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ALTO**

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Architectural Review Board

Staff Report

Agenda Date: October 17, 2013

To: Architectural Review Board

From: Clare Campbell, Planner

Department: Planning and
Community Environment

Subject: **518-526 Bryant Street [13PLN-00225]:** Request by VKK Signs, for Architectural Review of a building sign program with Sign Exceptions to allow the installation of five projecting wall signs for five commercial tenants in the CD-C(GF)(P) zone district. Environmental Assessment: Exempt from the provisions of CEQA, 15301 (Existing Facilities).

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Architectural Review Board (ARB) recommend the Director of Planning and Community Environment approve the proposed project based upon draft findings (Attachments A & B) and subject to the conditions of approval (Attachment C).

BACKGROUND

Site Information

The project site is located in Downtown Palo Alto in the middle of the 500 block of Bryant Street. The site is flanked by an existing one-story retail building to the left and a four-story retail and office building to the right, separated by an alley. The existing building was constructed in the mid-1930's and was considered potentially eligible for the California Register of Historic Resources in 1998. The site is developed with four retail storefronts along Bryant Street and a restaurant at the rear of the building that is accessed by the alley; the upstairs area provides office space.

Project Description

The proposed project would be a master sign program for five projecting signs for each of the ground-floor tenants. All five of the proposed projecting signs are two square feet (13" x 19.25") and would be mounted using a black powder-coated finish decorative bracket. The individual signs for the current tenants are unique in their content, including color, fonts and layouts. The new signage would not be illuminated.

Project Review

Applications for the location and construction of signs are typically classified as minor architectural review projects. Minor projects are usually reviewed at staff level without a public hearing, although

any member of the public may request a hearing once a decision has been made. However, requests for Sign Exceptions are required to be reviewed by the ARB, per Palo Alto Municipal Code (PAMC) Section 16.20.040.

DISCUSSION

Compliance with Palo Alto's Sign Ordinance

The standards for a projecting sign, as specified in Palo Alto Municipal Code Section 16.20.140, are listed below along with the proposed project's compliance.

(1) Area. No such sign shall exceed three square feet in area. *Complies; the proposed signs are two square feet.*

(2) Height. No part of any projecting sign shall exceed a height of twelve feet, nor shall any part of such sign extend above the top level of the wall upon or in front of which it is situated. Any such sign over any public or private sidewalk or walkway shall have a minimum clearance below the sign of eight feet. *Complies; the top of the sign mounting bracket is 11 feet above grade.*

(3) Location. No such sign shall be placed over or above any public sidewalk or other public place unless the sign is situated under a marquee, porch, walkway covering or similar covering structure. *Does not comply; there is no covering structure.*

(c) Number. Subject to the provisions of Section 16.20.170 there may be no more than one projecting sign for each place of business for each building face. *Complies; one sign is proposed for each of the five businesses.*

(d) Multisided Projecting Signs. Projecting signs constructed back-to-back, with faces in approximately parallel planes (such as on 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 projecting sign having multiple sides or faces, including a sign constructed in the form of a cylinder or sphere or similar figure, shall be limited in total area to that set forth above. *Complies.*

Sign Exception Findings

In order to support the Sign Exception the three findings below must be made. The ARB is requested to assist staff in making the required findings to support the project. Attachment B provides draft sign exception findings that may be modified by the ARB.

- (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.

Comprehensive Plan

The project design, as conditioned, and intent 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.


ATTACHMENTS


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

* Prepared by Applicant; all other attachments prepared by Staff

COURTESY COPIES

Dan Kitzmiller, VKK Signs; dan@vkksigns.com
Dan Cloutier, dcloutier@kensonventures.com

Prepared By: Clare Campbell, Planner 

Manager Review: Amy French, AICP, Chief Planning Official 

DRAFT
FINDINGS FOR APPROVAL
ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD STANDARDS FOR REVIEW
518-526 Bryant Street [13PLN-00225]

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 Comprehensive Plan policies that encourage high quality signage that is attractive, appropriate for the location and balances visibility needs with aesthetic needs.
- (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 are appropriate for the downtown retail/commercial setting.
- (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 project is generally consistent with the Downtown Urban Design Guide and is pedestrian oriented.
- (5) *The design promotes harmonious transitions in scale and character in areas between different designated land uses.* This finding is not applicable to this project.
- (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 project, with its scale and design, is compatible with the renovated building and the surrounding commercial 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.
- (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.

ATTACHMENT A

- (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.*

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FINDINGS FOR APPROVAL
SIGN CODE EXCEPTION
518-526 Bryant Street [13PLN-00225]

The following findings have been made to support the sign exception request for five projecting signs, as modified by the ARB approval conditions. The specific exceptions that have been requested are for the following standards:

Projecting Signs:

- Placement of projecting signs where there is no awning/covering above.

(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 original 1930's building, constructed by "master builder" Wells Goodenough, was identified as eligible for the California Register of Historic Resources in 1998 and is the only Spanish colonial revival style building on the block. The Projecting blade signs are inherently more compatible with historic preservation because they make less impact on the building, as opposed to flat wall signs, and better preserves the integrity of the building. The addition of canopies would be inconsistent with the original architecture and potentially incompatible with the Secretary of Interior Standards for Rehabilitation of historic structures.

(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.* The original building design, circa 1930's, preceded the 1970's rules regarding sign placement, and requiring the applicant to construct a historically appropriate canopy in order to have projecting blade signs can be considered an unnecessary hardship. The projecting blade signs will provide additional visibility from the main thoroughfare, University Avenue, and will enhance the viability of the related businesses.

(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 uncovered projecting signs would have minimal impacts to the site as perceived by the neighboring properties.

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CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL
518-526 Bryant Street [13PLN-00225]

PLANNING & COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

On October 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*.

Project Planner: Clare Campbell

Planning Division

1. The project shall be in substantial conformance with the approved plans and related documents received September 23, 2013, 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. All future blade signs shall conform with the approved dimensions (13" x 19.25") and utilize the approved mounting brackets to maintain the approval of the master sign program for the building.
4. Illumination is not approved for the sign program.
5. For any future changes to the sign content, an Architectural Review application must be filed for review and approval.
6. 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.

518-526 Bryant: "Before" and "After" Images

Building Prior to Renovations



Proposed Sign Project





September 26, 2013

City of Palo Alto Planning
Attn.: Clare Campbell | Planner

Subject: Projecting Blade Signs at 518 Bryant Street

Clare,

In response to your email dated August 29th, please find the following findings for exception along with attached photos in support of approval.

Per Section 16.20.040 Exception procedure;

(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. Our proposed projecting decorative brackets and sign panels are in keeping with the historic tradition of the building and neighborhood and in our opinion less obtrusive and more pedestrian friendly and more visual pleasing than typical wall mounted tenant panels, cabinets or individually mounted letters or logos. There is currently an existing decorative bracket and panel on the same building (in the alleyway) which is being matched in our proposed design.

(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. Our proposed projecting decorative brackets and sign panels are vital to the tenants success and financial well being of the landlord and our client. All of the tenants rely heavily on pedestrian walk-in traffic and not having these signs would definately be a hardship.

(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. Our proposed projecting decorative brackets and sign panels pose no threats to the buildings structural integrity, and in our opinion are not detrimental to the public health, safety, general welfare or convenience.

In closing, we feel the proposed signs are understated, the correct porportions for the building and surrounding neighborhodd and are completely in keeping with other blades signs in the neighborhood as demonstrated in the following photos.

Feel free to email or call if you want to discuss in further detail.

Regards,

Dan Kitzmiller
VKK Signmakers, Inc.
820 Sweeney Avenue
Redwood City, CA 94063
Office: 650 368 3688 ext 1
Cell: 650 670 6311
Web: <http://www.vkksigns.com>

