



CITY of CALABASAS

PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA REPORT
SEPTEMBER 2, 2021

TO: Members of the Planning Commission

FROM: Jaclyn Rackerby, Associate Planner

FILE NO(s): PL1900398, MSCP-2021-002

PROPOSAL: Request for a new Sign Program and Minor Scenic Corridor Permit for The Courtyard at the Commons shopping center located at 23741 Calabasas Rd (APN: 2068-002-024 and APN: 2068-002-025) within the Commercial Mixed Use (CMU) zoning district and Scenic Corridor (-SC) overlay zone.

APPLICANT: Mitch Chemers

RECOMMENDATION: Adopt Planning Commission Resolution No. 2021-726, approving File No(s). PL1900398 and MSCP-2021-002.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the Commission adopt Resolution No. 2021-726 approving File No(s). PL1900398 and MSCP-2021-002, a request for a Sign Program and Minor Scenic Corridor Permit to establish a new sign program for the Courtyard at the Commons shopping center.

REVIEW AUTHORITY:

The project is before the Planning Commission for review pursuant to Calabasas Municipal Code Section 17.30.050(C), which stipulates that the Planning Commission is the approval authority for all new sign programs. The applicant shall be required to obtain any necessary permits (sign permit, oak tree permit, building permit, etc.) prior to the installation of any sign permitted by the adopted sign program.

BACKGROUND:

On January 31, 2019, the applicant submitted an application for a new Sign Program for the existing Courtyard at the Commons shopping center, located at 23741 Calabasas Rd

(APN: 2068-002-024 and APN: 2068-002-025). The Development Review Committee reviewed the submitted application on February 11, 2019. The application was first deemed incomplete on March 1, 2019. Numerous resubmittals were made by the applicant, and numerous Notices of Incompleteness were sent by staff, and on April 21, 2021, the property owner designated Mitch Chemers as the new applicant to produce the sign program for the property. After all comments were addressed by the new applicant, the plans were deemed complete on August 17, 2021. Additionally, the Architectural Review Panel reviewed the proposed sign program on September 27, 2019, February 28, 2020, and on July 23, 2021. At the July 23, 2021 Architectural Review Panel meeting, the Panel recommended approval of the sign program as proposed to the Planning Commission.

STAFF ANALYSIS:

- A. **Site Design/Building Layout:** The applicant is proposing a new sign program for the existing shopping center known as the Courtyard at the Commons, located at 23741 Calabasas Rd. The subject site (APN: 2068-002-024 & APN: 2068-002-025) is located in the Commercial Mixed Use (CMU) zoning district, and is within the Scenic Corridor (-SC) overlay zone. The site is surrounded by the 101 freeway to the north, a hotel to the east, a commercial shopping center to the south, and office buildings to the west. The subject site is 6.76 acres in total, and is improved with an 88,362 square-foot commercial shopping center.
- B. **Parking:** In accordance with section 17.28.040(D)(4), the parking requirement for a shopping center is one space per 250 square feet of gross floor area, or where restaurants exceed 10 percent of the total gross floor area, that portion in excess of 10 percent of the gross floor area shall be calculated at one parking space per 100 square feet or as determined by a parking study. Because the sign program only includes signage proposed in areas of the property that currently are already landscaped/hardscape, there is no change in the existing number of on-site parking spaces, and there is no change in the number of parking spaces required.
- C. **Sign Program:** The purpose of a sign program is to integrate a project's signage into the architectural design of structures on the subject site. A sign program achieves a consistency and cohesiveness to the design and display of multiple permanent signs, while also ensuring adequate visibility of all signs and encouraging creativity and excellence in the design of signs. A sign program shall consist of a description, including dimensions, materials, locations, and illustration of all signs proposed on the site (CMC 17.30.050). The sign program shall have a unifying design theme or style, as approved by the Commission.

There is an existing program for the subject site that was approved by the Planning Commission on June 8, 2000. The proposed new sign program (Exhibit B) would

replace the existing sign program in its entirety, and provides standards for the commercial shopping center's signage (i.e. building mounted signs, monument signs, gateway signs, pedestrian signs, freeway-facing monument signs, and building-mounted freeway facing signs). All signs have been designed to conform with Chapter 17.30 of the Calabasas Municipal Code (CMC), including the proposed 16-foot height freeway facing monument sign, which is allowable pursuant to Section 17.30.070(C). Additionally, the sign program has been designed to ensure compatibility with the architectural style of the building. The sign program establishes allowed color, font and materials for each sign. The proposed sign program includes standards for the following signs:

Sign Type	Number of Signs
Building Mounted, tenant sign	1 per tenant
Building Mounted, secondary sign	1 per tenant with a second entrance (1 max.)
Building Mounted, freeway facing	1
Pedestrian	1 per tenant
Monument	2
Gateway signs	1 pair
Freeway facing monument	1

In accordance with Section 17.30.080 of the CMC, one freeway-facing monument sign is permitted for commercial shopping centers with five or more tenants. With space allocated for more than 20 tenants, the existing shopping center meets this requirement and is allowed to install a freeway facing monument sign. The maximum permitted height of a freeway facing monument sign is 16 feet if the sign is obscured by a physical barrier, the location of the sign is at a disadvantage for viewing due to its location at distance from a scenic corridor, the sign seeks to identify multiple tenants, or the sign is located along the freeway corridor, where traveling speed reduces the opportunity to read the sign. In this case, there is an existing 14'-6" Caltrans retaining wall between the freeway and the shopping center. The retaining wall obscures the lower 3 to 5 feet of the proposed freeway facing monument sign, depending on the direction of travel along the 101 freeway. Visibility of the shopping center and proposed sign is also obscured by the lower elevation of the 101 freeway, which is approximately 11 feet lower than the proposed sign. Given these circumstances, the 16-foot tall sign is justified because there are physical barriers and site conditions that obscure and reduce visibility of the proposed sign as viewed from the 101 freeway. Furthermore, the ARP recommended approval of the proposed 16-foot maximum height to the Planning Commission. The proposed "push through" halo illumination is in compliance with the allowed lighting type for freeway-facing monument signs. The sign advertises the name of the shopping center and includes space for five potential tenant signs. Finally, the color, materials and architectural style are compatible with the design of

the shopping center.

Per Section 17.90.020 of the CMC, a gateway sign is defined as two (2) monument signs flanking an entrance located on a public right-of-way and matching in size, design and sign area. In accordance with Section 17.30.080 of the CMC, gateway signs are permitted at each access point, with a minimum separation between monument or gateway signs of 150 feet. With approximately 274 feet from the nearest monument sign, the proposed gateway sign complies with this requirement.

Each monument of the proposed gateway sign is 4'4" in height and 14'10" in length, and the sign copy is limited to shopping center identification. The signs are halo illuminated, and match the materials and architectural style of the shopping center.

- D. Architectural Review Panel (ARP): The proposed sign program was reviewed by the Architectural Review Panel on September 27, 2019, February 28, 2020, and July 23, 2021. At the first two ARP meetings, the Panel expressed that the signs were too corporate in design, too large, and that there were too many proposed signs (examples of initially proposed signs shown in Figure 1 & Figure 3). Subsequently, a revised sign program was resubmitted by the new applicant, Mitch Chemers, to address the ARP's prior recommendations. The applicant altered the design of the signs, and reduced the size & massing of the signs along Calabasas Rd (see Figure 2 & Figure 4), and removed two building-mounted signs from the proposed sign program.



Figure 1: Initial proposal. 10' height monument sign reviewed by ARP on September 27, 2019.



Figure 2: Revised proposal. 5'6" height monument sign reviewed by ARP on July 23, 2021.



Figure 3: Initial proposal. 7'6" gateway sign reviewed by ARP on September 27, 2019.



Figure 4: Revised proposal. 4'4" gateway sign reviewed by ARP on July 23, 2021.

At the July 23rd ARP meeting, the Panel noted that they support the revised sign program design, and that they support the proposed 16 foot tall freeway-facing monument sign because it provides better visibility from the freeway corridor. The Panel unanimously recommended approval of the design as proposed to the Planning Commission.

REQUIRED FINDINGS:

The findings required in Section 17.62.050(D) of the Calabasas Municipal Code for a Minor Scenic Corridor Permit and Section 17.30.050(F) for a Sign Program are contained in the resolutions attached as Exhibit A.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

This project is Exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15301 (e)(2) (Existing Facilities) and Section 15311 (Class 11 – Accessory Structures (a) on-premise signs) of the California CEQA Guidelines.

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL:

See conditions contained in the resolutions attached as Exhibit A.

PREVIOUS REVIEWS:

Development Review Committee (DRC):

February 11, 2019 Minor comments.

Architectural Review Panel (ARP):

September 27, 2019 The applicant, Arno Ford, joined the ARP members and staff at the project review table, and identified themselves. Staff explained the proposed project and requirement for having a sign program. The applicant, Arno Ford, described the design of the signs, what they are made of, and how they tie into the building design. The panel commented that the proposed monument signs are too large for the shopping center. The design of the monument signs are too corporate, and should relate more closely to the architecture of the existing center. The Panel continued the item to a future meeting.

February 28, 2020 Associate Planner Gilli summarized the project and reviewed for the Panel members the remaining issues for consideration. Applicant Arno Furstenberg introduced himself to the Panel and provided an overview of revisions made to the proposed sign program. Also present to respond to questions was Ms. Karen Mayer. The Panel asked questions of Mr. Furstenberg and Ms. Mayer, and asked questions of staff.

Panel members expressed the following concerns and observations regarding the proposed sign program design:

1) The Panel appreciated the level of detail provided within the revised program.

2) The sizes of some of the proposed signs are rather large and somewhat out of scale with the smaller scale of the center. If the sizes of the signs can be reduced somewhat, particularly the tallest monument sign, that would be an improvement.

3) There are too many signs proposed for this small shopping center. For example, would the applicant consider having only three monument signs along Calabasas Road instead of four, as presently proposed?

4) The Panel recommended refinement of some of the lighting components to conform to City Code, particularly the Dark Skies Ordinance, and asked the applicant to work with staff to accomplish this.

Based on the revisions made to the proposed sign program, and with the aforementioned concerns and comments, the Panel recommended that the proposed sign program proceed to the Planning Commission.

July 23, 2021 Associate Planner Rackerby provided the panel with an overview of the applicant's changes to the sign program since the ARP's last review of the project on February 28, 2020. The applicant, Mitch Chemers, further described the proposed revisions to the sign program, and answered questions of the Panel. The Panel noted that it supports the revised sign

program design, and supports the proposed 16 foot tall freeway-facing monument sign because it provided better visibility from the freeway corridor. Acting chair Stockton made a motion to recommend approval of the sign program to the Planning Commission, with a second by panel member Moradi. Motion carried 3-0.

The Panel also noted after the vote that the City should look into the possibility of freshening up the appearance of the retaining wall on the north side of the courtyard at the commons (along the freeway), which has a deteriorated and disorganized appearance, to better enhance the visual quality of the freeway corridor.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Exhibit A: Planning Commission Resolution No. 2021-726
- Exhibit B: Sign Program
- Exhibit C: Freeway Facing Monument Sign Height Comparison
- Exhibit D: ARP Minutes from September 27, 2019
- Exhibit E: ARP Minutes from February 28, 2020
- Exhibit F: Draft ARP Minutes from July 23, 2021

TECHNICAL APPENDIX

	Proposed	CMC Requirement	CMC Compliance
Building Mounted, Tenant Sign			
Sign Area	0.5 SF per linear, 15 SF min and 80 SF max	0.5 SF per linear, 15 SF min and 80 SF max	Yes
Maximum Number	1 per tenant	1 per tenant	Yes
Location	Centered on wall	Centered on wall or canopy over store front	Yes
Sign Copy	Tenant identification	Tenant identification	Yes
Illumination	Interior illumination	Lighting allowed	Yes
Building Mounted, Secondary Sign			
Sign Area	½ total signage allowed for primary sign	½ total signage allowed for primary sign	Yes
Quantity	1 per secondary entrance - Max 2 signs per business	1 per secondary entrance - Max 2 signs per business	Yes
Location	At secondary main entrance, side of building adjacent to parking	At secondary main entrance, side of building adjacent to parking	Yes
Sign Copy	Tenant identification	Tenant identification	Yes
Lighting	Interior illumination	Lighting allowed	Yes
Building Mounted, Freeway Facing			
Sign Area	28.44 SF	0.5 SF per linear; 80 SF max	
Quantity	1	1 per commercial center	Yes
Location	Facing 101 Fwy, replacing existing building mounted freeway facing sign	N/A	Yes
Sign Copy	Shopping Center identification	Limited to single name only	Yes
Lighting	None	Non-illuminated only	
Pedestrian			

Sign Area	3 SF per face	3 SF max	Yes
Quantity	1 per tenant	1 per tenant	Yes
Location	Projecting perpendicular to wall, centered under canopy/eave	Projecting perpendicular to wall, centered under canopy/eave	Yes
Sign Copy	Tenant identification	N/A	Yes
Lighting	None	Non-illuminated only	Yes
Monument			
Sign Area	24.8 SF per face	50 SF max sign copy	Yes
Sign Height	5'6"	10 ft max	
Quantity	2	2 max	Yes
Location	In landscaped area at driveway, 236'6" separation	In landscaped area, 150' separation minimum	Yes
Sign Copy	Shopping center and up to 5 tenants	Multitenant signs allowed via sign program	Yes
Lighting	Halo	Lighting allowed	Yes
Gateway signs			
Sign Area	21.12 SF per face	Up to 200 SF	Yes
Sign Height	4'4"	10 ft max	Yes
Quantity	1 pair	1 pair per access driveway	Yes
Location	In landscaped area at driveway, 274'4" from nearest monument sign	In landscaped area, 150' separation from monument sign	Yes
Sign Copy	Shopping Center identification	N/A	Yes
Lighting	Halo	Lighting allowed	Yes
Freeway Facing Monument			
Sign Area	52 SF	Up to 200 SF max	Yes
Sign Height	16 ft	16 ft max	Yes
Quantity	1	1 max	Yes
Location	In landscaped area	In landscaped area	Yes
Sign Copy	Shopping center and 5 tenants max	N/A	Yes
Lighting	Halo	Halo only	Yes

Location Map:



Surrounding Properties:

	Existing Land Use	Zoning	General Plan Designation
Site	Shopping Center	Commercial, Mixed Use	Mixed Use 0.95
West	Office Building	Commercial, Mixed Use	Mixed Use 0.95
East	Hotel	Commercial, Old Town	Business – Old Town
North	101 Freeway	N/A	N/A
South	Shopping Center	Commercial, Mixed Use	Mixed Use 0.95