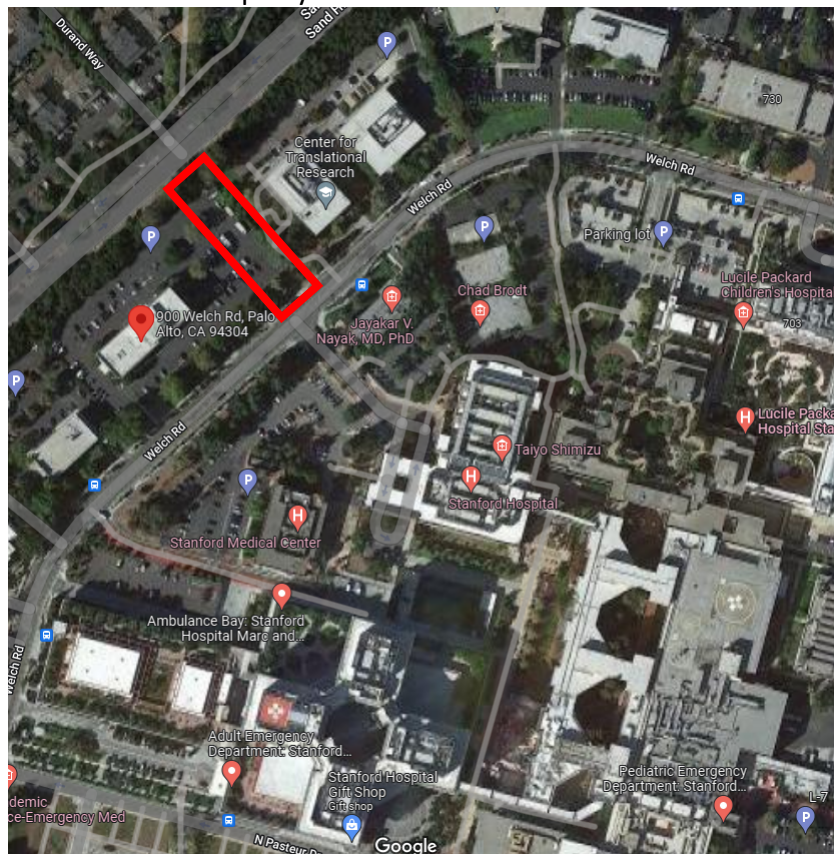
Owner:	Stanford University
Designer:	Clearstory Wayfinding + Placemaking
Representative:	Molly Swenson, Stanford Healthcare Department of Planning, Design, and Construction
Legal Counsel:	N/A

Property Information

Address:	900 Welch Road
Neighborhood:	Stanford University Medical Center (SUMC) – Outer Welch Rd Area
Lot Dimensions & Area:	2.75 Acres, approximately 277 ft by 432 ft
Housing Inventory Site:	N/A
Located w/in a Plume:	N/A
Protected/Heritage Trees:	N/A
Historic Resource(s):	N/A
Existing Improvement(s):	SUMC-owned office building, not a part of project Approved roadway under separate permit process
Existing Land Use(s):	Medical Office
Adjacent Land Uses & Zoning:	North: Stanford West Apartments (various addresses) – RM-30 (D) South: Stanford Hospital - HD (Hospital District) East: 800 Welch – Medical Office (MOR)

West: 1000 Welch – Medical Office (MOR)

Aerial View of Property:



Source: Google

Land Use Designation & Applicable Plans

Comp. Plan Designation: Research Office (RO)

Zoning Designation: Medical Office and Research (MOR)

	Yes		Yes		Yes
Baylands Master Plan/Guidelines (2008/2005)	<input type="checkbox"/>	El Camino Real Guidelines (1976)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Housing Development Project	<input type="checkbox"/>
Downtown Urban Design Guidelines (1993)	<input type="checkbox"/>	South El Camino Real Guidelines (2002)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Utilizes Chapter 18.24 - Objective Standards	<input type="checkbox"/>

Individual Review Guidelines (2005)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Within 150 feet of Residential Use or District	<input type="checkbox"/>	Context-Based Design Criteria applicable	<input type="checkbox"/>
SOFA Phase 1 (2000)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Within Airport Influence Area	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
SOFA Phase 2 (2003)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Stanford University Medical Center Master Plan	x <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

Prior City Reviews & Action

City Council:	None
PTC:	None
HRB:	None
ARB:	Master Sign Program 18PLN-00331 approved April 2019 Amendment to Master Sign Program, including a Sign Exception 22PLN-00059 approved August 2022

ANALYSIS

Neighborhood Setting and Character

There are currently four main sign typographies in the Master Sign Program (2019):

2. vehicular directional,
3. pedestrian directional,
4. building ID, and
5. campus monuments.

The directional signs within and surrounding the campus are consistent with regards to materials, fonts, and how information is displayed. It is crucial for the operations of the hospital that people are quickly able to identify where to go, particularly in finding the emergency room facilities at both the general and pediatric hospitals. The colors of Stanford Red, Stanford Gray, and two shades of off-white (also identified as Antique White and Stone Gray), confirm the branding of the hospital and blend in with the color tones of the hospital buildings.

The proposed project will use the same colors, materials, and Source Sans Pro font as the existing signage. The proposed locations are consistent with locations for similar signs. The Master Sign Program shows there are small, medium, and large subtypes of this sign. The large ones are proposed, based on these signs being along a major entry street, and located on the opposite side of a detached sidewalk from the vehicle travel lane.

Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan, Area Plans and Guidelines^[1]

The Comprehensive Plan includes Goals, Policies, and Programs that guide the physical form of the City. The Comprehensive Plan provides the basis for the City's development regulations and

is used by City staff to regulate building and development and make recommendations on projects. Further, ARB Finding #1 requires that the design be consistent and compatible with applicable elements of the Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan.

The Comprehensive Plan Land Use chapter includes “Policy L-6.10: Encourage high-quality signage that is attractive, energy-efficient, and appropriate for the location, and balances visibility needs with aesthetic needs.” The design of the signs, materials, and colors are consistent with the existing Master Sign Program, attractive, and appropriate for the buildings and the surrounding area.

Zoning Compliance^[2]

A detailed review of the proposed project’s consistency with applicable zoning standards has been performed. A summary table is provided in Attachment B.

Multi-Modal Access & Parking

This project will enable the installation of signs to clarify that the appropriate drop-off location for access to the 300 Pasteur Cancer Center building entrance is the main drop-off roundabout. However, this does not change the existing circulation.

Vehicular directional signs are a crucial component to the site circulation around and within the medical center. The inbound will provide direction towards six major destinations within the hospital area. The outbound sign will provide direction towards Interstate 280, Highway 101, El Camino Real, and the Stanford Shopping Center, which are useful as SUMC is a regional destination and many visitors may not be familiar with the area.

Consistency with Application Findings

Overall, the project meets application findings for Architectural Review and a Sign Exception. Findings are included in Attachment C.

^[1] The Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan is available online: <http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/gov/topics/projects/landuse/compplan.asp>

^[2] The Palo Alto Zoning Code is available online: http://www.amlegal.com/codes/client/palo-alto_ca

Public Notification, Outreach & Comments

The Palo Alto Municipal Code requires notice of this public hearing be published in a local paper and mailed to owners and occupants of property within 600 feet of the subject property at least ten days in advance. Notice of a public hearing for this project was published in the *Daily Post* on January 6, 2023 and postcard mailing occurred on January 5, 2023.

Public Comments

As of the writing of this report, no project-related, public comments were received.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The subject project has been assessed in accordance with the authority and criteria contained in the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the State CEQA Guidelines, and the environmental regulations of the City. Specifically, the project is exempt from CEQA under Guideline 15311 Accessory Structures.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS

In addition to the recommended action, the Architectural Review Board may:

1. Continue the project to a date (un)certain; or
2. Recommend project denial based on revised findings.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Location Map

Attachment B: Zoning Comparison Table

Attachment C: Draft Findings

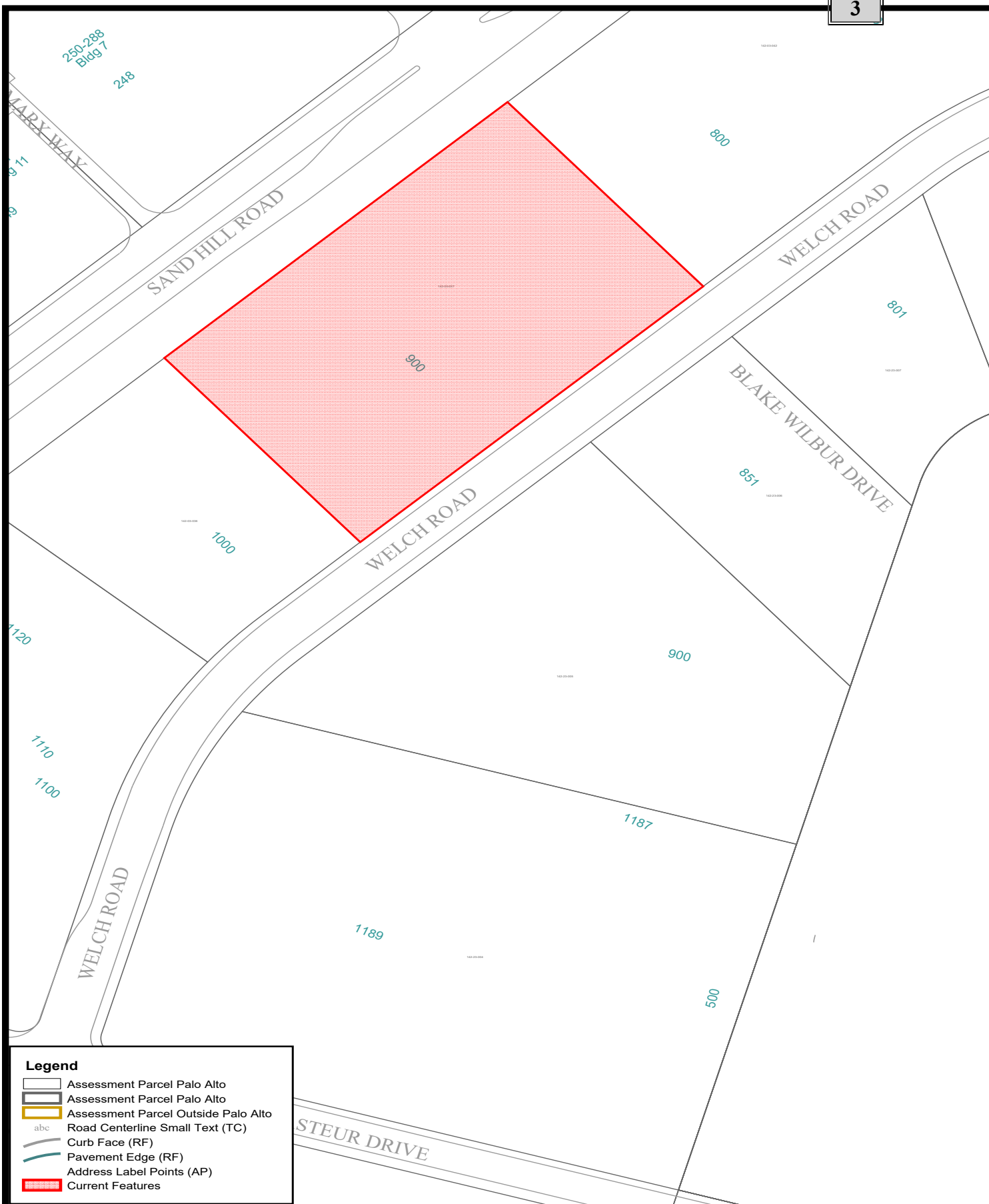
Attachment D: Draft Conditions of Approval

Attachment E: Project Plans

AUTHOR/TITLE:

Emily Foley, Planner

Report #: 2212-0507



Legend

- Assessment Parcel Palo Alto
- Assessment Parcel Palo Alto
- Assessment Parcel Outside Palo Alto
- Road Centerline Small Text (TC)
- Curb Face (RF)
- Pavement Edge (RF)
- Address Label Points (AP)
- Current Features



The City of
Palo Alto



Attachment A:
Location Map
900 Welch Rd

Packet Pg. 24

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



ATTACHMENT B
ZONING COMPARISON TABLE
900 Welch Rd/22PLN-00328

Proposed Sign / Type	PAMC 16.24 Compliance	Allowed Dimensions/Height	Proposed Dimensions
Vehicular Directional 114	Requires Exception	Less than 5ft tall, 27.5 sf	7'6" tall, 4'3" wide = 30 sf
Vehicular Directional 115	Requires Exception	Less than 5ft tall, 27.5 sf	7'6" tall, 4'3" wide = 30 sf

16.20.120 Freestanding signs.

Except as otherwise provided in this chapter, every freestanding sign shall comply with the requirements of this section.

(a) Freestanding Signs Over Five Feet. Freestanding signs over five feet in height shall be permitted only on nonresidential properties in the Hospital zone, GM zones and on El Camino Real in the CN and CS zones and for service stations, restaurants and shopping centers elsewhere.

(1) Area and Height. The maximum area and height of such signs is set forth in Table 2.*

(2) Location. Every sign shall be wholly on the owner's property, except that for any site that encompasses a minimum of ten acres in size and contains a minimum of 50,000 square feet of retail square footage, but does not have its primary frontage on a freeway, expressway, or major arterial, a freestanding sign may be located offsite on private property with frontage on the nearest major arterial roadway. The sign size and height shall be governed by the criteria set forth in Table 2*, using the average site length dimension as the lot frontage for calculation purposes, but in no case shall the sign size exceed fifty square feet. The sign shall comply with all other regulations of this chapter, the total site signage (including the offsite sign) shall not exceed the total allowed for the site, and all other signs on the offsite property must comply with sign regulations for that site.

(3) Number. Subject to the provisions of Section [16.20.170](#), there may be one such sign for each frontage and one additional sign for any portion of frontage in excess of two hundred fifty feet. The size of any additional sign shall be determined from Table 2* by counting as frontage that portion thereof which is in excess of two hundred fifty feet. In the case of shopping centers and other multiple occupancies having a common frontage, the frontage shall be deemed to be

that of the shopping center or commonly used parcel and not the frontages of the individual businesses or occupancies.

(4) Construction. In addition to the requirements of Section [16.20.190](#), every such sign shall be constructed wholly of metal, incombustible plastic or other approved fire-resistant material.

(b) Freestanding Signs Five Feet or Less In Height. Freestanding signs five feet or less in height shall be permitted in all districts within the limitations set forth in this section.

(1) Area. The maximum area of such signs is set forth in Table 1.*

(2) Location. Every such sign shall be wholly on the owner's property.

(3) Number. Subject to the provisions of Section [16.20.170](#), there may be no more than one such sign for each frontage. In the case of shopping centers and other multiple occupancies having a common frontage, the frontage shall be deemed to be that of the shopping center or commonly used parcel and not the frontages of the individual businesses or occupancies.

(c) Multisided Freestanding Signs. Freestanding signs constructed back-to-back, with faces in approximately parallel planes (such as both sides of a single panel) shall count as only one sign both as to number and area (i.e. only one side need be counted). Every other freestanding sign having multiple sides or faces, including a sign constructed in the form of a cylinder or sphere or similar figure shall be limited to total area to that shown on Table 1* or Table 2*, whichever is applicable.

(d) Lighting of Freestanding signs. No freestanding sign shall be constructed in such a way that any light bulb or filament is visible from the front of the sign or from beyond the property line. Nothing herein shall be construed to prohibit signs of neon tubing or similar self-illuminating material of equivalent or less intensity.

(Ord. 5123 § 3 (part), 2011: Ord. 4923 § 6, 2006: Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

* Editor's Note: Tables 1 and 2, referred to herein, may be found at the end of this chapter in a printed edition of this code.

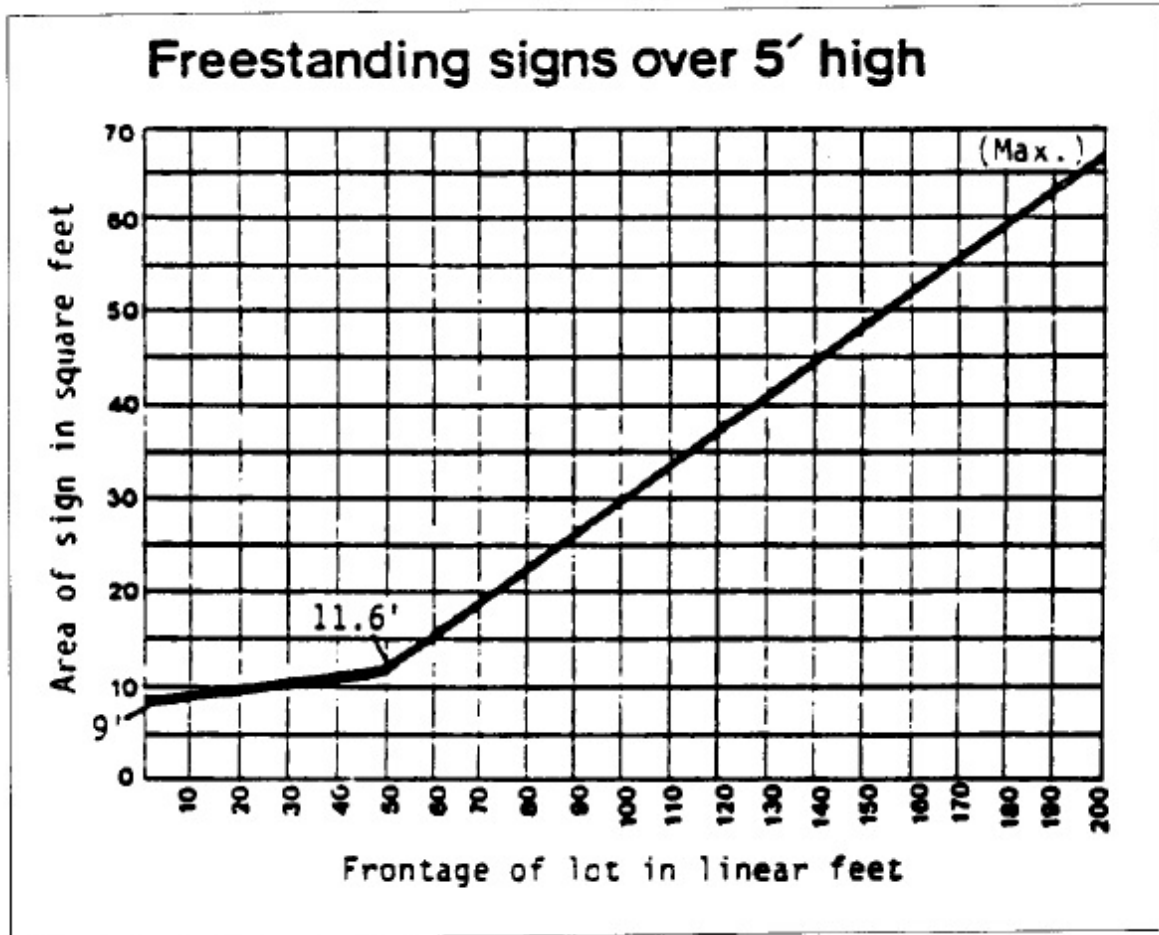
16.20.160 Special purpose signs.

(3) Directional Signs. Directional signs may be erected for the purpose of facilitating or controlling the efficient or safe movement of pedestrians or vehicles on private property. Such signs shall not be used for advertising purposes and particularly shall not include the name of any person, firm, company, organization or any product or service except as approved to designate directions to different businesses on the same site. Such signs shall be located on the property to which they pertain, shall not exceed an area of six square feet nor a height of three feet and shall be located at least twenty feet within the nearest property line, except that directional signs of not more than three square feet in area may be located not less than ten feet within any front property line. Such signs shall not be permitted in R-E, R-1, or R-2 districts.

Chapter 16.20 — Table 2

Allowable Sign Area for Freestanding Signs Over Five Feet High

NOTE: THESE ARE MAXIMUM DESIGN DIMENSIONS, AND MAY BE REDUCED IN THE DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS PURSUANT TO [CHAPTER 18.77](#) (Processing of Permits and Approvals)



- Applicable to nonresidential properties in the GM zone and El Camino Real in the CN and CS zones. Also applicable to restaurants, service stations and shopping centers in other zones.
- For requirements affecting freestanding signs generally, see Section [16.20.160](#).
- For computation of sign area generally, see Section [16.20.010](#)(11).
- For requirements in the HD district, see Section [16.20.160](#)(a)(1).

(Ord. 5373 § 1 (part), 2016)

ATTACHMENT C
ARB FINDINGS FOR APPROVAL
 900 Welch Road/22PLN-00328

Master Sign Program

The following findings have been made to support the application for a Master Sign Program, as modified by the ARB approval conditions. The existing Master Sign Program is modified with the following signage:

- Two (2) freestanding/vehicular directional signs in keeping with the MSP design

Finding 1: The design is consistent with applicable provisions of the Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan, Zoning Code, coordinated area plans (including compatibility requirements), and any relevant design guides.

The project is consistent with Finding #1 because:

The design is consistent and compatible with Comprehensive Plan policy L-6.10: Encourage high quality signage that is attractive, energy-efficient, and appropriate for the location, and balances visibility needs with aesthetic needs.

The design of the signs, materials, and colors are consistent with the existing MSP, and attractive and appropriate for the buildings and the surrounding area. The proposed signage was designed to be compatible with the large scale structures on the site and meet the high-visibility needs of the hospital.

Finding 2: The project has a unified and coherent design, that:

- (a) Creates an internal sense of order and desirable environment for occupants, visitors, and the general community,
- (b) Preserves, respects and integrates existing natural features that contribute positively to the site and the historic character including historic resources of the area when relevant,
- (c) Is consistent with the context-based design criteria of the applicable zone district,
- (d) Provides harmonious transitions in scale, mass and character to adjacent land uses and land use designations,
- (e) Enhances living conditions on the site (if it includes residential uses) and in adjacent residential areas.

The project is consistent with Finding #2 because:

The master sign program presents a framework for purposes of wayfinding and site visibility. The proposed signage uses consistent materials and colors that is unified and coherent, and create a hierarchy of signage at both the pedestrian and vehicular scale. The design is compatible with the hospital environment and university branding, and is appropriately scaled for visibility while driving.

Finding 3: The design is of high aesthetic quality, using high quality, integrated materials and appropriate construction techniques, and incorporating textures, colors, and other details that are compatible with and enhance the surrounding area.

The project is consistent with Finding #3 because:

The existing master sign program uses a clean, limited color palette of Stanford branding reds and grays, off-whites, and black and white. The off-white colors compliment the building colors whereas the red promotes branding and stands out in a manner consistent with the use as a hospital, which requires high visibility for signage. The aluminum and vinyl signs are durable and easily cleaned.

Finding 4: The design is functional, allowing for ease and safety of pedestrian and bicycle traffic and providing for elements that support the building's necessary operations (e.g. convenient vehicle access to property and utilities, appropriate arrangement and amount of open space and integrated signage, if applicable, etc.).

The project is consistent with Finding #4 because:

The signage has been placed to assist in wayfinding for vehicles, including potentially emergency vehicles, entering the SUMC campus. The light colored background with dark gray letters provides easy-to-read contrast.

Finding 5: The landscape design complements and enhances the building design and its surroundings, is appropriate to the site's functions, and utilizes to the extent practical, regional indigenous drought resistant plant material capable of providing desirable habitat that can be appropriately maintained.

The project is consistent with Finding #5 because:

Finding #5 is not applicable for this project. The existing landscaping will not be impacted by the proposed signage.

Finding 6: The project incorporates design principles that achieve sustainability in areas related to energy efficiency, water conservation, building materials, landscaping, and site planning.

The project is consistent with Finding #6 because:

The proposed signs are not illuminated. There are no elements of Green Building that are applicable to freestanding signs.

Sign Exception

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

- To allow two freestanding signs taller than 5 feet tall in the MOR zoning district, and less than 20 feet from a property line.

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;

The property is distinct from other MOR-zoned properties in that the new road will be an entrance to the site. The proposed signage is identical to other signage on site, as freestanding signs taller than 5ft are allowed in the HD (Hospital) Zoning District. This exception will allow for the signage to be consistent throughout the campus.

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 it is crucial for a hospital to have a high visibility of signage for directional purposes. The entry direction sign in particular will be one of the first that drivers will see when entering the campus.

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.

The signs were designed to be aesthetically pleasing, in keeping with the design of other signs on the site, and would not detract from the visual environment. The placement and appearance of the signs do not pose any safety hazards nor do they detract from on site building or surrounding properties.

ATTACHMENT D
CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL
900 Welch Road/22PLN-00328

Planning Division

1. **CONFORMANCE WITH PLANS.** Construction and development shall conform to the approved plans entitled, "Stanford Medicine Master Sign Program, Blake Wilbur Drive Extension, Addendum to 18PLN-00331" stamped as received by the City on January 4, 2023 on file with the Planning Department, 250 Hamilton Avenue, Palo Alto, California except as modified by these conditions of approval.
2. **BUILDING PERMIT.** Apply for a building permit and meet any and all conditions of the Planning, Fire, Public Works, and Building Departments.
3. **BUILDING PERMIT PLAN SET.** A copy of this approval with conditions shall be printed on the second page of the plans submitted for building permit.
4. **TREE PROTECTION FENCING.** Tree protection fencing shall be required to protect trees that are to remain during construction.
5. **PLANNING FINAL – PHOTO VERIFICATION.** Photo verification of the signage installation shall be emailed to the Project Planner, Emily Foley, at Emily.Foley@cityofpaloalto.org.
6. **LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE.** All landscape material shall be well maintained and replaced if necessary, to the satisfaction of the Urban Forester and Director of Planning.
7. **INDEMNITY:** To the extent permitted by law, the Applicant shall indemnify and hold harmless the City, its City Council, its officers, employees and agents (the "indemnified parties") from and against any claim, action, or proceeding brought by a third party against the indemnified parties and the applicant to attack, set aside or void, any permit or approval authorized hereby for the Project, including (without limitation) reimbursing the City for its actual attorneys' fees and costs incurred in defense of the litigation. The City may, in its sole discretion, elect to defend any such action with attorneys of its own choice.
8. **PERMIT EXPIRATION.** The project approval shall be valid for a period of one year from the original date of approval. In the event a building permit(s), if applicable, is not secured for the project within the time limit specified above, the approval shall expire and be of no further force or effect. A written request for a one-year extension shall be submitted prior to the expiration date in order to be considered by the Director of Planning and Development Services.

Building Division

9. Submit building permit for the signs shown - including structural calculations for all free-standing monument signs. Wall signs - please include the weight, size, and method of connections to the wall structural elements matching the site as-builts (no boiler plate). If illuminated signage, please include T24 Energy calculation, disconnect, and electrical power panel to power the signs.

Attachment E

Project Plans

In order to reduce paper consumption, a limited number of hard copy project plans are provided to Board members for their review. The same plans are available to the public, at all hours of the day, via the following online resources.

Directions to review Project plans online:

1. Go to: bit.ly/PAwaitingprojects
2. Scroll down to find "900 Welch" and click the address link
3. On this project specific webpage you will find a link to the project plans and other important information

Direct Link to Project Webpage:

<https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/News-Articles/Planning-and-Development-Services/900-Welch-Road>

Materials Boards:

During Shelter-in-Place, color and material boards will be available to view in the display case outside of City Hall, on the exterior elevator near the corner of Hamilton Ave. and Bryant St.