



## Planning Department

**TO:** Chairperson and Members of the Planning Commission

**FROM:** Holly Smyth, Planning Director, AICP  
Dennis Tagashira

**SUBJECT:** ORB Partnership's Design Review Permit - #DRP 18-04 Design Review to modify the previously-approved Master Sign Program for the Hercules Retail Center located at the southeast corner of San Pablo and Sycamore Avenues, (Assessor Parcel Number: 404-040-152-7 00) regarding wall, pylon, and monument signage

### 1. RECOMMENDATION

That the Planning Commission request staff report, open public hearing, invite applicant to make a presentation, receive comments from public and Commission, and consider adopting Resolution #18-12 approving Design Review Permit #DRP 18-04 new Master Sign Program for Hercules Retail Center and approving Sharetea's proposed signage

### 2. PROCESS

Recently adopted Zoning Text Amendment #ZTA 18-03 amended Chapter 34 of the Zoning Ordinance related to Master Sign Programs. Section 34.103, requires that "the Planning Commission shall hold a public hearing as specified in the Zoning Ordinance, review the application based on the criteria of this chapter, and take action when such signage includes a freeway-oriented, freestanding pylon sign, or the approval of Master Sign Programs or sign variances.

The Design Review section of the City of Hercules Zoning Ordinance (Chapter 42) defines the purpose of and types of projects subject to Design Review, and includes any exterior alteration of any structure on non-residential property be reviewed by the Planning Commission and must meet required findings prior to approval. Because the project is subject to discretionary review, a public hearing notice was sent to property owners within 300 feet of the subject property and published in a general circulation newspaper on July 6 2018, for the July 16, 2018 Planning Commission hearing.

Concurrently, Sharetea (one of the incoming tenants within this shopping center) for their wall signage above the ceramic tile area and under canopy signage in conformance with the proposed new Master Sign Program, which would normally be administratively approved with an existing Master Sign Program.

### **3. RELEVANT HISTORY**

Hercules Retail Center was approved in June, 1994 for:

- a.) a 29,320 square foot commercial shopping center including a gasoline dispensing station and car wash operation, a drive-through fast-food restaurant, and in-line retail commercial shops, and 114 parking spaces.
- b.) Also approved at the same time was the Spanish Mediterranean architecture design of the shopping center which included the use of 1-1/2 feet by 10 feet teal-colored ceramic tile fascia bands above each tenant space as the background for individual businesses storefronts identification, the design of stucco fascia band treatments, 10-foot wide colonnades, and a focal tower element in the middle of two separate commercial buildings.
- c.) A 55-foot high freestanding freeway-oriented pylon sign (later modified to 70-feet high), and 2 ground-mounted, internally-illuminated monument signs 8-feet high, 14-feet wide, 3-1/2 feet deep located along the San Pablo Avenue frontage, and internally-illuminated canister signs 1-1/2 feet by 13 feet at the gable elements of the in-line shops.
- d.) A subdivision map subdividing one single lot into four commercial lots.

### **4. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The applicant is requesting Design Review approval to modify the previous 1994 City approval for the Hercules Retail Center's Master Sign Program, and allow individual business tenants the following 3 choices of advertising their store front businesses:

- a.) Permit internally-illuminated channel letters within the ceramic teal-colored tile area, arched fascia bands above the storefront (See "Typical A" and "Typical B" storefront elevation). The sign in this ceramic tile area is not allowed to exceed 10 feet in length. If the sign is 8 feet or less in length, the maximum sign height is 2 feet. (The height of individual letters do not exceed 24 inches) If the length of the sign is more than 8 feet, the maximum sign height is 18 inches. If double line text is provided, higher letters are allowed so long as a 4" vacant frame is retained from natural architectural features.
- b.) Allow internally-illuminated channel letter signs above the storefront's ceramic tile fascia bands but below the roof eaves to not exceed 16" in letter height and 10' in signage width. (see "Typical C").
- c.) Allow the installation of new 1 foot by 4 feet, non-illuminated, double-faced sheet metal under canopy signs to be placed in the existing 10-foot wide pedestrian corridor for individual storefront businesses (see "Typical D").

Additionally, staff has added the approval of Sharetea's proposed signage that has been drafted to conform to the proposed new Master Sign Program to save on costs and staff time to separate process as one review for the ease of processing

### **5. ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION**

The Planning Commission does not need to take any environmental action regarding the proposed changes to the sign program as the proposed exterior changes to the existing Hercules Retail Center signage are exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and do not change the existing structures housing the signage. Projects such as

the exterior changes proposed are classified as “Categorically Exempt” Class 15: Existing Facility (Section 15031e of the California Environmental Quality Act), and therefore do not require an environmental impact report or the filing of a negative declaration.

## 6. REQUIRED FINDINGS

The Design Review section of the Zoning Code lists a total of five required findings that the decision making body must make to approve a Design Review application (Section 42.500). The Findings address a number of issues including 1) the proposed project’s consistency with the City’s General Plan and Zoning, 2) whether the project is in the best interests of the public’s health, safety, and welfare, 3) the importance of site planning considerations such as the orientation and location of the building, 4) architectural considerations including the character, scale, quality of design, architectural relationship with other buildings on the site and other design considerations such as lighting and signage, and 5) the appropriateness and extent of the proposed landscaping.

Given that this project involves modifying an existing approve Master Sign Program for an existing retail-commercial shopping center with no change to the footprints of the existing buildings, site plan, or landscape plan, staff is recommending the Planning Commission make all required findings in the positive.

**Fact/Finding 1 Zone and General Plan.** The approval of the design review plan is in general compliance with all provisions of Chapter 42- Design Review section of the Zoning Ordinance, pertinent provisions of the Zoning Ordinance and applicable zoning and land use regulations, including but not limited to the Hercules General Plan as amended and any specific plan.

Design Review Permit #DRP 18-04 is a request to allow individual storefront businesses at the Hercules Retail Center to add allowance for under canopy signage, signage above the existing teal tile areas, and the allow up to 7 tenants on the pylon sign and to affirm/clarify the remaining components of the existing sign program. The table below shows how the proposed Master Sign Program compare to the existing City Sign Ordinance. Once approved, Master Sign Program are allowed to deviate from the City Code as approved so that it may better harmonize with the buildings and site characteristics. Staff has worked with the applicant to make a few adjustments from the original submittal to best harmonize with the site characteristics.

Sharetea’s signage proposal conforms to the proposed new Master Sign Program.

**Fact/Finding 2 – Public Health, Safety and General Welfare.** The approval of design review plan is in the best interests of the public health, safety, and general welfare.

The proposed additional changes to the exterior signs of the existing commercial shopping center will only modernize and enhance the appearance of the Hercules Retail Center facility. Therefore, the approval of Design Review Permit # 18-04 allows additional choices for tenants to advertise their businesses using the revised Master Sign Program which is in the best interests of the public health safety, and general welfare.

**Table 1: Signage comparison under the proposed Master Sign Program\***

Sign Type	Number of Signs	Size Limits	Signage Copy Area	City Standard (per Zoning Ordinance)	Notes
Pylon Sign	1	Existing structure is 70' tall by 10' wide that was previously approved by the City	<b>7 max tenants in 4 rows</b>	90 ft. tall; 250 sf max.; 3 onsite tenant maximum	Received 2 prior variances to allow more tenant space
Two (2) Double-sided Monument Signs	2	<b>Existing previously approved monument sign structure is approximately 8' tall x 14' wide x 3½' deep</b>	<b>25.5 sq ft per side</b>	6 ft. tall; 32 sf max; 1 per 600 ft. of lot frontage	Double-sided; Each side approx. 25.5 square feet of total changeable copy area for 6 tenant slots
Tenant Wall Signage in Ceramic Tile Area (see Typical A & B)	Potentially 1 per tenant as approved by owner	-Maximum 18" high letters if 8-10' wide -Maximum 24" high letters if < 8' wide -Additional letter height (to be 24" or 30) allowed if using 2 lines of text so long as approved by owner & 4" vacant frame retained from natural architectural features	-15 sf -16 sf -Varies	100 sf max.	Individual Channel Letters with internally illuminated colored neon tubes to match plexi color of letters
Tenant Wall Signage on Stucco area above ceramic Tile Area (see Typical C)	Potentially 1 per tenant as approved by owner	-Maximum 18" high letters if 8-10' wide -Maximum 24" high letters if < 8' wide -Additional letter height (to be 24" or 30) allowed if using 2 lines of text so long as approved by owner & 4" vacant frame retained from natural architectural features	-15 sf -16 sf -Varies	100 sf max.	Individual Channel Letters with internally illuminated colored neon tubes to match plexi color of letters
Under Canopy Signage (see Typical D) Aka "Suspended Signage"	1 per business max	-Maximum 12" tall x 48" wide at least 8' above the sidewalk	<b>4 sf</b>	Not specified	
Window Signage	Varies	-Maximum 144 square inches per door entrance -Prohibits all "sales" signs -All window signage not to exceed a maximum total of 25% of total window area	Max 144 sq inches per door <25% coverage <b>(no provision listed for clear 3' exterior windows)</b>	All window signage shall not exceed more than 25% of glass area of all windows and is at least 3' from the window frame of an exterior window and the majority of the interior is visible from the outside of the building.	

*\*Items in bold red indicate exceedance of City Standard without approval of an MSP*

**Fact/Finding 3 – Site characteristics provide desirable development environment.** General site considerations, including site layout, open space and topography, orientation and location of buildings, vehicular access, circulation and parking, setbacks, height, walls, fences, public safety and similar elements have been designed to provide a desirable environment for the development.

The proposed changes to the Hercules Retail Center Master Sign Program do not affect or modify the vehicular and pedestrian access to the site from San Pablo or Sycamore Avenues, or the original layout of the commercial buildings, landscaped medians, walls, or public safety, therefore this Finding can be made. **Fact/Finding 4 – Architecture compatibility.** General architectural considerations, including the character, scale, and quality of the design, the architectural relationship with the site and other buildings, building materials colors, screening of exterior appurtenances, exterior lighting and signing, and similar elements have been incorporated in order to insure the compatibility of this development with its design concept and the character of adjacent buildings.

Design Review Permit #DRP 18-04 does not propose to change any of the existing Hercules Retail Center’s Spanish Mediterranean architectural design, style or shape of the 19,329 square foot retail commercial shopping center. The modified Master Sign Program proposes to allow for additional internally-illuminated channel letter signage to be allowed to be install above the existing teal-colored ceramic canister signs if a storefront business so choses. However, the property owner would have the discretion to approve wall signage in the two areas of the wall.

**Fact/Finding 5 – Landscape.** General landscape considerations, including the location, type, size, color, texture and coverage of plant materials at the time of planting and after a 5 year growth period, provision for irrigation, maintenance and protection of landscaped areas and similar elements have been considered to insure visual relief, to complement buildings and structures, and to provide an attractive environment for the enjoyment of the public.

None of the proposed changes to the existing Master Sign Program for the Hercules Retail Center effects, modifies, or otherwise negatively impacts the project’s existing landscaping or irrigation system, therefore this Finding can be made.

## **7. ISSUES FOR PLANNING COMMISSION’S CONSIDERATION**

Currently, Hercules Retail Center is shielded from some of the mature tree growth on sight. As a result, individual tenant signs constructed within the teal-colored ceramic tile fascia area are not easily visible from passenger vehicles driving past this shopping center. Because of this constraint, the Commission should consider permitting the applicant’s modifications to their approved Master Sign Program at the Hercules Retail Center discussed above. Additionally, allowing further splitting of signage on the pylon sign seems appropriate given the other site constraints as stated in the proposed criteria

Only Chase Bank, Kinder's BBQ, Tutti Frutti, and the Optometrist have 2 storefront signs that are within and above the arched ceramic tile face that can be seen from San Pablo Avenue. But, other businesses at this shopping center do not have signs above the arched ceramic tile fascias, as a result, cannot be seen unless drivers enter Hercules Retail Center.

Sharetea's proposed signage is attached to this staff report.

## **8. ATTACHMENTS**

- Attachment 1 - Resolution #18-12 with Conditions of Approval
  - Exhibit A Proposed Hercules Retail Center "Master Sign Program" Sign Criteria (with Typical A, B, C, and D drawing attachments and 12 photos to include June 2018 photos of Optometry, Tutti Frutti, Kinder's Chase bank, 7-foot pylon sign, ground-mounted monument signs
  - Exhibit B – Sharetea Signage Proposal