



Agenda Report

19-1194

Agenda Date: 11/13/2019

REPORT TO PLANNING COMMISSION

SUBJECT

Public Hearing: Action on a Variance from the Sign Ordinance for the size and number of signs at 3975 Freedom Circle.

REPORT IN BRIEF

Project: Variance to allow two wall signs on one side of a building at a height of over 35 feet where only one sign would typically be allowed and increased total sign area at 3975 Freedom Circle.

Applicant: Corporate Sign Systems

Owner: 3975 Freedom Circle, LLC

General Plan: High Intensity Office / R&D

Zoning: PD - Planned Development

Site Area: 10.12 acres

Existing Site Conditions: Developed with two twelve story towers and a parking garage

Surrounding Land Uses

North: Hotel

South: US 101 and Office

East: Office

West: Great America Parkway

Issues: Consistency with the City's General Plan and Zoning Ordinance

BACKGROUND

On September 24, 2019, the applicant, Corporate Sign Systems, on behalf of the property owner, 3975 Freedom Circle LLC, filed an application for a sign Variance. The purpose of the Variance is to allow two wall signs on one side of a building at a height of over 35 feet where only one sign would typically be allowed, and to increase the total sign area permitted. The property was developed with two twelve story towers and a parking garage through a Planned Development (PD) Zoning and Architectural Review in 1998. The most recent Master Sign Program was approved in 2015 for the site and allows 300 square-feet of signage on the top parapet of the west and south building elevations, for a total of 600 square feet of wall signage. The Master Sign Program also includes monument and directional signage for the entirety of the site.

DISCUSSION

The proposal is subject to the sign regulations of the Zoning Code unless a variance is granted by the Planning Commission. Pursuant to Chapter 18.108 of the City's Zoning Ordinance, where practical difficulties, unnecessary hardships and effects inconsistent with the general purposes of the Zoning Code may result from the strict application of certain provisions, variances may be granted. However, granting of a variance would require making the findings in SCCC Section 18.108.040,

including that there are unusual conditions applying to the land or building which do not apply generally in the same district.

The applicant proposes two wall signs on the top parapet on the west side of the existing building facing Great America Parkway. The purpose of the signs is to advertise two new building tenants, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Ignio. The signs would be 297 square feet and 265 square feet in size, respectively. The existing 314 square foot KPMG sign on the south side of the building would remain in place, as well as the other property and wayfinding signage.

Consistency with General Plan

The project site has a General Plan land use designation of High Intensity Office/R&D. This designation is intended for high rise or campus like developments for corporate headquarters and R&D. The proposed variance is consistent with the following General Plan policies:

- 5.3.1 P24: Coordinate sign programs for commercial uses to promote continuity, improve streetscape design and reduce visual clutter. The proposal is consistent with this policy in that the new signage will allow two visually consistent signs to locate on one building façade. This will improve visibility of the business located within the building and the signs are designed and placed on opposite sides of the façade to avoid visual clutter. The signs are also proportionate in size to the 12-story office tower façade where they would be placed.
- 5.3.1 P25: Provide gateway signage at key entries into the City of Santa Clara, if feasible. The proposed signs are located at a key Santa Clara gateway, the intersection of Great America Parkway and US 101. This is an important entry to the north side of Santa Clara and represents the most concentrated area of business uses. While not a City gateway sign, the proposed signs are representative of the overall business district.

Zoning Conformance

Per Section 18.80.050 of the Sign Ordinance, signs cannot exceed a height of 35 feet above the ground level, except for building signs for buildings which are four stories or greater in height. On such taller buildings, not more than one sign may be placed on each side of the building above the ground floor level. In addition, the current master sign program only allows 300 square feet of signage on the west elevation and 300 square feet on the south elevation, where the existing KPMG sign is located.

As proposed, two new signs 297 square feet and 265 square feet in size would be located on the western façade. The western building façade is 265 feet in length, while the total street frontage on Great America Parkway for both towers and parking garage is approximately 986 feet. The building and overall site are substantial in size and the signs are in scale with the structure. By locating the signs on opposite sides of the façade, the visual impact is limited.

The building was built speculatively without specific tenants confirmed. As new tenants are occupying the building, they are seeking equal advertisement on the most prominent frontage. In addition, the parking garage location on the Great America Parkway site frontage requires that the signs are located at a higher elevation for visibility.

Conclusion

As a major entry to the business and industrial center of Santa Clara, the proposed signs work as an

entryway into the northern City limit and business hub. The size allows maximum readability for drivers along the street and allows two prominent businesses to advertise their Santa Clara locations on an important corridor, Great America Parkway. In addition, the signs are situated in such a way to minimize visual clutter on the building face.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The proposed is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) per Section 15311 (a) Class 11 "Accessory Structures," which exempts construction, or placement of minor structures accessory to existing commercial, industrial, or institutional facilities, including on-premise signs.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no cost to the City other than administrative staff time and expense typically covered by processing fees paid by the applicant.

COORDINATION

This report was coordinated with the City Attorney's Office.

PUBLIC CONTACT

On November 1, 2019, a notice of public hearing of this item was posted in three conspicuous locations within 300 feet of the project site and mailed to property owners within 300 feet of the project site. At the time of preparation of this report no comments related to this project were received from the public.

Public contact was made by posting the Council agenda on the City's official-notice bulletin board outside City Hall Council Chambers. A complete agenda packet is available on the City's website and in the City Clerk's Office at least 72 hours prior to a Regular Meeting and 24 hours prior to a Special Meeting. A hard copy of any agenda report may be requested by contacting the City Clerk's Office at (408) 615-2220, email clerk@santaclaraca.gov <<mailto:clerk@santaclaraca.gov>> or at the public information desk at any City of Santa Clara public library.

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution approving the variance allowing the increased sign area for two wall signs placed at a height of over 35 feet on the western façade at 3975 Freedom Circle.

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Reviewed by: Alexander Abbe, Assistant City Attorney
Approved by: Reena Brilliot, Planning Manager

ATTACHMENTS

1. Project Data Summary Sheet
2. Applicant's Statement of Justification
3. Development Plans
4. Resolution Approving a Variance
5. Conditions of Approval