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Architectural Review Board

Staff Report

Agenda Date: January 17, 2013

To: Architectural Review Board

From: Clare Campbell, Planner **Department: Planning and Community Environment**

Subject: 1305 Middlefield Road [12PLN-00222]: Request by Palo Alto Community Services Department for Historic and Architectural Review of a new sign program for Rinconada Cultural Park that includes the Lucie Stern Community Center, a Category 1 Historic Resource. Zone District: PF. Environmental Assessment: Exempt from CEQA per sections 15301 and 15311.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Architectural Review Board (ARB) recommend approval of the proposed project to the Director of Planning and Community Environment (Director), based upon the ARB Approval Findings in Attachment A and Sign Exception Findings in Attachment B.

BACKGROUND

Previous Review

The ARB and Historic Resources Board (HRB) both reviewed the original sign package early last year in a Study Session format. Since that time, due to the significant comments received by the HRB, the project was substantially modified and the majority of the previous ARB comments are no longer applicable.

The HRB will be reviewing the proposed project on January 16, 2013. Staff will provide a summary of the action at the ARB meeting.

Site Information

The 19 acre project site includes the Rinconada Park and the Lucie Stern Community Center. Lucie Stern, a Spanish Mediterranean-style complex, was designed by Birge Clark and built in 1934 and is the location of the City of Palo Alto's Recreation Department, a Community Theatre and a Children's Theatre. The Lucie Stern facility is designated as a Category 1 Historic Resource and all modifications to the site requires Historic Review. Rinconada Park is Palo Alto's second

oldest park (after El Camino), established in 1922, and was originally called Waterworks after a nearby well and reservoir. Two years later it was renamed Rinconada (Spanish for corner) through a contest sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce.

The public facility is located within a single-family neighborhood and is adjacent to the Walter Hays Elementary School, the Main Library, and Art Center. The numerous park activities and the adjacent uses provide many attractions for the community within a concentrated area.

Project Description

The project scope includes various sign types throughout the facility. The submittal provides three design options for the wall, pole, and map signs. The plans indicate the four existing signs are to be repainted and a new “Arrival Sign” (free-standing sign) is to be installed at the main driveway entrance at the Lucie Stern parking lot. The details for the arrival sign and the repainted signs are not included in the plans provided; the conditions of approval require these details to be submitted for review and approval. The proposed signs are described below:

1. Wall Signs: There are six wall signs proposed (labeled as “Destination ID” on Sign Location Map, Attachment E). The three design options start with just the basic lettering for the location name, and then the second design includes a line, and the third design adds the City logo. The proposed signage would be raised lettering with a bronze finish, and not illuminated. No sign exception is needed.
2. Directional Map Signs: There are five map directional signs proposed. The plans provide three color palettes for this sign. The sign is approximately 57” tall and 14 square feet and would have a bronze finish for the sign frame. A sign exception is needed due to its size and height. The code allows directional signs to be up to six square feet and no taller than three feet.
3. Pedestrian Directional Signs (pole signs): There are four pole signs proposed that include a permanent banner element stating “Welcome” with the City logo and six blades indicating the direction for each listed facility. The plans provide three color palettes for the pole sign that tie into the colors for the map signs. The height of the pole is 13 feet and the clearance from grade to the bottom of the signage is six feet eight inches. The pole is also proposed with a bronze finish. Because of this unique sign type, the poles require a sign exception.

DISCUSSION

Compliance with Sign Ordinance

The proposed wall signs are in conformance with the standards in the Sign Code (PAMC 16.20). As mentioned above, the pole signs and map directional signs require ARB approval of a sign exception. In considering approval of the pole signs and map directional signs, the following sign exception findings must be made:

- (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;

(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; and

(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.

Staff believes the findings can be made to support the signs. The project site is a City facility, and due to its civic nature and unique and specific function, the Rinconada Park and Lucie Stern Community Center would be considered an exceptional use that is not found at other sites within the City.

Comprehensive Plan

The project design is in general conformance with the Comprehensive Plan and is supported by Policy L-50, which encourages high quality signage that is attractive, appropriate for the location and balances visibility needs with aesthetic needs.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Pursuant to the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the Project is categorically exempt from CEQA, per Section 15311 and 15301.

ATTACHMENTS


- Attachment A: Draft Architectural Review Findings
- Attachment B: Draft Sign Exception Findings
- Attachment C: Conditions of Approval
- Attachment D: Project Letter*
- Attachment E: Development Plans (Board Members Only)*

* Prepared by Applicant; all other attachments prepared by Staff

COURTESY COPIES

Greg Betts, Community Services Department

Prepared By: Clare Campbell, Planner

Manager Review: Amy French, Chief Planning Official 

FINDINGS FOR APPROVAL
ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD STANDARDS FOR REVIEW
1305 Middlefield Road [12PLN-00222]

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

- (1) *The design is consistent and compatible with applicable elements of the Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan.* This finding can be made in the affirmative in that the project incorporates quality design that conforms with policies that encourage high quality design that is attractive, appropriate for the location and balances visibility needs with aesthetic needs. In addition, the signs are in compliance with the Secretary of Interior Standards for Rehabilitation of historic sites.
- (2) *The design is compatible with the immediate environment of the site.* This finding can be made in the affirmative in that the proposed design of the signs is appropriate for the historic/public facility.
- (3) *The design is appropriate to the function of the project.* This finding can be made in the affirmative in that the signs are not excessive for the intended use.
- (4) *In areas considered by the board as having a unified design character or historical character, the design is compatible with such character.* This finding can be made in the affirmative in that the signs are in compliance with the Secretary of Interior Standards for Rehabilitation of historic sites.
- (5) *The design promotes harmonious transitions in scale and character in areas between different designated land uses.* This finding can be made in the affirmative in that the signs are compatible with the public facility and with the surrounding residential neighborhood. The signs are not excessively large or illuminated, and are limited in number.
- (6) *The design is compatible with approved improvements both on and off the site.* This finding can be made in the affirmative in that the signs are not excessive in size and are compatible with the public facility and the surrounding sites.
- (7) *The planning and siting of the various functions and buildings on the site create an internal sense of order and provide a desirable environment for occupants, visitors and the general community.* This finding is not applicable to this project.
- (8) *The amount and arrangement of open space are appropriate to the design and the function of the structures.* This finding is not applicable to this project.
- (9) *Sufficient ancillary functions are provided to support the main functions of the project and the same are compatible with the project's design concept.* This finding is not applicable to this project.

ATTACHMENT A

- (10) *Access to the property and circulation thereon are safe and convenient for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles.* This finding is not applicable to this project.
- (11) *Natural features are appropriately preserved and integrated with the project.* This finding is not applicable to this project.
- (12) *The materials, textures, colors and details of construction and plant material are appropriate expression to the design and function.* This finding can be made in the affirmative, see Findings 2, 3, and 4 above.
- (13) *The landscape design concept for the site, as shown by the relationship of plant masses, open space, scale, plant forms and foliage textures and colors create a desirable and functional environment.* This finding is not applicable to this project.
- (14) *Plant material is suitable and adaptable to the site, capable of being properly maintained on the site, and is of a variety which would tend to be drought-resistant to reduce consumption of water in its installation and maintenance.* This finding is not applicable to this project.
- (15) *The project exhibits green building and sustainable design that is energy efficient, water conserving, durable and nontoxic, with high-quality spaces and high recycled content materials.* This finding is not applicable to this project. The scope of the project is small and there is limited opportunity to incorporate green building design into the sign installations.
- (16) *The design is consistent and compatible with the purpose of architectural review as set forth in subsection 18.76.020(a).* This finding can be made in the affirmative in that the project design promotes visual environments that are of high aesthetic quality and variety.

ATTACHMENT B

FINDINGS FOR APPROVAL SIGN CODE EXCEPTION 1305 Middlefield Road [12PLN-00222]

The following findings have been made to support the sign exception request:

(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 project site is the Lucie Stern Community Center and the Rinconada Park, and due to its civic nature and unique and specific functions, the public facility would be considered an exceptional use that is not found at other sites 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.* Civic engagement is an integral part of the functions of the City of Palo Alto. The proposed sign promotes community awareness and facilitates the use of the City facilities.

(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 project will be constructed in accordance with all code requirements of the City of Palo Alto and will be neither detrimental nor injurious to surrounding properties, public health, safety, general welfare, or convenience. The proposed sign will have minimal impacts to the site as perceived by the neighboring properties.

DRAFT
CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL
1305 Middlefield Road [12PLN-00222]

PLANNING & COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

On January 17, 2013 the Architectural Review Board (ARB) recommended approval of the application referenced above, and the Director of Planning and Community Environment (Director) approved the project on date, 2012.

Project Planner: Clare Campbell

Planning Division

1. The project shall be in substantial conformance with the approved plans and related documents received November 5, 2012, except as modified to incorporate these conditions of approval.
2. The Conditions of Approval document shall be printed on all plans submitted for building permits related to this project.
3. The details for the Arrival Sign and the repainting of the existing signage shall be submitted for review and approval. If the Arrival Sign requires a Sign Exception, and or staff determines the project to be significant, it will need review by the ARB and HRB.
4. The project shall comply with the conditions of approval associated with the Historic Review.
5. 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 ARB approval shall expire and be of no further force or effect. Application for extension of this entitlement may be made prior to the one year expiration.

Setting

PALO ALTO'S RINCONADA PARK

Rinconada Park is Palo Alto's second oldest park. It features 19 acres of facilities and recreational resources, including playgrounds, pools, tennis courts, libraries, community theaters, an art center, community center, and the Junior Museum and Zoo.



Issues

Resident feedback, plus the 2011 Citizen Survey, revealed that this unique gem was being seriously overlooked and under-used by Palo Alto residents. The City sought the expertise of marketing consultant Stephanie Weaver with the objective of finding a remedy for this.

Baseline Recommendations

Ms. Weaver recommended staff improve the signage and way-finding system at Rinconada Park and the adjoining Stern Center to accomplish the following objectives.*

- Identify facilities so that visitors can see at a glance the name of the room or patio
- Help visitors easily navigate through and around the campus on foot or bike
- Encourage visitors who are visiting one part of the campus to explore other areas
- Provide user-friendly way-finding signs that make finding destinations easy
- Unify the signage program so that colors, fonts, sizes and styles are consistent
- Employ the City's logo and brands so that there is better identity of City services
- Respect the architecture of the Stern Center and other buildings with signs that enhance the ambiance and do not take away from the beauty of the site

**From City of Palo Alto Memorandum, July 18, 2012; Greg Betts.*

Application

Applying Ms Weaver's recommendations, the design objectives for the signage program should facilitate:

- Informing the public
- Navigating and wayfinding
- Inspiring park users to explore other areas
- Unifying the graphics
- Identifying with the City and its brand
- Respecting architecture

Design Objectives

CHALLENGE

Awareness

Rinconada Cultural Park facilities are under-utilized and need more visibility in the community.

Many residents are not aware that this is a City facility.

DESIGN OBJECTIVES

Inform • Identify

Increase streetside visibility and info throughout park to increase awareness of park and facilities. Use signs, directory maps and directional blades to accomplish this.*

Consistent use of new branding guidelines would solidify connection as City facility.

Confusion and unfamiliarity

Facilities lack identifying signage, which can contribute to confusion or under-utilization.

Navigate • Inspire

Appropriately identify facilities to increase awareness and eliminate confusion

Use directional signage to inspire exploration.

*Signs need to be kept to a minimum to avoid clutter, so strategic placement is critical.

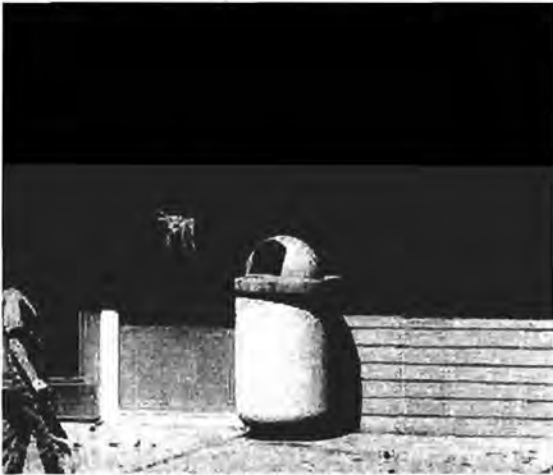


CHALLENGE

Lack of cohesion
Existing signs are a hodgepodge of styles with little cohesion and no connection to City ID. Some signs lack readability.

DESIGN OBJECTIVES

Unify
Utilize a unified approach for park signage that conforms to new City branding guidelines.



CHALLENGE

Compatibility
Rustic historical buildings and campus vs new and clean look of City brand. How to make these styles compatible?

DESIGN OBJECTIVES

Respect
Rely on clean yet classic forms that don't overwhelm the structures and landscape. Aim for "subtle contrast"; let the structures be the stars, and let the signs be the supporting cast.



CITY OF
**PALO
ALTO**



Elements

FONT

The fonts used in all signage should extend the Palo Alto logo's look and feel, reflecting the clean geometry that is a key feature of the new City brand.

Gotham is the font used in the new Palo Alto logo. I propose we utilize Gotham (or Avenir or Gill Sans, which are similar to Gotham) for the signage program. These fonts are handsome, legible and un-fussy. Their classic lines complement the vintage architecture of the Stern Center buildings while working equally well with sport and recreational facilities.

Avenir **Fireside Room**

COLORS

Starting with the green and gray of the logo, and utilizing colors from Palo Alto's extended palette (brick red, bronze brown, yellow-green, bright blue and dark teal), we have colors that work well in the environment of the Park.



PMS 7489U



PMS Cool
Gray 10U



PMS 167U



PMS 469U



PMS 584U



PMS 7489U



PMS 7477U

MATERIALS

Bronze-finished aluminum for on-building signage, map signs, and directional signposts. This material complements the rustic nature of the buildings, while clean simple design maintains the connection to the City's brand.