

# Agenda Report



**MEETING DATE:** Tuesday, May 7, 2024

**TO:** PLANNING COMMISSION

**FROM:** COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR MERRIAM  
ASSISTANT PLANNER MADRIGAL

**SUBJECT:** MASTER SIGN PROGRAM (PP2023-6374) FOR 950 AND 1052 EAST  
LAKE AVENUE (APN: 017-321-76 & 77)

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## RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Staff recommends the Planning Commission adopt a resolution approving a Master Sign Program (PP2023-6374) located at 950 and 1052 East Lake Avenue (APN 017-321-76 & 77), based on the attached findings and conditions of approval and finding project exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as a Class 1 Categorical Exemption pursuant to section 15301 of the CEQA Guidelines and a Class 3 Categorical Exemption pursuant to section 15303.

## BASIC PROJECT DATA

<b>Application:</b>	PP2023-6374
<b>Location:</b>	950 & 1052 East Lake Avenue (APN: 017-321-76 & 77)
<b>Lot Size:</b>	6.426± acres (279,917 SF)
<b>General Plan:</b>	Thoroughfare Commercial
<b>Zoning:</b>	CT (General Commercial)
<b>Surrounding:</b>	Multiple family residential, neighborhood commercial, neighborhood shopping center
<b>Existing Use:</b>	Shopping Center
<b>Proposed:</b>	Master Sign Program for East Lake Shopping Center
<b>Flood Zone:</b>	N/A

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## BACKGROUND:

On March 24, 2021, Mike Terron with Northwest Signs submitted preliminary plans via email to City staff to determine whether three additional monument signs could be erected at the East Lake Village Shopping Center.

On April 1, 2021, staff notified Mike Terron with Northwest Signs via email that the East Lake Village Shopping Center was not eligible for additional monument signs because the shopping

center had an existing monument sign. Staff noted that only one monument sign was allowed per shopping center as outlined in Section 8-6.120(b) of the Watsonville Municipal Code (WMC).

On November 18, 2021, code enforcement responded and confirmed three unpermitted sub-monument signs were constructed adjacent to East Lake Avenue at the East Lake Village Shopping Center. The sub-monument signs did not receive approval and were required to be removed.

On March 1, 2022, City Building Inspector Jose Perez verified that the sub-monument signs had been removed.

On August 5, 2022, Mike Terron with Northwest Signs submitted a Sign Permit application (PP2022-3929) requesting three “sub” monument signs at 906 East Lake Avenue. Similar plans were reviewed by City staff in April 2021. Staff notified Mike Terron that the East Lake Village Shopping Center was not eligible for additional monument signs because the shopping center had an existing monument sign. Staff noted that only one monument sign was allowed per shopping center as outlined in WMC §8-6.120(b).

On November 1, 2022, the Planning Commission adopted Resolution No. 17-22 (PC) recommending that the City Council adopt a new sign ordinance.

On December 13, 2022, the City Council adopted Ordinance No. 1450-22 (CM) repealing Chapter 6 (Signs) of Title 8 (Building Regulations) in its entirety and adding a new Chapter 14-21 (Signs) of Title 14 (Zoning) of the Watsonville Municipal Code.

On January 12, 2023, the new sign ordinance went into effect.

On October 5, 2023, Mike Terron with Northwest Signs submitted a Sign Application and plan set for a Master Sign Program that included three new sub-monument signs located at 906 East Lake Avenue for the East Lake Village Shopping Center.

On October 31, 2023, the applicant paid the permit fee for Master Sign Permit Application #PP2023-6332.

### **Proposal**

The proposed Master Sign Program (MSP) includes custom standards for signage throughout the East Lake Shopping Center. Specifically, the MSP includes:

- One primary monument sign adjacent to East Lake Avenue
- Three double-faced, freestanding, internally illuminated, multi-tenant, sub-monument signs along the property’s East Lake Avenue frontage
- 29 wall and projecting signs located adjacent to each tenant space
- Two new wall signs at the rear of Suite 1056 (Ace Hardware)
- 16 parking lot pole light banner signs
- Existing Roof Mounted sign for Suite 1012 with a maximum of 40 sq. ft.

- The project also includes a request for variations from the design standards of the sign ordinance ([WMC Chapter 14-21](#))

## **PROCESS**

### Master Sign Program

The Planning Commission is authorized to approve Master sign programs in accordance with the procedures set forth in [WMC §14-21.130\(g\)](#) if it can make the findings required by WMC [§14-12.1206](#).

The purpose of the Master Sign Program is to ensure the proper integration of uses which, because of their special nature, may be suitable only in certain locations or zoning districts or only provided that such uses are arranged or designed in a particular manner. This review shall be for the purpose of determining that the proposed use is, and will continue to be, compatible with surrounding, existing, or planned uses; and for the further purpose of establishing such special conditions as may be necessary to ensure the harmonious integration and compatibility of uses in the neighborhood and with the surrounding area ([WMC §14-12.501](#)).

## **STANDARD OF REVIEW & APPEAL PROCESS**

The decision whether to approve this Master Sign Permit is adjudicative and requires environmental review. For more information on standard of review and process, see the [Standard of Review and Process Overview](#) on the City website.

## **DISCUSSION:**

### Existing Site

The subject site is occupied by the East Lake Village Shopping Center. According to the Santa Cruz County Assessor's records, the shopping center was constructed in 1964. The East Lake Village Shopping Center serves the neighboring residential properties with an array of retail, restaurant, and personal services. The mix of uses at the shopping center includes a grocery store (Staff of Life), a brewery with retail sales (Fruition Brewing), a laundromat, a barbershop, a coffee shop, a sushi restaurant, a hardware store (ACE Hardware), and a liquor store. There are 28 existing tenant spaces within the East Lake Shopping Center.

Visibility from East Lake Avenue has been a challenge for the shopping center tenants due to the location of the buildings, which are set back 250 feet or more from East Lake Avenue. Most of the existing wall and projecting signage for the tenants is not legible from the sidewalk/street. Signage serves as a prominent identifier, enhancing visibility and attracting potential customers. Figure 1 identifies the subject site and surrounding uses.



**FIGURE 1** Aerial Photograph of Project Site and Surrounding Uses  
Source: Google Earth, 2021

### General Plan

The subject property is designated General Commercial on the General Plan Land Use Map and is within the Thoroughfare Commercial (CT) Zoning District. The project would allow for the establishment of a Master Sign Program within a 279,917± square foot shopping center.

The Project is consistent with the following Goals, Policies, and Implementation Measures of the 2005 General Plan:

- **Commercial Signs 4.C.5.** – The City shall enforce diligent control over the placement of commercial signs to avoid unsightly, dangerous, or misleading advertising.
- **Goal 5.3 Signs** – Ensure that commercial signs do not detract from street appearance or create hazardous visual distractions.
- **Policy 5.C Sign Control** – The design review process shall be used to ensure that signs (materials, size, color, lettering, and location) are aesthetically pleasing and compatible with surroundings.
- **Implementation Measure 5.C.2 Uniform Sign Program** – In order to discourage visual clutter, the City shall require integrated sign programs for projects with multiple business tenants.



## Zoning

The purpose of the Thoroughfare Commercial District is to provide for retail, commercial, service, amusement, and transient-residential uses which are appropriate to thoroughfare location and dependent upon thoroughfare travel; to be located only in the immediate vicinity of major streets and arterials or on the service drives thereof; and to provide convenient vehicular access and parking for the public ([WMC § 14-16.1200](#)).

The establishment of a Master Sign Program requires approval by the Planning Commission ([WMC § 14-21.130\(c\)](#)).

## Master Sign Program (MSP)

Pursuant to WMC §14-21.130(f), Master Sign Programs establish material, letter style, height, color and illumination of signs for shopping centers. Once it is in place, a MSP allows individual sign permits to be issued by the Community Development Director or their designee ministerially when in compliance with the MSP standards. The Planning Commission has added flexibility within the municipal code when reviewing an MSP.

The current shopping center currently has a diverse collection of wall signs and a monument sign, featuring various designs. For smaller, inline tenants, cabinet signs are the predominant style for wall signage, with differences in size, shape, and positioning. Anchor tenants, on the other hand, showcase larger custom wall signs. Additionally, there is currently one monument sign with signage for four tenants.

East Lake Shopping center does not have an existing MSP for the shopping center but is proposing an MSP to allow more streamlined and coordinated approach to signage for the multi-tenant commercial shopping center.

## Wall Signs

The proposed MSP for the East Lake shopping center would specify the allowed location, size, and design of wall signs throughout the center. The MSP includes a table on page fifteen which includes the current dimensions and the proposed maximum allowed sign area, letter height, and logo height for each tenant (Attachment 1). The MSP would allow tenants to choose between replacing an existing wall sign with a new wall sign of the same size and design, or constructing a new sign which meets the design requirements of the MSP with an administrative review sign permit. In addition, one current tenant (Hong Kong) has a 40-square-foot, roof-mounted, wall sign, which is included in the MSP. Several of the proposed wall sign dimensions exceed what would be allowed by [WMC §14-21.080\(f\)](#) and therefore require Planning Commission approval of a variation, as described in the variation section below.

## Design

The MSP proposes that new wall and projecting signs will consist of cabinet signs. The majority of the existing tenants have cabinet signs which are located along the roofline or hanging below the rooftop.

<b>Development Standards Review Table (Cabinet Signs)</b>					
<b>Suite</b>	<b>Tenant</b>	<b>Current Dimensions</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Proposed Sign Area (sq. ft.)</b>	<b>Variation</b>
906	Staff of Life	7'3" x 22' 6"	Wall	165	Yes
906	Staff of Life	6' x 16' 7"	Wall	100	Yes
906/1056	Staff of Life	10' x 15"	Wall	150	Yes
916	Fruition	1'6" x 8' 2"	Wall	16	No
918	Fruition	1'6" x 8'2"	Wall	16	No
924	India Gourmet, Inc	No Sign	Wall	16	No
926	B&M	1'6" x 8'2"	Wall	16	No
928	B&M	1'6" x 8'2"	Wall	16	No
930	Vacant	1'6" x 8'2"	Wall	16	No
936	Oaktree Property company	No sign	Wall	16	No
948	Coffee	1'6" x 8'2"	Wall	16	No
952	Sushi	1'6" x 8'2"	Wall	16	No
954	East Lake Food and Liquor	2'x7" x 16'	Wall	165	No
960	Bud's Barber Shop	1'6" x 8'2"	Wall	16	No
962	Taekwondo	1'6" x 8'2"	Wall	16	No
966	Alex and Olivia Flores	No sign	Wall	16	No
972	Klassy	1'6" x 8'2"	Wall	16	No
976	Fuentes Coin	1'6" x 8'2"	Wall	16	No
982	Eric Silva	1'6" x 8'2"	Wall	16	No
984	Laundry	1'6" x 8'2"	Wall	16	No
990	Dollar	2'7" x 16'	Wall	165	No
1004 & 1006	Alan K. & Gayle W.	1'6" x 8'2"	Wall	16	No
1012	HK	10" x 4'	Wall	40	Yes
1012	HK	2'4" x 1'	Wall	12	Yes
1012	HK	1'6" x 8'2"	Wall	16	Yes
1032	Villager	1'6" x 8'2"	Wall	16	No
1036	Ozzie's Pizza	1'6" x 8'2"	Wall	16	Yes
1036	Ozzie's Pizza	1'6" x 10'	Wall	16	Yes
1040	Carmona	1'6" x 8'2"	Wall	16	No
1044	TBH	1'6" x 8'2"	Wall	16	No
1046	RV's Computers	1'6" x 8'2"	Wall	16	No
1048	Michelle's	1'6" x 8'2"	Wall	16	No
1052	Lillian Liberatore	1'6" x 8'2"	Wall	19	No
1056	Ace	6'7" x 22'6"	Wall	165	Yes

1056	Ace	4' x 22'9"	Wall	92	Yes
1056	Ace	1'6" x 8'2"	Wall	16	Yes
1056	Ace	10' x 15'	Wall	150	Yes

### Anchor Tenant Signage

Currently the shopping center has four large wall signs for the four anchor tenants located under the gable roofs in those locations: Staff of Life, East Lake Food and Liquor, Dollar Saver, and Ace. The MSP proposes all gable signs to have a maximum size of 165 square feet. As shown in the table below, these additional wall signs exceed the permitted number and size of signage for those locations, so variations are requested. See variations section below.

<b>Development Standards Review Table – Anchor Tenant Signage</b>			
Suite	Tenant	Maximum Number	Maximum Area
906	Staff of Life	1 per shopfront	165 sq. ft.
954	East Lake Liquor	1 per shopfront	165 sq. ft.
990	Dollar	1 per shopfront	165 sq. ft.
1056	ACE	1 per shopfront	165 sq. ft.

### Monument Signs

The shopping center currently has one existing monument sign along East Lake Avenue. The MSP proposes to keep the existing 34-foot-tall primary monument sign and add three sub monument signs that will be located along East Lake Avenue. Each new sub-monument sign contains six tenant panel spaces on each side, for a total of 36 new tenant sign panel spaces. Tenant panels will have dark colored Lexan backgrounds with white vinyl copy lettering (Attachment 1).

### Size

Pursuant to the [WMC §14-21.080\(c\)](#), monument signs are limited to a maximum height of fifteen feet and maximum area of 200 square feet. The MSP is proposing to keep the current 34-foot-tall primary monument sign and add three new eight-foot-tall sub-monument signs, one adjacent to each of the driveways on East Lake Avenue.

Development Standards Review Table (Monument Signs)						
Address	Type	Max. Area (sq. ft.)	Max. Height (ft.)	Max. Number	Proposed Dimensions & Sign Area	Variation Requested
950 East Lake Avenue	Primary Monument Sign	200	15	1 per building frontage	34'-5" high x 13'-5" wide (462 sq. ft.)	Yes
	Sub-monument Sign	200	15	Permitted with Variation	9'-11" high x 7'-6" wide (74 sq. ft.)	Yes
	Sub Monument Sign	200	15	Permitted with Variation	9'-11" high x 7'-6" wide (74 sq. ft.)	Yes
	Sub Monument Sign	200	15	Permitted with Variation	9'-11" high x 7'-6" wide (74 sq. ft.)	Yes

#### Landscaping

Per [WMC §14-21.080\(c\)\(5\)](#), the area surrounding the base of a monument sign shall be landscaped with a minimum three (3') foot wide planter area (on each side of the sign) to include drought-tolerant species. Proposed plans for the three sub monument signs provide three feet of planter area on the two sides of the sign with signage, three feet of planting area on the parking lot side of the sign, and five feet of planter area between the street side of the sign and the sidewalk along East Lake Avenue. Therefore, the proposed sub-monument signs comply with the landscaping provisions of the sign ordinance.

#### Findings

To approve a Master Sign Program, the Planning Commission shall make the findings in [WMC § 14-12.1206](#). Those findings are listed below with Staff analysis.

- a. **The proposed signs are consistent with the General Plan, zoning code, and any applicable specific plan or area plan adopted by the City Council.**

#### **Staff Analysis:**

The subject property is designated Industrial on the General Plan Land Use Map and is within the Thoroughfare Commercial (CT) Zoning District. The Project would allow for the establishment of a Master Sign Program within a 279,917± square foot shopping center. As conditioned, the Project complies with the zoning regulations for the CT Zoning District.

The Project is also consistent with the following Policies and Implementation Measures of the Land Use Element of the 2005 General Plan:



- **Commercial Signs 4.C.5.** – The City shall enforce diligent control over the placement of commercial signs to avoid unsightly, dangerous, or misleading advertising.
- **Goal 5.3 Signs** – Ensure that commercial signs do not detract from street appearance or create hazardous visual distractions.
- **Policy 5.C Sign Control** – The design review process shall be used to ensure that signs (materials, size, color, lettering, and location) are aesthetically pleasing and compatible with surroundings.
- **Implementation Measure 5.C.2 Uniform Sign Program** – In order to discourage visual clutter, the City shall require integrated sign programs for projects with multiple business tenants.

**b. The proposed signs comply with all applicable standards in Chapter 14-21 (Signs).**

**Staff Analysis:**

With the approval of the variations listed below, the proposed signs will comply with all applicable standards in Chapter 14-21 (Signs):

- One monument sign with a sign area greater than 200 square feet
- Three sub monument signs
- Two new wall signs at the rear of Suite 1056
- wall signs exceeding the maximum sign area
- Four new anchor tenant signs for Suite 906, 954, 990, and 1056 exceeding the maximum sign area
- 16 commercial banner signs mounted on parking lot light poles – Two hanging, double-sided, 30-square-foot signs per pole (8 poles)

**c. The proposed signs will not adversely impact the public health, safety, or general welfare.**

**Staff Analysis:**

The proposed sub monument signs will be set back at least 10 feet from and public or private driveway ([WMC §14-21.080\(c\)\(6\)](#)) to ensure the signs do not create a vision nuisance for pedestrians and vehicle traffic. No other proposed signage in the MSP has the potential to adversely impact the public health, safety, or general welfare.

**d. The number, size, placement, design, and material of the proposed signs are compatible with the architectural design of buildings on the site.**

**Staff Analysis:**

The quantity and dimensions of the existing and proposed wall signs are compatible with the building frontage. The placement and design of the three new sub monument signs will complement the architectural design of the buildings in the shopping center and the existing primary monument sign.

- e. **The proposed signs are restrained in character and no larger than necessary for adequate identification.**

**Staff Analysis:**

The existing cabinet signs for the East Lake shopping center blend harmoniously with the building and will only increase in size by a few square feet. The monument signs are sized appropriately to fulfill their purpose of bringing awareness to the individual businesses within the East Lake Shopping Center, which are set back 250 feet or more from the sidewalk/street, and enhance the aesthetic of the site.

These findings are included in Exhibit A of the Resolution.

**Variations**

Pursuant to [WMC § 14-21.130\(g\)](#), the Planning Commission may approve variations to any type of signage as part of a Master Sign Program if they can make two findings in addition to the findings in [WMC § 14-12.1206](#). The Planning Commission has the ability to approve the increase in number and size of tenants due to geographical constraints of the site as long as the required findings can be made. Many of the tenants are not visible from adjacent properties or public streets and will rely on the monument signs for business visibility. All new face/design changes for future tenants will require an administrative review sign permit.

The proposed project is requesting the following variations:

- One monument sign with height greater than 15 feet and a sign area greater than 200 square feet
- Three sub monument signs
- Two new wall signs at the rear of Suite 1056
- Four anchor tenant signs for (Suite 906, 954, 990, 1056) exceeding the maximum allowable sign area
- 16 commercial banner signs mounted on parking lot light poles – Two hanging, double-sided, 30-square-foot signs per pole (8 poles)

Pursuant to [WMC §14-21.130\(g\)](#), the two findings required for Planning Commission approval of variations to MSP signage are below with staff analysis.

1. **The variation to sign standards, as designed and conditioned, is necessary and appropriate for the subject commercial site, in order to allow the site and the businesses located within it to be competitive with other businesses of a similar nature located elsewhere, and/or to be competitive with industry standards governing sale of the merchandise offered at the site.**

**Staff Analysis:**

Visibility from East Lake Avenue has been a challenge for the shopping center tenants due to the location of the buildings, which are set back 250 feet or more from East Lake Avenue. Most of the existing wall and projecting signage for the tenants is not legible

from the sidewalk/street. Signage serves as a prominent identifier, enhancing visibility and attracting potential customers.

- 2. The variation to sign standards, as designed and conditioned, will not have a significant adverse effect on the safety, character, and integrity of the surrounding area.**

**Staff Analysis:**

The project is located within an existing shopping center. The proposed master sign program would complement the existing commercial uses in the shopping center. Most of the existing signage for the tenants is located 250 feet or more away from the East Lake Shopping Center. The new signage serves as a prominent identifier, enhancing visibility and attracting potential customers.

Based on the analysis above, Staff recommends the Planning Commission approve the requested variations. These findings are included in Exhibit A of the Resolution.

**Environmental Review**

The project qualifies for a Class 1 Categorical Exemption because it is limited to repair, replacement or minor alteration to existing structures and facilities involving negligible or no expansion of use (CEQA Guidelines §15301). Additionally, the project also qualifies as a Class 3 Categorical Exemption because it will involve the construction and location of limited numbers of new small facilities or structures (CEQA Guidelines §15303).

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. Master Sign Permit Plans