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CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

(PRC Section 21152; CEQA Guidelines Section 15062)

Pursuant to Public Resources Code § 21152(b) and CEQA Guidelines § 15062, the notice should be posted with the County Clerk by mailing the form and posting fee payment to the following address: Los Angeles County Clerk/Recorder, Environmental Notices, P.O. Box 1208, Norwalk, CA 90650. Pursuant to Public Resources Code § 21167 (d), the posting of this notice starts a 35-day statute of limitations on court challenges to reliance on an exemption for the project. Failure to file this notice as provided above, results in the statute of limitations being extended to 180 days.

PARENT CASE NUMBER(S) / REQUESTED ENTITLEMENTS

CPC-2023-1637-SP

LEAD CITY AGENCY

City of Los Angeles (Department of City Planning)

CASE NUMBER

ENV-2023-1638-CE

PROJECT TITLE

Amendment to the Ventura-Cahuenga Boulevard Corridor Specific Plan

COUNCIL DISTRICTS

3, 4

PROJECT LOCATION (Street Address and Cross Streets and/or Attached Map)

Boundaries of the properties and rights-of-way within the Ventura-Cahuenga Boulevard Corridor Specific Plan

Map attached.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

A proposed ordinance to amend the Ventura-Cahuenga Boulevard Corridor Specific Plan (Specific Plan) to establish a ministerial Administrative Review process for limited types of permits, including but not limited to signage, interior tenant improvements, and limited changes of use, to update and add clarifying language to the Specific Plan to reflect new ordinances and processes that have been adopted since the Specific Plan was last amended in 2001, and to amend the Specific Plan's Plan Review Board appointments and administration after redistricting of 2022, as well as some clean-up language corrections.

Additional page(s) attached.

NAME OF APPLICANT / OWNER:

City of Los Angeles

CONTACT PERSON (If different from Applicant/Owner above)

Courtney Schoenwald

(AREA CODE) TELEPHONE NUMBER

818-374-9916

EXT.

EXEMPT STATUS: (Check all boxes, and include all exemptions, that apply and provide relevant citations.)

STATE CEQA STATUTE & GUIDELINES

STATUTORY EXEMPTION(S), Public Resources Code Section(s) _____

CATEGORICAL EXEMPTION(S) (State CEQA Guidelines Sec. 15301-15333 / Class 1-Class 33)

CEQA Guideline Sections / Classes:

1. Section 15301 (Class 1): for existing structures, including interior alterations for tenant improvements
2. Section 15303 (Class 3): as applied to small structures for limited changes of use and interior alterations related to tenant improvements
3. Section 15311 (Class 11): for on-premises signs
4. Section 15320 (Class 20): for changes in reorganization of local governmental agencies relating to the Ventura-Cahuenga Boulevard Corridor Specific Plan Review Board (PRB) appointments and administration, administrative project review process, updated language to reflect new ordinances and language clean up, recognition of a sixth community, and updated maps

OTHER BASIS FOR EXEMPTION (E.g., CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3) or (b)(4) or Section 15378(b)) _____

JUSTIFICATION FOR PROJECT EXEMPTION:

Project meets the conditions described in the CEQA Guidelines Sections listed above. See attached for further justifications.

Additional page(s) attached

None of the exceptions in CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 to the categorical exemption(s) apply to the Project.

The project is identified in one or more of the list of activities in the City of Los Angeles CEQA Guidelines as cited in the justification.

IF FILED BY APPLICANT, ATTACH CERTIFIED DOCUMENT ISSUED BY THE CITY PLANNING DEPARTMENT STATING THAT THE DEPARTMENT HAS FOUND THE PROJECT TO BE EXEMPT.

If different from the applicant, the identity of the person undertaking the project.

CITY STAFF USE ONLY:

CITY STAFF NAME AND SIGNATURE

Courtney Schoenwald

Courtney Schoenwald

STAFF TITLE

City Planner

ENTITLEMENTS APPROVED

Specific Plan Amendment

**DEPARTMENT OF
CITY PLANNING**
COMMISSION OFFICE
(213) 978-1300

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

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PRESIDENT

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VICE-PRESIDENT

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LISA M. WEBBER, AICP
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

Justifications for Case No: ENV-2023-1638-CE

Project Location: Boundaries of the properties and rights-of-way within the Ventura-Cahuenga Boulevard Corridor Specific Plan, along Ventura Boulevard, spanning from the Dry Canyon-Calabastas Flood Control Channel west of Woodlake Avenue in Woodland Hills, to Cahuenga Boulevard four lots (approximately 209 linear feet) east of Oakcrest Drive in Cahuenga Pass, as shown (in blue) below (see also Plan Maps 1 to 14 that accompany the Proposed Ordinance for the Specific Plan).



Project Description: A Proposed Ordinance to amend the Ventura-Cahuenga Boulevard Corridor Specific Plan (Specific Plan) to establish a ministerial Administrative Clearance Review process for limited types of permits, including but not limited to signage, interior tenant improvements, and limited changes of use, to update and add clarifying language to the Specific Plan to reflect new ordinances and processes that have been adopted since the Specific Plan was last amended in 2001, and to amend the Specific Plan's Plan Review Board appointments, composition, and administration as well as some clean-up language corrections.

Proposed Ordinance:

The purpose of the proposed amendments to the Specific Plan is to streamline the signage review process to assist businesses install new signs, to ensure consistency across the Specific Plan area, and to facilitate bringing non-conforming signs into compliance with

existing Specific Plan requirements. The following provides an overview of the types of revisions and clarifications that are proposed as part of the Specific Plan amendments:

- Changing the definition of “Project” in Section 4 to include a proposed ministerial Administrative Clearance Review processes for sign permits, interior tenant improvements, and changes of use that will not increase the floor area, increase the number of vehicle trips, increase parking requirements, or permit a change of use to a use that is not already permitted by the Specific Plan, and to clarify which Projects would require Discretionary Review.
- Adding the definition of “Tenant Frontage” in Section 4 to clarify the metric for calculating sign area.
- Clarifying the wording for Section 8, entitled “Sign Regulations:”
 - Revising language for wall sign area calculation from “lot frontage,” which is undefined in the Los Angeles Municipal Code to the newly defined “tenant frontage.”
 - Clarifying that a secondary wall sign would be calculated from the same tenant frontage calculation.
 - Replacing the term “lot frontage” (undefined) from Monument Sign calculations with the term “street frontage” (defined) to match LAMC Section 14.4.8 for Monument Signs.
- Adding language to Section 9 to outline the Administrative Clearance Review process, and distinguish it as a process separate from other Discretionary Reviews, such as Project Compliance, Project Adjustments, Exception of Entitlements, etc.
- Adding references to the new Chapter 1A of the LAMC (Processes and Procedures Ordinance, effective 1/23/23, operative 1/22/24) throughout the Specific Plan.
- Updating street designation names in Section 7 to match the Mobility Plan 2035.
- Updating references to out-of-date LAMC citations and clarifying cross-references to chapters that reside outside of Chapter 1 in the LAMC.
- Updating references in the existing Specific Plan from “five (5) communities” to “six (6) communities” to divide the existing “Studio City/Cahuenga Pass” into two distinct communities, i.e., “Studio City” and “Cahuenga Pass”, and updating Section 1.B of the Specific Plan to identify the boundaries for these two distinct communities.
- Correcting typos/grammatical errors, as well as terminology corrections within the document, such as updating the Specific Plan name to “Ventura-Cahuenga” instead of “Ventura/Cahuenga” throughout, in Section 4 correcting PM to AM for the morning peak hour traffic definition, consistently referencing City Planning Commission for urban design guidelines throughout, updating the terms “San Diego Freeway” to “Interstate 405” and “Ventura Highway” to “U.S. Route 101” throughout, hyphenating two-word modifiers before the noun throughout, etc.
- Updating the maps and map references to reflect corrections, previous amendments, and integrate maps that were separated.
- Amending Section 15 of the Specific Plan regarding the Plan Review Board’s (PRB) appointment process and composition to set a number of members based on community, rather than by council district, and clarify qualifications for PRB board members.
- Amending Section 15 to clarify department roles and responsibilities related to their work with the Plan Review Board.

In summary, the proposed project is a Specific Plan Amendment to revise Sections 1, 2, 4, 8, and 9 for content/procedures, and Sections 3, 5-7, 10-15, and 19-20 for corrections/updates to align with existing codes and terminology.

Environmental Setting

The Ventura-Cahuenga Boulevard Corridor is a major corridor for the San Fernando Valley, spanning over 17 miles in length, that includes more than 1,200 acres of land, and regulates over 4,300 individual parcels of land. Ventura and Cahuenga Boulevards, which are the streets that make up this Corridor, are both designated as Boulevard II in the Mobility Plan 2035¹. The Boulevard II standard has a right of way of 110 feet with a roadway width of 80 feet². Ventura Boulevard varies in width- from nearly 100 feet wide in Woodland Hills to the west, with a narrower roadway of approximately 70 feet wide in Studio City to the east. Cahuenga Boulevard is also around 70 feet wide. The topography of the Corridor varies throughout. The furthestmost western edge of the Corridor in Woodland Hills is relatively flat, but as the Corridor goes east there is a significant hilly portion between De Soto Avenue and Winnetka Avenue. The rest of the Corridor's roadway is relatively level with slight gradation, the roadway slopes downward on the eastern edge as the Cahuenga Boulevard portion traverses over the Cahuenga Pass.

Highway 101 is south of the Corridor at the western edge, crossing Ventura Boulevard around Shoup Avenue. For a majority of the Corridor, the highway is to the north and runs somewhat parallel; the distance of the highway from Ventura Boulevard widens through Tarzana and Encino and remains somewhat separated until close to the Cahuenga Pass. Highway 101 is separated from Cahuenga Boulevard by one row of lots through the Cahuenga Pass. The Los Angeles River is also north and the distance between the river also narrows as the Corridor heads east, with the distance separated with one row of lots at Studio City. To the south of the Corridor, the terrain is hilly. The hills interact with the Corridor roadway in Woodland Hills as noted above, but the hills abut the roadway in Studio City and the Cahuenga Pass, with some steep slopes going up from the roadway in those areas. Parts of Studio City are "sandwiched" between the Los Angeles River and steep slopes; the Cahuenga Boulevard portion is nestled between Highway 101 and Cahuenga Pass slopes.

The zoning along the Corridor is urbanized and is largely commercial- with commercial zones (e.g., CR, C1, C2, C4) making up a majority of the zoning for the area. However, there are some lots zoned multifamily (e.g., R3) and single-family (e.g., RA, RS, R1), as well as Parking (e.g., P), Public Facility (e.g., PF), and Open Space (e.g., OS). The properties to the south of the Plan Area are mostly zoned single-family residential, although portions of the Corridor have multi-family as a buffer zone between Ventura Boulevard and the single-family area, particularly in portions of Woodland Hills, Sherman Oaks, and the Cahuenga Pass. The properties to the north have more commercial and multi-family zones. In Woodland Hills the Warner Center area is largely commercial, and swaths of multi-family zones are north of portions of Ventura Boulevard in Tarzana/Encino.

The commercial Corridor is largely developed with a range of small single-story retail shops to larger, multi-story, multi-tenant shopping centers. The Corridor has been called colloquially "Restaurant Row" because of the large number of restaurants in the area; there are also several office buildings along the Corridor, particularly in Encino and Woodland Hills. Multi-family developments have been built over the last 10 years along the Corridor, particularly in Woodland Hills. Also in the last 10 years, some of the largest developments have been grocery stores.

¹ Mobility Plan 2035: https://planning.lacity.org/odocument/523f2a95-9d72-41d7-aba5-1972f84c1d36/Mobility_Plan_2035.pdf

² Standard Street Dimensions: https://enq2.lacity.org/techdocs/stdplans/s-400/S-470-1_20151021_150849.pdf

Existing Environmental/Physical Conditions in Relation to the Proposed Ordinance

Administrative Clearance Review of Tenant Improvements and Limited Changes of Use:

Along this 17-mile Corridor, the existing commercial spaces turn over to new tenants frequently, which not only requires new signage, but tenant improvements for the business to adapt the space to the new tenant's needs. These improvements are often accompanied by changes of use for the tenant space. The amount of businesses in these commercial developments on this Corridor have led to a proliferation of business signs, which are described in further detail under the analysis in the next section below.

The Proposed Ordinance would make the review and clearance for these scopes of work part of an Administrative Clearance Review process. Currently, the tenant improvements and changes of use identified are deemed as "not a project" within the Specific Plan as per the existing definition of a "Project" in Section 4 of the Specific Plan (bolded emphasis added):

PROJECT: Any grading, construction, erection, addition to, or structural alteration of any building or structure, a use of vacant land, or change of use on a lot located in whole or in part within the Specific Plan area, which requires the issuance of any building permit, demolition permit, excavation permit, foundation permit, grading permit, or sign permit. **A Project shall not include interior construction or a change of use unless it (a) increases the floor area; or (b) increases the number of Trips; or (c) increases parking requirements pursuant to Section 7 F of this Specific Plan; or (d) includes a change of use which is not consistent with those permitted by Section 5 A 3 of this Specific Plan.**

The Proposed Ordinance formalizes the review process as an administrative clearance for these types of tenant improvements and changes of use. These changes are processed by Project Planning staff via email within a few-day to few weeks turnaround time. This is not a change from the current process.

Clarifying Terms for Signage and Alleviating Filing Fees

Signs in the Specific Plan currently require a case filing; in order for a business to install a new sign, under the current process, the business would need to file a Planning case. Administrative clearances are currently only allowed for sites with an already-established master sign plan. Most properties do not have a master sign plan, especially as property owners must file these cases. Property owners usually opt to require that each tenant pursue their own sign approval. Applicants putting signs in multi-tenant centers must also conduct an onerous sign analysis of existing building signage.

This case process can be very burdensome for businesses with respect to processing time (an average of six months to obtain Planning review and approval) and application costs (thousands of dollars), which has an associated filing fee of \$3,757.65, along with an additional \$2,499.36 condition clearance fee, totaling \$6,257.01 in fees.

The Project team has received correspondence from the public and heard from Project Planners that the current sign process in the Specific Plan is time-consuming and expensive. As a result, many illegal signs have been erected by operators to obtain

immediate business recognition. Consequently, one of the objectives of the Proposed Ordinance is to streamline this process to make operator compliance more attainable and to also ensure consistency in terms of signage location and sizing across the Specific Plan area.

The Proposed Ordinance is intended to create a new Administrative Clearance Review process to streamline this process for businesses to install signs. This Administrative Clearance Review process would require sign area calculations to be based on the individual tenant space instead of the entire building, which would facilitate easier calculations for the business to provide for review. Processing would no longer require a case as it would be an Administrative Clearance Review and could be done as quickly as a counter visit, or a few-day to a few-month turnaround time. The cost for this new process is estimated to be less than \$400 (hundreds of dollars instead of thousands).

Even though this change entails a new protocol, the creation of the process itself will not result in any foreseeable impacts on the environment.

The Proposed Ordinance also clarifies ambiguous language in the Specific Plan, in particular the term "lot frontage," which is used for wall and monument sign area calculation. This term is undefined in both the Specific Plan and LAMC. Historically, staff have interpreted this to mean that sign area calculation was based on the calculation of all of the linear street frontages for a lot. This interpretation has led to a burdensome requirement for sign-permit applicants. For instance, as noted above, often a single tenant in a multi-tenant shopping center is required to provide a permit history and analysis of the entire center under the existing permitting process. This analysis is used to determine how much sign area is left on the site for the tenant to utilize. The Proposed Ordinance instead calculates signage area based on the new definition of tenant frontage. This change in sign area calculation has the potential to result in an aesthetic impact, which is analyzed in more detail below.

Observations along the Corridor were made using windshield surveys in 2022 and Google Street View 2019 images; what was observed indicates the signage along the Corridor often exceeds the area, type, number, and locations allowed by the existing Specific Plan.

This Corridor is urbanized and largely developed with widespread signage that has left relatively few open or undeveloped areas or lots that do not have signage. The greater City of Los Angeles also has significant and widespread signage throughout the jurisdiction.

The following analysis is organized by an overview of the Corridor-wide existing conditions followed by an overview of the conditions in each of the six (6) communities.

Existing Conditions: Corridor-wide observations

- **Wall Signs:** For big box retailers, car service businesses, dealerships, grocery stores, bigger buildings with large wall areas, or smaller businesses in their own stand-alone buildings, they often exceed the number of wall signs allowed by the Specific Plan regulations in place today. Multi-tenant developments often exceed the allowable sign area even while still maintaining the number of signs allowed per business. Smaller strip malls often place wall signs on the facade facing Ventura Boulevard even if the tenant is an interior site tenant, which the Specific Plan regulations do not allow. The Specific Plan does not regulate material or sign type for wall signs.

- **Window Signs:** The most blatant examples of window sign violations are in cases where the window is used as a banner advertisement or for additional signs with services/products. The most common cases were beauty salons, pet stores/businesses, print shops, dry cleaners, or various small businesses which often used both text and photo/graphic imagery. Small independent businesses were noted more often than large chain businesses to exceed these window sign standards.
- **Awning Signs:** Awnings are often used as or instead of additional business wall signage, where the business frontage is adjacent to or very visible from the right-of-way. There are many cases in which the entire area of the awning is used as a business identifying sign or to promote specific products/services. While this sign type is a distinct form that is separate from wall signs, they often function as wall signs.
- **Banners:** Banners are used for a variety of reasons. When banners are used to announce a special event/happy hour, additional services, or temporary announcement they are often in addition to an existing sign identifying the business, and sometimes placed on a fence, railing, or window area. When banners are used in lieu of a permanent wall sign identifying the business, they are typically placed above the door or near an entrance in a location where other tenants have located their wall signs. Where banner signs are used, a small number of businesses tend to have multiple banners displayed at the same time.
- **Projecting Signs:** Projecting signs are not common in any community although there are some buildings with more than the one allowed or that exceed the allowable size. It was clear that some projecting signs preceded the adoption of the Specific Plan.
- **Monument Signs:** are not common except for use with office buildings or for multi-tenant shopping centers.
- **Billboards, Rooftop Signs, Pole Signs, and Other Signs:** are present along most of the Corridor even in locations where they are not allowed. While they very likely predate the Specific Plan, these signs have an impact on the existing aesthetic conditions of the Corridor. Other illegal and non-conforming signage is also present throughout the Corridor.

Existing Conditions: Community-Specific Observations

Cahuenga Pass

The Cahuenga Pass is an auto-oriented area with various gas stations or car service businesses, drive-thru locations, and a few multi-tenant strip mall shopping centers. A large segment of the Corridor in this area is occupied by a car dealership which displays more wall signs than allowed. The most common signage non-compliance issues are at gas stations and multi-tenant strip mall shopping centers although there are some large buildings that have a small number of signs. Billboards are common in this area, a majority of which are oriented towards the 101 freeway³. All billboards pre-date the adoption of the Specific Plan; billboards are prohibited per Section 8.A.3 of the Specific Plan.

Studio City

The Studio City segment of the Corridor is filled with narrow and shallow parcels of land which are common in this area. Some blocks have a high concentration of narrow frontages side-by-side (zero-side-lot line) resulting in signs that are highly visible from Ventura in close proximity to each other. Some portions of this segment of the Corridor are pedestrian-oriented, such as the area centered around the intersection of Laurel Canyon Boulevard and Ventura Boulevard. In these pedestrian-oriented areas sandwich signs are common,

³ The Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety keeps an inventory of billboards citywide, which is published online here: <https://ladbs.org/docs/default-source/publications/misc-publications/billboard-survey-information.pdf>

particularly for the eastern segment of the Corridor. This community has a number of auto-oriented service shops that very notably exceed allowable signs. The far eastern edge of Studio City also has billboards because of the proximity with Highway 101.

Sherman Oaks

The Sherman Oaks segment of the Corridor is also filled with some narrow and shallow parcels of land, common in the area. Some blocks have a high concentration of narrow frontages side-by-side (zero-side-lot line) resulting in signs that are highly visible from Ventura in close proximity to each other. Some portions of this segment of the Corridor, particularly the western edge of the community on the Corridor and around the intersection of Woodman Ave and Ventura Boulevard are pedestrian oriented. This community also has examples of entire window areas covered in signage.

Encino

In Encino, the large commercial centers, such as Encino Commons, have a high concentration of signage possibly exceeding the allowable sign area. Pockets of this part of the Corridor, such as the corner of Newcastle Avenue and Ventura Boulevard, have almost all types of non-compliant signs --- banners, flags, window signs, canopy/awning signs. There are a number of segments in Encino that have multiple office buildings where wall signs are minimal, and the entire building is served by one monument sign. Schools and religious institutions in the area do not tend to have a lot of signage.

Tarzana

Some segments in Tarzana have single-story multi-tenant shopping centers with large monument signs and pole signs in addition to tenant wall signs on one side. The other side of the street (typically the south side) have single-story zero-side-lot line small businesses with street frontages near the sidewalk (e.g., Tarzana Square). Single-story strip malls in Tarzana are very common.

Woodland Hills

In Woodland Hills, single-story strip malls are very common. In this area of the Corridor, lots are larger and/or wider and buildings are spaced out so that the concentration of signage is sparse compared to other segments of the Corridor. Pole signs, projecting signs, and sandwich signs appear to be more common in this area. The proximity and number of signs tapers off between Winnetka Ave and De Soto Ave as Taft High School, various hotels, and multi-family residential buildings are on large lots and do not tend to have a lot of signage. Projecting signs are not very common but one of the worst examples in the entire Corridor of an excessive number of signs is on one building in Woodland Hills. Billboards are common in this area though they appear more spaced out than in Cahuenga Pass. Auto-dealerships and large apartment complexes are common along this segment.

Analysis of Potential Aesthetic Impacts:

One of the intents of the sign code simplification and streamlining is to create a faster and easier process for business tenants, with a secondary goal to achieve more compliance with the sign regulations.

Future signage in these areas would continue to be subject to the Specific Plan and/or Zoning Code regulations where the Specific Plan is silent. Based on the observations made, the changes proposed would not result in significantly more signage than what currently exists within the Specific Plan area.

The current regulations allow for one tenant wall sign and permits a secondary wall sign for each tenant facing driving entrances; the Proposed Ordinance would allow for the same number of signs per tenant. The change in calculated area for wall signs is a shift that might allow for additional sign area in total but the most difficult challenge for new signs today is in the multi-tenant shopping centers.

As the current regulations state that the calculation of sign area is based on "lot frontage" which is not defined, staff have been interpreting the term to mean the street frontage linear length for the entire lot. This "lot frontage" calculation method has led to inconsistent sign allocations for interior lots, corner lots, or lots surrounded by streets on three sides. The "lot frontage" calculation method has also caused hardships for single tenants that apply for a new sign because the tenant is asked to create a map of existing signs on the building and do permit research for the existing signs. By calculating the sign area based on the calculation of the primary tenant's frontage, there may be a slight increase in the amount of signs erected, but by limiting the area calculation to tenant frontage for the sign over the primary entrance and secondary facing driving entrances, the sign area will be well controlled and consistent. Overall, the net difference of the new wall sign area is expected to be negligible.

Another proposed change is to remove projecting signs from the wall sign calculation. This change improves accessibility as the projecting signs assist wayfinding for pedestrians. The projecting sign size limitation of sixteen square feet of Section 8.B.1.c.2 of the Specific Plan will remain; oftentimes these signs are smaller. The quantity of one sign per building of Section 8.B.1.c.1 of the Specific Plan will remain. This change is minimal and is expected to be negligible.

For monument signs, the change of the term to "primary street frontage" from "lot frontage" will maintain the quantity of signs as it exists today or reduce the quantity of signs as the calculation would only be based on the one frontage area as opposed to two streets for corner lots, or three streets for lots surrounded by streets on three sides.

This change is demonstrated more clearly in Figure 1, below. The site on a corner of Ventura Boulevard and Firmament Avenue has two street frontages- the primary street frontage on Ventura Boulevard and a secondary frontage on Firmament Avenue. Under the current interpretation of "lot frontage" this site would have a calculation of monument sign area based off of both of the linear frontage distances ($233 + 194 = 427$ linear feet) which would allow for two monument signs, as the quantity of signs is limited per Section 8.B.1.b of the Specific Plan, which states: "no more than one monument sign shall be permitted per 200 feet of lot frontage."

However, the revised language would allow only one monument sign as the revised language states: "no more than one monument sign shall be permitted per 200 feet of primary street frontage."

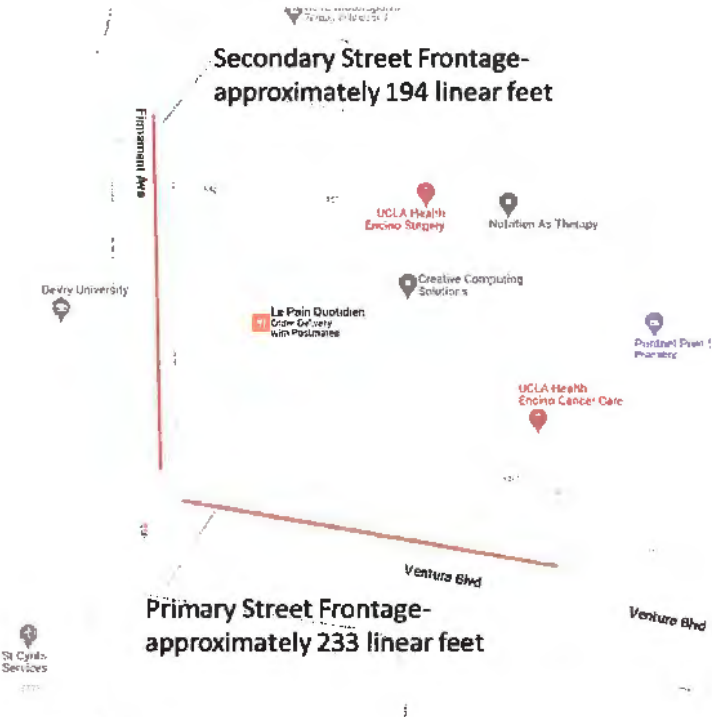


Figure 1

The street view image shown in Figure 2, below, illustrates the relationship more clearly; there is a monument sign on the primary street frontage (that faces Ventura Boulevard) while the secondary street frontage does not have, and under the updated language would not be permitted, a monument sign.



Figure 2

If the lot was an interior lot with no secondary frontage, the sign quantity calculation would remain the same as the current regulations as the calculation would be based on the lot line that faces the street.

Staff have noted that the current Specific Plan process which requires a case filing, disincentivizes operator compliance, resulting in the proliferation of signs that do not generally require a permit (i.e., temporary banner signs), which is contrary to the intent of the Specific Plan. As noted above, the current discretionary process can often take staff several months to complete, costs thousands of dollars in fees, and has consequently led to an increase in the illegal erection of signs put up after the adoption of the Specific Plan. The intent of the proposed Specific Plan Amendments is to facilitate the process for a business to install signs with efficient and orderly processing, that allows for easy compliance with the Specific Plan by making sign clearances an Administrative Clearance Review that could be handled over the counter or over a few months and cost less than \$400.

As such, the proposed changes to signage language are not anticipated to have a significant impact on the environment.

Updating Language to Reflect New Ordinances and Language Clean Up

Another part of the Proposed Ordinance is to bring the Specific Plan language into alignment with recently adopted ordinances. Specifically, there are two recently adopted regulations that would impact language in the Specific Plan; the Mobility Plan 2035⁴, originally adopted in 2016, and the Processes and Procedures Ordinance, which was adopted in January of 2023 and becomes effective in January 2024⁵. The update for Processes and Procedures will mean replacing language in the Specific Plan to reflect the new code section for the same processes that the Processes and Procedures ordinance updated. For example, Section 7.E.2.a is proposed to be amended as the following where text with a strikethrough is removed and red text is inserted:

“The procedures for granting relief from the height limitations shall be as set forth in ~~LAMC Section 11.5.7.E~~ **Part 13.B of Chapter 1.A of the LAMC**. Any ~~Project Permit Adjustment~~ **Project Adjustment** application to exceed the height should be filed at the same time as an application for a ~~Project Permit Compliance~~ **Project Compliance**.”

Also, references to street designations are proposed to match the nomenclature that was updated with the new Mobility Element, where the terms “major and secondary highway” are proposed to be replaced with “street designated as an Avenue or a Boulevard per the Mobility Plan 2035” to reflect the updated street designations.

In addition, existing language in the Specific Plan referenced other Chapters of the LAMC which appears to have migrated language over the last few decades. The proposed amendment updates and clarifies these references to align with the code section that matches the content within the Specific Plan. For example, Section 8.B.1.(c).(2) is proposed to be amended as the following where text with a strikethrough is removed and red text is inserted:

⁴ The Mobility Element 2035 is online at: https://planning.lacity.org/odocument/523f2a95-9d72-41d7-aba5-1972f84c1d36/Mobility_Plan_2035.pdf

⁵ Processes and Procedures Ordinance, online at: https://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2012/12-0460-S4_ord_187712_1-23-2023.pdf

“Area. Notwithstanding LAMC Chapter IX Article 1, Division 62, Section 91.6212.6208(b)(1) to the contrary, the sign area of a projecting sign shall be limited to 16 square feet.”

This reference was updated to clarify the Chapter, Article, Division of the Building Code for signs⁶ as the original code section cited, 91.6208, refers to Animated Devices, but 91.6202 refers to Projecting Signs, and as such is the applicable code section for this Specific Plan text that refers to projecting signs.

Furthermore, staff have identified a number of typos within the published Specific Plan. The Proposed Ordinance corrects these typos.

These text changes are administrative without any foreseeable impact on the environment.

Recognizing an Existing Sixth Community

The existing Specific Plan references two communities as one with a slash to indicate the two: “Studio City/Cahuenga Pass.” The proposed amendment would have these communities read separately as “Studio City” and “Cahuenga Pass,” and also updates Section 1.B of the Specific Plan to identify the boundaries for these distinct communities. This text change is administrative without any foreseeable impact on the environment.

Updating Maps

Existing maps that accompany the Specific Plan have not been updated since a boundary change occurred with the removal of the Tarzana Medical Center in 2018, and the current Specific Plan maps show separate pages when an additional overlay exists for the same area. Furthermore, a deeper review of the originally adopted ordinances for the Specific Plan revealed errors within the maps of the adopted Specific Plan. The proposed amendment will allow for the text changes in the Plan of these corrected maps to be referenced appropriately. This text change is administrative without any foreseeable impact on the environment.

Plan Review Board Re-Alignment, Composition, and Administration

The proposed City Council motion (Council File No. 17-1071-S1⁷) also proposes new configurations and requirements for the Plan Review Board members. The current plan requires appointment of Plan Review Board members based on the council districts, within which the Specific Plan area is located, with two members appointed by each council district and one appointment by the Mayor (Specific Plan at Section 15.A.2.b.). Prior to redistricting, the Specific Plan Area was located within Council Districts 2, 3, 4 and 5. However, with the redistricting of 2021, the Specific Plan area that used to have four council districts now has two council districts (Council Districts 3 and 4), thereby reducing the board’s size from nine (9) members to five (5). The Proposed Ordinance seeks to modify the membership that would be based on the six (6) communities, which would not change in size over time. The specific qualifications of eligible board members and

⁶ The Building Codes for Signs (Chapter IX Article 1, Division 62) is online at: https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/los_angeles/latest/lamc/0-0-0-176609

⁷ Council File 17-1071-S1 is online at: <https://cityclerk.lacity.org/lacityclerkconnect/index.cfm?fa=ccfi.viewrecord&cfnumber=17-1071-S1>

membership terms are also proposed to change. The Proposed Ordinance also clarifies roles and responsibilities for the Departments that work with the PRB. For example, Section 15.A.1.c. has been amended to clarify that the Department of Transportation is responsible for maintaining records of transportation fund expenditures. Other changes include tasking the Department of City Planning to notify, in writing, Plan Review Board members and the corresponding council office (or mayor's office) in advance of the member reaching their term limit. These changes are meant to facilitate better administration of the Board and ensure that the directives of the Specific Plan are followed. This text change is administrative without any foreseeable impacts on the environment.

Environmental Review Under CEQA

Based on the limited scope of the proposed amendments, Planning Staff has concluded that the proposed project falls within the following CEQA categorical exemptions (Class followed by CEQA Guideline Section):

1. Class 1, Section 15301: Existing Facilities (for interior alterations related to tenant improvements and limited changes of use, and changing the copy of text for existing signs)
2. Class 3, Section 15303: New Construction or Conservation of Small Structures (for limited changes of use and interior alterations related to tenant improvements)
3. Class 11, Section 15311: Accessory Structures (for on-premises signs)
4. Class 20, Section 15320: Changes in Organization of Local Agencies (for the Ventura Specific Plan "Plan Review Board" appointment and administration, administrative project review process, updated language to reflect new ordinances and language clean up, recognition of a sixth community, and updated maps)

Class 1, Small Facilities: State CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 (Class 1) consists of "the operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, licensing, or minor alteration of existing public or private structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, or topographical features, involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use, and is expressly listed in CEQA Guidelines 15301(g) for the installation and alteration of signs, which are ministerial and categorically exempt from CEQA. The types of 'existing facilities' itemized below are not intended to be all-inclusive of the types of projects which might fall within Class 1. The key consideration is whether the project involves negligible or no expansion of use."

Examples include but are not limited to (list edited for relevance):

- (a) Interior or exterior alterations involving such things as interior partitions, plumbing, and electrical conveyances;...
- (d) Restoration or rehabilitation of deteriorated or damaged structures, facilities, or mechanical equipment to meet current standards of public health and safety, unless it is determined that the damage was substantial and resulted from an environmental hazard such as earthquake, landslide, or flood;
- (e) Additions to existing structures provided that the addition will not result in an increase of more than:
 - (1) 50 percent of the floor area of the structures before the addition, or 2,500 square feet, whichever is less; or
 - (2) 10,000 square feet if:
 - (A) The project is in an area where all public services and facilities are available to allow for maximum development permissible in the General Plan and
 - (B) The area in which the project is located is not environmentally sensitive.

- (f) Addition of safety or health protection devices for use during construction of or in conjunction with existing structures, facilities, or mechanical equipment, or topographical features including navigational devices;
- (g) New copy on existing on and off-premise signs;...
- (k) Division of existing multiple family or single-family residences into common-interest ownership and subdivision of existing commercial or industrial buildings, where no physical changes occur which are not otherwise exempt;
- (l) Demolition and removal of individual small structures listed in this subdivision;
- (1) One single-family residence. In urbanized areas, up to three single-family residences may be demolished under this exemption.
- (2) A duplex or similar multifamily residential structure. In urbanized areas, this exemption applies to duplexes and similar structures where not more than six dwelling units will be demolished.
- (3) A store, motel, office, restaurant, and similar small commercial structure if designed for an occupant load of 30 persons or less. In urbanized areas, the exemption also applies to the demolition of up to three such commercial buildings on sites zoned for such use.
- (4) Accessory (appurtenant) structures including garages, carports, patios, swimming pools, and fences....
- (n) Conversion of a single-family residence to office use....
- (p) Use of a single-family residence as a small family day care home, as defined in Section 1596.78 of the Health and Safety Code.

Tenant improvements, where a new tenant does construction in a space to adapt to their needs, squarely fits within the Class 1 Categorical Exemption, as would any limited change of use that would not expand the use. Changing of text on existing signs is also included in this category, as are certain types of construction.

Class 3. Small Facilities: State CEQA Guidelines Section 15303 (Class 3) consists of the "construction and location of limited numbers of new, small facilities or structures; installation of small new equipment and facilities in small structures; and the conversion of existing small structures from one use to another where only minor modifications are made in the exterior of the structure."

On-site signs can be classified as small structures. Therefore, on-site signs would be exempt under Class 3 as small structures. For the purposes of this CEQA analysis, on-site signs would be allowed by the Proposed Ordinance with the clarified terminology, and would be subject to an administrative clearance process to safeguard against signage that exceeds the scope of what is permitted under the Specific Plan (e.g. three wall signs as the Proposed Ordinance limits it to two, signs that are larger than the limit based off of the tenant frontage calculation, or in locations not allowed by the Proposed Ordinance such as a back entrance that does not face an alley, street, or parking lot). The list of prohibited sign types is not changing: off-site commercial signs such as billboards, supergraphic displays, flashing, mechanical, moving or strobe or blinking lights signs; stretchers; windblown devices; etc. Given the baseline conditions of what is existing on the Ventura-Cahuenga Corridor today (see the Existing Conditions, above), new signage in the Specific Plan area will be cohesive with the existing dense and urbanized environment. This Class 3 categorical exemption also addresses the proposed limited changes of use, and minor tenant improvements.

This Class 3 categorical exemption also addresses the proposed limited changes of use, and minor tenant improvements.

Class 11. Accessory Structures: *State CEQA Guidelines Section 15311 (Class 11) consists of "construction, or replacement of minor structures accessory to (appurtenant to) existing commercial, industrial, or institutional facilities, including but not limited to: (a) on-premise signs..."*

The Proposed Ordinance regulates on-site signs in largely the same way that they are currently regulated but through a more streamlined process. On-site signs, which can also be described as on-premise signs, are accessory structures to the main structure where they are located and to which they usually refer. As such, all on-site signs are covered by Class 11 and the sign portion of the Proposed Ordinance falls squarely within a Class 11 categorical exemption.

Class 20. Changes to Organization of Local Agencies: *State CEQA Guidelines Section 15320 consists of changes in the organization or reorganization of local governmental agencies where the changes do not change the geographical area in which previously existing powers are exercised. Examples include but are not limited to:*

- (a) Establishment of a subsidiary district.
- (b) Consolidation of two or more districts having identical powers.
- (c) Merger with a city of a district lying entirely within the boundaries of the city.

This category addresses organizational restructuring that does not change the boundaries of the geographical area. The Proposed Ordinance does not include any boundary adjustment but does include the restructuring of how Plan Review Board members are appointed and how the business of the Board is administered by Departments. This change in appointment structure is considered an organizational change covered by this Class. The other changes to the Specific Plan text such as the designation of Cahuenga Pass as a distinct community, the updating of text to reflect updated maps or newly adopted code, code references, and typo corrections would also all fall under this category.

CEQA EXCEPTIONS:

Pursuant to Section 15300.2, a categorical exemption may not be used if any of the following six (6) exceptions apply:

(a) Location. Classes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 11 are qualified by consideration of where the project is to be located - a project that is ordinarily insignificant in its impact on the environment may in a particularly sensitive environment be significant. Therefore, these classes are considered to apply in all instances, except where the project may impact on an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern where designated, precisely mapped, and officially adopted pursuant to law by federal, state, or local agencies.

The entire Ventura-Cahuenga area within the Ventura-Cahuenga Boulevard Corridor Specific Plan is known as a commercial corridor, and is developed along the length of the Corridor. Signage is installed on structures, and for this purpose because the change in Specific Plan regulations relates to wall signs, the signage refers to the installation of signs on existing buildings, in a relatively urban area. As the installation is expected to occur on the exterior of existing buildings, and monument sign erection will be reduced with the Proposed Ordinance, there is minimal ground disturbance that will occur as a result of the

Proposed Ordinance. There is no anticipated impact on an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern.

The Administrative Clearance Review process for signage in lieu of a discretionary sign case, updated language to reflect new ordinances and language clean up, recognition of a sixth community, updated maps, Plan Review Board Re-Alignment and administration are administrative in nature and have no direct impact on development and the environment.

(b) Cumulative Impact. All exemptions for these classes are inapplicable when the cumulative impact of successive projects of the same type in the same place, over time is significant.

The Administrative Clearance Review process for signage in lieu of a discretionary sign case, updated language to reflect new ordinances and language clean up, recognition of a sixth community, updated maps, Plan Review Board re-alignment and administration are administrative in nature and have no direct impact over time in the same place.

It should be noted that the Specific Plan Area contains three transit priority areas⁸, for which the aesthetics analysis does not apply per Senate Bill 743 (SB 743; signed into law in 2013.) SB 743 provides that, "aesthetics and parking impacts of a residential, mixed use residential, or employment center project on an infill site within a transit priority area shall not be considered significant impacts on the environment." Therefore, the areas near the intersections of Ventura Boulevard and Sepulveda Boulevard, Ventura Boulevard and Van Nuys Boulevard, and Ventura Boulevard and Lankershim Boulevard have been identified as transit priority areas and given their prominence as part of the commercial corridor, it is likely that any anticipated increase in signage will be concentrated in these TPAs. With respect to non-TPA areas, no portions of the proposed project boundary fall within a scenic vista.

The Ventura-Cahuenga Corridor is largely in the flatlands of the San Fernando Valley and has no ocean views. Nor does the Corridor have any striking or unusual terrain in its near proximity; as noted in the Environmental Setting above, there are a few hilly portions of the Corridor- notably in the Chalk Hill portion of Woodland Hills and in the areas on the eastern portion in Studio City and the Cahuenga Pass. However, in both of these areas there are no scenic overlooks or identified vistas of note.

Furthermore, the change to wall signage and projecting sign regulations refers to the installation of signs on buildings, primarily existing buildings, which are not scenic vistas. Monument signs would also be erected in front of buildings which are not scenic vistas.

As such there is no anticipated impact to scenic vistas with the change in signage regulations.

In response to whether the project would substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway, it should be noted that there is no State Scenic Highway that intersects or aligns with the Ventura-Cahuenga Corridor.

⁸ Transit Priority Areas are online at:

<https://planning.lacity.org/eir/1020SoFigueroa/FEIR/files/Appx%20F%20-%20LA%20Planning%20ZI%20File%20No.%202452.pdf>

As such, significant changes to the visual character are not foreseeable as a result of the Specific Plan amendments to the sign regulations.

(c) Significant Effect. A categorical exemption shall not be used for an activity where there is a reasonable possibility that the activity will have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.

The Ventura-Cahuenga Corridor as noted above is a developed, urban corridor. There are no unusual circumstances with relation to signage that would be installed on existing buildings, updated language to reflect new ordinances and language clean up, recognition of a sixth community, updated maps, Plan Review Board re-alignment or administration.

With respect to the Administrative Clearance Review process, across the City of Los Angeles, areas that have no special overlay or other regulations, sign permits are administratively cleared. However, some specific plans or other overlays made this approval discretionary, which has been challenging both for businesses applying for the signs as well as the staff processing these cases. In addition to parts of the City outside of overlays, several of the Community Design Overlay areas already administratively clear new signs. The Westwood Specific Plan recently removed the discretion to be more business-friendly and for the same reason, this proposed Specific Plan Amendment does the same. The Administrative Clearance Review process would only be applicable for signs that comply with Section 8 of the Specific Plan. There are no unusual circumstances with relation to the Administrative Clearance Review process for signage in lieu of a discretionary sign case.

Therefore, it is not a reasonable possibility that the Proposed Ordinance will have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.

(d) Scenic Highways. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may result in damage to scenic resources, including but not limited to, trees, historic buildings, rock outcroppings, or similar resources, within a highway officially designated as a state scenic highway. This does not apply to improvements which are required as mitigation by an adopted negative declaration or certified EIR.

There is no State Scenic Highway that intersects or aligns with the Ventura-Cahuenga Corridor. There is no anticipated impact on a State Scenic Highway.

(e) Hazardous Waste Sites. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project located on a site which is included on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code.

As the sign installation for wall signs will occur on the exterior of existing buildings, there will be no ground disturbance activities. The installation of any new monument sign would be minimal and is not anticipated to have an impact as the installation would be at surface ground levels near the pedestrian sidewalks that exist today.

The Administrative Clearance Review process for signage in lieu of a discretionary sign case, updated language to reflect new ordinances and language clean up, recognition of a sixth community, updated maps, Plan Review Board re-alignment and administration are administrative in nature and do not relate to development in any way that would disturb any hazardous sites.

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There is no anticipated impact on an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern.

(f) Historical Resources. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource.

The Administrative Clearance Review process for signage in lieu of a discretionary sign case, updated language to reflect new ordinances and language clean up, recognition of a sixth community, updated maps, Plan Review Board re-alignment and administration are administrative in nature and have no direct impact on historic buildings.

Although the change in sign area calculations can have an impact on the environment that would be aesthetic in nature, historically designated resources are flagged for a separate, specific review that check for and would prevent damage to the historic structures. As such, no impact is anticipated.

I hereby certify and attest this to be a true and correct copy of the official record on file in the office of the Department of City Planning of the City of Los Angeles

designated as ENV-2023-1638-CE

2/4/26 Cary Schwenn

Department Representative

Cary Schwenn