



Architectural Review Board Staff Report

From: Planning and Development Services Director
Lead Department: Planning and Development Services

Meeting Date: August 15, 2024
Report #: 2405-3098

TITLE

PUBLIC HEARING / QUASI-JUDICIAL. 525 University [23PLN-00308] and 530 Lytton [23PLN00311] Recommendation on Applicant's Request for Major Architectural Review Approval for Two Master Sign Programs with Sign Exceptions at two locations. The Project at 525 University Includes Five Signs: One Illuminated Directory Sign (Type A), One Illuminated Canopy Address Sign (Type B), One Illuminated Address Wall Sign (Type C), One Illuminated Directional Sign at Parking Entrance (Type D), and One Illuminated Directional Sign – Parking Monument ID (Type E). The Project at 530 Lytton Includes Four Signs: One Illuminated Directory Sign (Type A), One Illuminated Address Wall Sign (Type C), One Illuminated Directional Sign at Parking Entrance (Type D), and One Illuminated Directional Sign – Parking Blade ID (Type E). Environmental Assessment: Exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Action in Accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 and 15311. Zoning District: CD-C (P) (Downtown Commercial). For More Information Contact the Project Planner Emily Kallas at Emily.Kallas@CityofPaloAlto.org.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Architectural Review Board:

1. Find the projects exempt from CEQA in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 and 15311; and
2. Recommend that the Director of Planning and Development Services approve the Master Sign Programs and Sign Exemptions based on the findings in Attachment B and subject to the Conditions of Approval in Attachment C.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The subject project was previously reviewed by the ARB. An earlier staff report includes background information, project analysis and evaluation to city codes and policies; that report is available online¹. A copy of the report without attachments is available in Attachment E.

The purpose of this report is to restate the comments made by the Board and detail the applicant's response to those comments. The analysis section below builds upon the information contained in the earlier report and modified to reflect recent project changes.

BACKGROUND

On May 16, 2024 the ARB reviewed the project. A video recording of the Board's meeting is available online.² The Board's comments and the applicant's response are summarized in the following table.

ARB Comments/Direction	Applicant Response
Show all planter locations and heights accurately to 2021 approved plans in the sign elevation drawings	Both sets of plans have been updated accordingly.
For 525 University - sign type A, the maximum height of the sign should be seven feet as measured from sidewalk level	See 525 University plans sheet 8. The sign has been modified to include the planter base in the height and is now measured 84 inches (7 ft) from grade to the top of sign.
530 Lytton - sign type A maximum height of 7ft from sidewalk level	See 530 Lytton plan sheets 8-9. Sign has been moved back from the public sidewalk edge to the interior side of the planter. Sign height is 7ft from the plaza level and 10.5 ft from the sidewalk level.
Define the tenant space parameters for sign type A	See both plans sheet 8. Tenant plaques are 7 in by 30 in, with text space of 2.5 in by 25.5 in
525 University - sign type C maximum size of 40 sf, maximum height of 12 inches for lettering, clarify mounting, cannot exceed the wall height	See 525 University plans sheet 15. Sign is now 40.5 sf, with 12 inch lettering. It does not exceed the wall height and will be mounted on the existing concrete wall. The indent the sign was shown sitting in the prior plans does not exist.

¹ The Staff report for the May 16, 2024 Architectural Review Board Hearing is Available online at: <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/files/assets/public/v/1/agendas-minutes-reports/agendas-minutes/architectural-review-board/2024/arb-5.16-525-university-530-lytton.pdf>. A

² A video of the May 16, 2024 hearing is available online at: <https://midpenmedia.org/architectural-review-board-77-5162024/>.

For 530 Lytton - sign type C the maximum size should be 40 square feet with a maximum height of 12 inches for lettering

See 530 Lytton plans sheet 13. The sign is now 40.5 sf, with 12 inch lettering. It does not exceed the wall height and will be mounted on the existing concrete wall.

The bottom of both parking signs types E shall be the minimum required above the sidewalk, top of sign shall not exceed 11 feet.

See 525 University plans sheet 20 and 530 Lytton plans sheet 18. Sign heights have been reduced by approximately one foot to meet this requirement.

ANALYSIS

Overall, the revised plans are responsive to the ARB's comments. However, there are two items that were not fully addressed.

1. Sign Type C (wall signs on the side streets) were reduced to 40.5 sf rather than the requested 40 sf
2. Sign Type A (Directory Sign) for 530 Lytton at the corner of Lytton and Cowper Street has not been revised in accordance with the ARB's recommendations. The ARB requested this sign be no more than seven feet tall measured from the sidewalk, which would leave approximately three feet for the height of the sign because it is raised up from grade on a planter. To accomplish this, it would require fully redesigning the sign. The sign would also no longer be consistent with the design proposed for 525 University, and one of the primary objectives of this project is to unify currently mis-matched signage. As an alternative solution, the applicant moved the sign back from the edge of the planter and rotated toward the center of the planter, closer to the building entrance. The height is seven (7) feet when measured relative to the plaza height it is nearest, and 10.5 ft from the sidewalk height.

With respect to Sign Type C, staff finds that the total size of the sign is reasonable and minimally differs from the ARB's recommendation. With respect to Sign Type A, although this does not meet the ARB's comment, staff feels that it meets the intent of the comment, which was to reduce the sign height directly adjacent to the sidewalk. The revised design maintains site-wide cohesion for the sign design. The signs are otherwise consistent with the sign code requirements as detailed in Attachment D, or are requesting an exception through the Major Architectural review process consistent with the sign code requirements.

Therefore, staff finds that the plans, with the proposed modifications to address ARB comments, are consistent with the findings for Architectural Review and for the Sign Exceptions. The Draft findings for approval are included in Attachment B and the recommended conditions of approval are included in Attachment C.

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 the provisions of CEQA per CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 and 15311. CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 considers minor alterations to existing buildings to be categorically exempt from CEQA. CEQA Guidelines Section 15311 considers on-premise signs for commercial developments to be exempt from CEQA. None of the exceptions to the exemptions under 15300.1 would apply.

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 August 2, 2024, which is 12 days in advance of the meeting. Postcard mailing occurred on July 31, 2024, which is 14 in advance of the meeting.

Public Comments

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

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS

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

3. Approve the project with modified findings or conditions;
4. Continue the project to a date (un)certain; or
5. Recommend project denial based on revised findings.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Location Map

Attachment B: Draft Findings for Approval

Attachment C: Draft Conditions of Approval

Attachment D: Zoning Consistency Analysis

Attachment E: May 16, 2024 ARB Staff Report

Attachment F: Project Plans

Report Author & Contact Information

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ARB^[1] Liaison & Contact Information

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RM-30

CD-C
(P)

PC-4296

3437

PC-408

Legend

-  Project Site
-  Current Features



The City of
Palo Alto



Attachment A
Location Map
525 University and S

Packet Pg. 19



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



ATTACHMENT B
ARB FINDINGS FOR APPROVAL & SIGN EXCEPTION

525 University Avenue/23PLN-00308
530 Lytton Avenue/23PLN-00311

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

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 the applicable elements of the city's Comprehensive Plan in that the proposed project is consistent with 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 attractive and appropriate for the building and the surrounding area.

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:

This finding can be made in the affirmative in that the proposed design of the signage is appropriate for the downtown office tower setting. The proposed signage uses consistent materials and colors that is unified and coherent between the two sites.

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 project incorporates high quality materials, and replaces existing mis-matched signage with a cohesive set. The proposed materials include perforated and solid aluminum, with push-through acrylic lettering. The colors are black, gray, and white, which is appropriate to the modern architecture of the buildings and appropriately blend in with the surrounding area.

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 intent of the design is to provide functional directional assistance throughout the building and to assist with pedestrian safety. The two directory signs allow people to know what businesses are in the buildings. The parking signs at each of the two garage entrances include “car coming” warning systems to help protect pedestrians and bicyclists crossing in front of the garage entries. The two monument signs provide pedestrian-scale identifying address markers.

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. There is no landscaping that would be impacted by the proposed signage. Landscaping was previously reviewed by Staff under 21PLN-00209.

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 sign is made of durable long-lasting materials. Although the signs are illuminated, lighting is the minimum necessary to provide for wayfinding after dark and is either limited to the lettering itself, partially shielded by the materials, or provided as small lights directed on the sign itself to avoid light spillover.

Sign Exception

The proposed signs that exceed code requirements comply with the Findings for Sign Exception as required in PAMC Chapter 16.20.040 .

The specific exceptions are requested for the following standards:

525 University

- Directory Sign (Type A) – exceeds allowed sign area for non-business name portions of a directory sign in order to provide the site address – 6.45 sf where 4 sf are allowed
- Directional Sign at Parking Entrance (Type D)– exceeds allowed sign area and of a directional wall sign – 89.8 sf where 6 sf is allowed
- Directional Sign - Parking Monument ID (Type E) – 7.63 sf where 3 sf is allowed

530 Lytton

- Directory Sign (Type A) – exceeds allowed sign area for non-business name portions of a directory sign in order to provide the site address – 6.45 sf where 4 sf are allowed
- Directional Sign at Parking Entrance (Type D)– – exceeds allowed sign area and of a directional wall sign – 69.8 sf where 6 sf is allowed
- Directional Sign – Parking Blade ID (Type E) – exceeds allowed sign area and height of a directional sign – 7.36 sf where 3 sf is allowed and mounted between 8-11 feet in height where 3 feet height is allowed.

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 existing buildings are in the commercial downtown area, the building at 525 University is California Register of Historic Resources eligible, but not currently listed. The two buildings create an office campus environment that is unique to the downtown area and that encompasses the entire block between Cowper Street and Tasso Street, and University Avenue and Lytton Avenue. Therefore, the building façades are significantly larger than most other buildings within the downtown area. They also have unique mid-block entrances to the below grade parking garage, with tall retaining walls even when the ramp reaches grade. The size of the two parking signs are appropriate for wayfinding based on the size of the driveways and the need for the signs to be visible for both drivers, bikers, and pedestrians.

The two directory signs function as both monument signs with the building addresses, and directory signs listing the businesses within the buildings. If the directory signs were reduced, monument signs would still be desired, leading to additional signs being added. The scale of the directory signs are appropriate to the scale of the building.

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 granting of this application is necessary for the preservation and enjoyment of a substantial property right of the tenant to have appropriately scaled signage for safety in the parking entrances, and to provide site identification signage that is appropriate based on the size of the building and that does not detract from the potential historic nature of the property.

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 building 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 signage reduces the overall number of signs at the site and unifies the signage across two adjacent properties.

ATTACHMENT C
CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL
525 University Avenue
23PLN-00308

PLANNING DIVISION

1. CONFORMANCE WITH PLANS. Construction and development shall conform to the approved plans entitled, "Project: 525 UNIVERSITY AVE, SUITE 200 PALO ALTO, CA 94301," uploaded to the Palo Alto Online Permitting Services Citizen Portal on July 3, 2024, 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, Transportation, and Building Departments.
3. BUILDING PERMIT PLAN SET. The ARB approval letter including all Department conditions of approval for the project shall be printed on the plans submitted for building permit.
4. COLORS AND MATERIALS. The final colors for the signage will align with the colors and materials approved by the architectural review board.
5. TENANT SIGNS. Future tenants shall obtain an OTC Planning Entitlement for tenant plaques on the Directory Sign (Type A) and any other future site signage.
6. PROJECT MODIFICATIONS: All modifications to the approved project shall be submitted for review and approval prior to construction. If during the Building Permit review and construction phase, the project is modified by the applicant, it is the responsibility of the applicant to contact the Planning Division/project planner directly to obtain approval of the project modification. It is the applicant's responsibility to highlight any proposed changes to the project and to bring it to the project planner's attention.
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. FINAL INSPECTION: A Planning Division Final inspection will be required to determine substantial compliance with the approved plans prior to the scheduling of a Building Division final. Any revisions during the building process must be approved by Planning. Contact your Project Planner, Emily Kallas at emily.kallas@cityofpaloalto.org to schedule this inspection.

BUILDING DIVISION

9. A building permit is required for the signs shown. Include structural calculations as part of building permit submittal.

OFFICE OF TRANSPORTATION

10. The car detection device (or equivalent new model) shall be reinstalled on the new parking freestanding sign.

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL

530 Lytton Avenue
23PLN-00311

PLANNING DIVISION

1. CONFORMANCE WITH PLANS. Construction and development shall conform to the approved plans entitled, "Project: 530 LYTTON AVE, PALO ALTO, CA 94301," uploaded to the Palo Alto Online Permitting Services Citizen Portal on July 3, 2024, 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, Transportation, and Building Departments.
3. BUILDING PERMIT PLAN SET. The ARB approval letter including all Department conditions of approval for the project shall be printed on the plans submitted for building permit.
4. COLORS AND MATERIALS. The final colors for the signage will align with the colors and materials approved by the architectural review board.
5. TENANT SIGNS. Future tenants shall obtain an OTC Planning Entitlement for tenant plaques on the Directory Sign (Type A) and any other future site signage.
6. PROJECT MODIFICATIONS: All modifications to the approved project shall be submitted for review and approval prior to construction. If during the Building Permit review and construction phase, the project is modified by the applicant, it is the responsibility of the applicant to contact the Planning Division/project planner directly to obtain approval of the project modification. It is the applicant's responsibility to highlight any proposed changes to the project and to bring it to the project planner's attention.
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. FINAL INSPECTION: A Planning Division Final inspection will be required to determine substantial compliance with the approved plans prior to the scheduling of a Building Division final. Any revisions during the building process must be approved by Planning. Contact your Project Planner, Emily Kallas at emily.kallas@cityofpaloalto.org to schedule this inspection.

BUILDING DIVISION

9. A building permit is required for the signs shown. Include structural calculations as part of building permit submittal.

OFFICE OF TRANSPORTATION

10. The car detection device (or equivalent new model) shall be reinstalled on the new parking blade sign.

**Attachment D
Zoning Table
525 University**

Proposed Sign / Type	PAMC 16.24 Compliance	Allowed Dimensions/Height	Existing Dimensions/Height	Proposed Dimensions
Directory Sign (Type A)	No, Sign Exception Requested, replaces existing signage	4 sf plus business names 8ft in height	30.6 sf total 8ft in height	6.5 sf plus business names 13.85 sf total 5.5 ft from base, 7ft from grade
Address Wall Sign (Type C)	No, Sign Exception Requested	Cannot extend beyond wall height	Replaces 12.7 sf monument sign	40.5 sf Located on retaining wall
Directional Sign at Parking Entrance (Type D)	No, Sign Exception Requested, replaces existing signage	6 sf (more than 10 feet from property line)	Currently multiple smaller signs	89.75 sf on Cowper St
Directional Sign – Parking Monument ID (Type E)	No, Sign Exception Requested, replaces existing signage	3 sf (less than 10 feet from property line)	13.3 sf	7.36 sf 6’11” from base 11 ft from grade

530 Lytton

Proposed Sign / Type	PAMC 16.24 Compliance	Allowed Dimensions/Height	Existing Dimensions/Height	Proposed Dimensions
Directory Sign (Type A)	No, Sign Exception Requested, replaces existing signage	4 sf plus business names 8ft	Replaces 18 sf monument sign	6.5 sf plus business names 13.85 sf total 5.5 ft from base 7 ft from plaza Approximately 10.5 ft from sidewalk
Address Wall Sign (Type C)	Yes		Replaces 38.5 sf monument sign	40.5 sf Located on retaining wall
Directional Sign at Parking Entrance (Type D)	No, Sign Exception Requested, replaces existing signage	6 sf	Currently multiple smaller signs	69.8 sf on Tasso St
Directional Sign – Parking Blade ID (Type E)	No, Sign Exception Requested	3 sf (less than 10 feet from property line) Min 7 ft clearance	N/A	7.36 sf Mounted 8’3” above sidewalk, total height not to exceed 11 ft



CITY OF
**PALO
ALTO**

Architectural Review Board Staff Report

From: Planning and Development Services Director
Lead Department: Planning and Development Services

Meeting Date: May 16, 2024
Report #: 2404-2903

TITLE

PUBLIC HEARING / QUASI-JUDICIAL. 525 University [23PLN-00308] and 530 Lytton [23PLN-00311] Recommendation on Applicant's Request for Major Architectural Review Approval for Two Master Sign Programs with Sign Exceptions at 525 University Avenue and 530 Lytton Avenue. The Project at 525 University Includes Five Signs: One Illuminated Directory Sign, One Illuminated Canopy Address Sign, One Illuminated Wall Property ID Sign, One Illuminated Parking ID Sign, and One Illuminated Parking Directional Directory Sign. The Project at 530 Lytton Includes Four Signs: One Illuminated Directory Sign, One Illuminated Wall Property ID Sign, One Illuminated Parking ID Sign, and One Illuminated Parking Blade Sign. Environmental Assessment: Exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Action in Accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 and 15311. Zoning District: CD-C (P) (Downtown Commercial). For More Information Contact the Project Planner Emily Kallas at Emily.Kallas@CityofPaloAlto.org.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Architectural Review Board:

1. Find the projects exempt from CEQA in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 and 15311; and
2. Recommend that the Director of Planning and Development Services approve the Master Sign Programs and Sign Exemptions based on the findings in Attachment B and subject to the Conditions of Approval in Attachment C.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The applicant requests approval of two Master Sign Programs, one for 525 University Avenue and one for 530 Lytton Avenue. These two parcels are adjacent to each other and the signage for the two separate parcels has been coordinated as these buildings encompass the entire block between Cowper Street and Tasso Street, and University Avenue and Lytton Avenue, functioning as an office campus environment. The Master Sign Program at 525 University includes five total signs and the Master Sign Program at 531 Lytton Avenue includes four total signs.

Sign exceptions are requested for most of these signs, as detailed further in this report, for minor deviations from the Code requirements. These signs primarily replace existing signage of a similar size and nature. The site proposes to maintain existing business-specific wall signage. The proposed signs unify wayfinding/directory signage across these two sites.

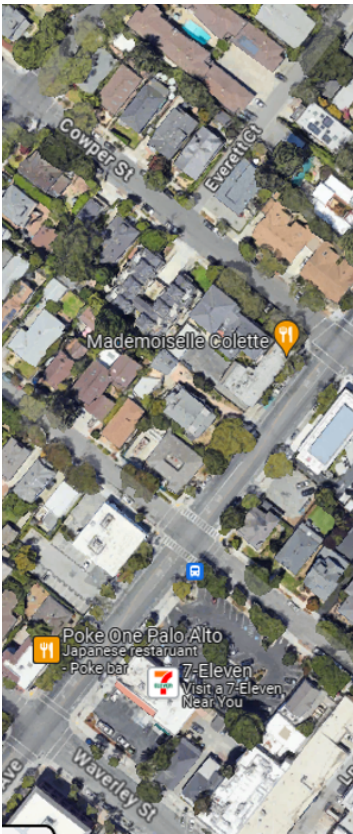
BACKGROUND

Project Information

Owner of 525 University:	PAOC, LLC
Owner of 530 Lytton	530 Lytton CM, LLC
Owner Representative:	David Giusti, Orchard Commercial Real Estate
Sign Company Representative:	Mardeen Gordon, SignAge and ArtWorks
Legal Counsel:	Not Applicable

Property Information

Addresses:	525 University and 530 Lytton
Neighborhood:	Downtown
Lot Dimensions & Area:	525 University: 225 ft wide, 262.5 ft long, 59,062.5 sf 530 Lytton: 225 ft wide, 130.5 ft long, 29,362 sf Total: 225 ft wide, 393 ft long, 88,425 sf (2.03 acres)
Housing Inventory Site:	Not Applicable
Located w/in a Plume:	Not Applicable
Protected/Heritage Trees:	Not Applicable (signs would have no impact on existing protected trees on or near the sites)
Historic Resource(s):	Yes, 525 University is a CRHR eligible building. See further discussion below.
Existing Improvement(s):	525 University: 15-story office tower with two, 2-story wing buildings, 199,115 sf, built 1966 530 Lytton: four-story office tower, 49,264 sf, built 1975
Existing Land Use(s):	Office, Financial Services
Adjacent Land Uses & Zoning:	North: Land Use (CD-C(P)) West: Land Use (RM-30) East: Land Use (CD-C(GF)(P)) South: Land Use ((CD-C(P)))
Aerial View of Properties:	



Source: Google Satellite Maps

Land Use Designation & Applicable Plans

Comp. Plan Designation: Community Commercial (CC)

Zoning Designation: Downtown Commercial, Pedestrian Overlay CD-C (P)

	Yes		Yes		Yes
Baylands Master Plan/Guidelines (2008/2005)		El Camino Real Guidelines (1976)		Housing Development Project	
Downtown Urban Design Guidelines (1993)	X	South El Camino Real Guidelines (2002)		Utilizes Chapter 18.24 - Objective Standards	
Individual Review Guidelines (2005)		Within 150 feet of Residential Use or District		Context-Based Design Criteria applicable	X
SOFA Phase 1 (2000)		Within Airport Influence Area			
SOFA Phase 2 (2003)					

Prior City Reviews & Action

City Council: None

PTC:	None
HRB:	None for the proposed signage. Exterior building and landscaping changes were reviewed by the HRB on April 28, 2022 as a part of 21PLN-00209 (currently under construction)
ARB:	None

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed projects include two Master Sign Programs, both of which include Sign Exceptions. The proposed Master Sign Program at 525 University Avenue includes five total signs, all of which are illuminated, including:

1. A freestanding directory sign;
2. A canopy address sign;
3. A wall property ID sign;
4. A parking ID sign; and
5. A parking directional sign

The proposed Master Sign Program at 530 Lytton Avenue includes four total signs, all of which are illuminated, including:

1. A freestanding directory sign;
2. A wall property ID sign (address);
3. A parking ID sign; and
4. A parking blade sign;

Sign exceptions are required for the freestanding directory signs at both properties, parking ID signs at both entrances to the underground garage, parking directional/blade signs at each site, and a wall property ID sign at 525 University, as summarized below.

525 University Avenue	
Type of Sign	Code Compliance (or deviation)
Freestanding directory sign	6.5 sf allowed plus 1.5 sf per business name, where 4 sf plus 1.5 sf per business name is allowed
Canopy address sign	Compliant
Wall property ID Sign (Address Sign)	Extends beyond the wall height where exceedance beyond the wall height is not allowed
Parking ID Sign (Directional Wall sign)	89.75 sf proposed where 6 sf is allowed
Parking Directional Sign	7.36 sf where 3 sf is allowed

530 Lytton Avenue	
Type of Sign	Code Compliance (or deviation)

Freestanding directory sign	6.5 sf plus 1.5 sf per business name, where 4 sf plus 1.5 sf per business name is allowed
Wall property ID sign (Address)	Compliant
Parking ID sign (Directional Wall Sign)	69.8 sf where 6 sf is allowed
Parking blade sign	7.36 sf where 3 sf is allowed

The proposed sign materials include umber black aluminum as well as perforated aluminum for the sign surface with white acrylic push-through lettering. All signs include LED internal illumination or LED strip up lighting.

Requested Entitlements, Findings and Purview:

The following discretionary applications are being requested:

- Architectural Review – Major (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 & Community Environment 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 finding requires project redesign or denial. The findings to approve an AR application are provided in Attachment B.
- Architectural Review – Master Sign Program: In accordance with PAMC section 16.20.030 "Master sign program" means a program allowing the occupants of a building or project including a number of buildings to combine the total lawful sign coverage into one or more lawful signs in an integrated design concept. The master sign program shall designate the sign locations and areas of all signs in the program, as well as typical sign designs, colors and faces. Pursuant to the approval of the master sign program, subsequent individual signs may be erected without further design review. The findings for a Master Sign Program are those for Major Architectural Review.
- Architectural Review – Sign Exception: In accordance with PAMC section 16.20.040 “Sign Exception” means an application made in conjunction with an architectural review application which requests a deviation from what is allowed in the Sign code. Sign Exceptions are evaluated against specific findings, provided in Attachment B.

ANALYSIS¹

The proposed projects have been reviewed for conformance with relevant plans, policies and regulations. Staff finds that the project is in conformance with these requirements or is seeking through the requested permits permission to deviate from certain code standards in a manner

¹ The information provided in this section is based on analysis prepared by the report author prior to the public hearing. The Architectural Review Board in its review of the administrative record and based on public testimony may reach a different conclusion from that presented in this report and may choose to make alternative findings. A change to the findings may result in a final action that is different from the staff recommended action in this report.

that is consistent with the code. Staff has also concluded that the project is consistent with the Architectural review findings as detailed further in this section.

Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan, Area Plans and Guidelines²

ARB Finding #1 requires that the design be consistent and compatible with applicable elements of the Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan. The projects would provide high quality signage, consistent with Comprehensive Plan goals and policies related to high quality design. Specifically, the project is consistent with Policy L-6.10, which encourages high quality signage that is attractive, appropriate for the location, and balances visibility needs with aesthetic needs. A summary of the project's consistency with the Comprehensive Plan is provided in the findings under ARB Finding #1 in Attachment B.

Municipal Code Compliance³

Attachment D includes a detailed review of the proposed project's consistency with applicable zoning standards or the areas in which the applicant is seeking, through the requested permits, permission to deviate from the standards in a manner that is consistent with the exceptions process outlined in the sign code. Specifically, the Master Sign Program at 525 University includes one sign that is code compliant (canopy address sign) and four signs that include minor deviations from the code. The Master Sign Program at 530 Lytton Avenue includes one sign that is code compliant (Address Wall Sign). Overall, the proposed sign packages replace existing signs in a manner that will create a more modern and cohesive design. While exceptions are requested, they are comparable or reduced in comparison to the existing signage, and appropriate based on the scale of the sites and buildings.

The proposed signs are consistent with the Context Based Design Criteria for the CD-C zoning District (PAMC 18.18.110). The signs help define the primary entrances to the parking, buildings, and site overall. They improve wayfinding within the site for pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles. The Downtown Design Guidelines likewise do not focus on signage, but the project meets the Guidelines to improve signage related to parking, and to utilize signage as a visual anchor for the site.

Directory Signs

Per PAMC 16.20.160, a directory sign is a sign that displays the names of the occupants of a building. These signs must be situated at least two feet inside the property line and has a height limit of 8 feet. The maximum sign area is four square feet, plus one and one-half square feet per name, up to 75 sf maximum. The proposed directory signs at both addresses are more than four square feet of non-business name sign area, which says the address of the building. Essentially, the project has combined a monument sign for the address with the proposed directory sign for the site, however staff has treated each of these as directory signs. The height of the sign is

² The Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan is available online: bit.ly/PACompPlan2030

³ The Palo Alto Zoning Code is available online: http://www.amlegal.com/codes/client/palo-alto_ca

allowed, but the total address area is 6.5 sf where 4 sf is allowed. A minor deviation from the code for which a sign exception is requested. Staff supports this exception, as the buildings do not have other monument signage on this facade, the size of the signs are appropriate to the scale of the building, and the signage is for an address.

Parking ID Signs

The proposed parking ID signs, which read “Welcome to 525 University Avenue” and “Welcome to 530 Lytton” and indicate entrances and exits to the underground garage are considered directional signage. Directional signage, per PAMC 16.20.160, does not include any business names and provides directional information only. They are limited to 6 square feet (sf) and a height of 3 feet for signs located more than 20 feet from a property line. The proposed signs are 23 sf and 3 feet tall. However, this signage is unique and encompasses address signage with safety and directional signage. The size is appropriate to the scale of the wall on which they are located and are appropriate to the scale of what is legible for drivers. They are also similar in size to the parking directional signages existing on the site.

Parking Directional and Blade Sign

A small parking directional sign is proposed for 525 University Avenue and a small blade sign for 530 Lytton Avenue. Both directional signs and blades are typically limited to 3 square feet and 3 ft tall when located within 20 ft of a property line. However, in this case larger signs are necessary for safety (they include a car indicator signal for visibility for pedestrians and bicyclists), and the size is consistent with the scale of the buildings. Each sign is approximately 7 sf.

Wall sign at 525 University

There is a proposed sign above the retaining wall for the raised landscaping area. This sign most aligns with a wall sign and therefore is being proposed as such. However, the sign is located in a manner that extends beyond the top of the wall on which it is mounted on, which is not typically allowed. This code is intended to stop signs from exceeding the height of a building rather than a retaining wall, and staff finds that the sign exception is appropriate in this circumstance.

The findings for these requested sign exceptions are provided in Attachment B.

Consistency with Historic Eligibility

The building at 525 University is California Register of Historic Resources (CRHR) eligible, but not currently listed. Nevertheless, the proposed site signage would not have any impact on the site’s eligibility for the CRHR.

Consistency with Application Findings

The existing buildings are in the commercial downtown area. The two buildings create an office campus environment that encompasses the entire block between Cowper Street and Tasso Street, and University Avenue and Lytton Avenue. Therefore, the building façades are significantly larger than most other buildings within the downtown area. They also have unique

mid-block entrances to the below grade parking garage, with tall retaining walls even when the ramp reaches grade. The size of the two parking signs are appropriate based on the size of the driveways and the need for the signs to be visible for both drivers, bikers, and pedestrians. The proposed sign packages replace existing signs, in a manner that will create a more modern and cohesive design. While exceptions are requested, they are comparable to the existing signage or otherwise function in a cohesive manner to reduce excessive signage across the site. For example, the two directory signs function as both monument signs with the building addresses, and directory signs listing the businesses within the buildings. If the directory signs were reduced, monument signs would still be desired, leading to additional signs being added. The scale of the directory signs are appropriate to the scale of the building.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

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 May 3, 2024, which is 12 days in advance of the meeting. Postcard mailing occurred on May 2, 2024, which is 13 days in advance of the meeting.

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 the provisions of CEQA per CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 and 15311. Specifically, CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 considers minor alterations to existing buildings to be categorically exempt from CEQA. CEQA Guidelines Section 15311 considers on-premise signs for commercial developments to be exempt from CEQA. None of the exceptions to the exemptions under 15300.1 would apply.

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: Draft ARB Findings

Attachment C: Draft Conditions of Approval

Attachment D: Zoning Comparison Table

Attachment E: Project Plans

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⁴ Emails may be sent directly to the ARB using the following address: arb@cityofpaloalto.org

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 and environmental documents online:

1. Go to: bit.ly/PAPendingprojects
2. Scroll down to find “525 University Avenue” and “530 Lytton Avenue” and click either for the address link
3. On these project-specific webpages you will find a link to the project plans and other important information

Direct Link to Project Webpages:

<https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/Departments/Planning-Development-Services/Current-Planning/Projects/525-University-Avenue>

and

<https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/Departments/Planning-Development-Services/Current-Planning/Projects/530-Lytton-Avenue>

Materials Boards:

Color and material boards will be available in the chambers during the ARB hearing.