

MONTEREY COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

Meeting: January 30, 2013 Time: 1:30 P.M	Agenda Item No.: 7
Project Description: Workshop to consider the removal of the 13 foot 6 inch tall, 120 square foot monument sign at Laguna Seca County Park and the construction of a new 18 foot tall, 116 square foot monument sign with electronic display.	
Project Location: 1025 Monterey-Salinas Highway 68	APN: 173-011-025-000
Planning File Number: PLN120279	Owner: County of Monterey Parks Department Agent: John Akeman, Parks Planning Manager
Planning Area: Greater Monterey Peninsula Area Plan	Flagged and staked: No – Visual Simulations Provided in Submittal
Zoning Designation: : PQP-D-S	
CEQA Action: Categorically Exempt per Section 15302: Replacement or Reconstruction	
Department: RMA - Planning Department	

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission conduct a workshop to consider the replacement of the 120 square foot monument sign at Laguna Seca County Park along Highway 68, a state designated Scenic Highway.

PROJECT OVERVIEW:

The Parks Department intends to modernize the Laguna Seca County Park sign and provide for remotely changeable messages. The biggest issue is finding the appropriate aesthetic and size for the sign, while meeting the requirements of County Code, the Zoning Ordinance and the limitations of State Scenic Highway designation.

In this workshop, the Parks Department intends to share the sign’s history, site constraints, bureaucratic limitations, the evolution of the present design proposal, and to seek input and guidance from the Planning Commission. See the discussion in **Exhibit B**.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

The following agencies and departments reviewed this project:

- RMA - Public Works Department
- √ Monterey County Regional Fire District
- √ California Department of Transportation, District 5

Agencies that submitted comments are noted with a check mark (“√”). As this is a Workshop Request, no recommendation for a decision to approve or deny is being made of the Commission, and therefore, no Conditions of Compliance, or Draft Resolution have been prepared or presented at this time.

Laguna Seca Park and the subject parcel adjacent to Highway 68 are not included within an area served by a Land Use Advisory Committee; therefore there is no recommendation from such a committee.

/S/



Taven M. Kinison Brown, Senior Planner
(831) 755-5173 kinisonbrownm@co.monterey.ca.us
January 22, 2013

cc: Front Counter Copy; Planning Commission; Monterey County Regional Fire Protection District; Public Works Department; Parks Department; Environmental Health Bureau; Water Resources Agency; Caltrans District 5; Laura Lawrence Planning Services Manager; Taven M. Kinison Brown, Project Planner; Owner; Monterey County Parks Department c/o John Akeman; The Open Monterey Project; Land Watch; Highway 68 Coalition; Planning File PLN120279

Attachments: Exhibit A Project Data Sheet
Exhibit B Project Discussion
Exhibit C Vicinity Map
Exhibit D Parks Department – Suggested Workshop Discussion items

This report was reviewed by Laura Lawrence, Planning Services Manager



EXHIBIT A

Project Information for PLN120279

Project Information:

Project Name:	COUNTY OF MONTEREY (LAGUNA SECA PARK MONUMENT SIGN)		
Location:	1025 MONTEREY SALINAS HWY SALINAS		
Permit Type:	Combined Development Permit		
Environmental Status:	To Be Determined	Final Action Deadline (884):	
Existing Structures (sf):	0	Coverage Allowed:	N/A
Proposed Structures (sf):	0	Coverage Proposed:	N/A
Total Sq. Ft.:	0	Height Allowed:	15 FEET
Tree Removal:	0	Height Proposed:	18 FEET
Water Source:	N/A	FAR Allowed:	N/A
Water Purveyor:	N/A	FAR Proposed:	N/A
Sewage Disposal (method):	N/A	Lot Size:	786
Sewer District:	N/A	Grading (cubic yds.):	100

Parcel Information:

Primary APN:	173-011-025-000	Seismic Hazard Zone:	II / Undetermined
Applicable Plan:	Grtr. Mont. Peninsula AP	Erosion Hazard Zone:	High / Moderate
Advisory Committee:	None	Fire Hazard Zone:	None
Zoning:	PQP-D-S	Flood Hazard Zone:	Floodway
Land Use Designation:	Public/Quasi Public	Archaeological Sensitivity:	Moderate
Coastal Zone:	No	Viewshed:	Scenic Highway 68
Fire District:	Monterey Regional	Special Setbacks on Parcel:	Y

Reports on Project Parcels:

Soils Report #:	N/A
Biological Report #:	N/A
Geologic Report #:	N/A
Forest Management Rpt. #:	N/A
Archaeological Report #:	N/A
Traffic Report #:	N/A

EXHIBIT B DISCUSSION

Workshop Issues

The main issue with this project is that *any* sign at the Laguna Seca County Park will serve to represent an essence of Monterey County and will be included in tourism and marketing materials across a broad spectrum of media for a long time. Having this sign reflect well on Monterey County is very important.

Other issues involve how to modernize the sign with the utility of a changeable display, yet still meet the intent of the local sign code to not have flashing or distracting copy present safety hazards to the driving public; how to meet State Scenic Highway Standards to not have product advertising or commercial-type sales on the reader board/display; or how to not detract from the aesthetic merits of the driving experience along this highway.

Background and Setting along California State Scenic Highway 68

The Monterey County Parks Department approached the Planning Department in early 2011, indicating that they wanted to update and modernize the monument sign at the famed Laguna Seca Park (deeded to County Parks in 1974) and Raceway (constructed in 1957). The Parks Department presented several designs at that time and asked for constructive comments. At least a dozen versions of a new sign for the Laguna Seca Park have been drafted and scrutinized by Mazda, County Parks and the Planning Department.

Located along California State Scenic Highway 68 (designated in 1968¹), the Monterey County General Plan and zoning codes show the subject property as Highly Visually Sensitive and zoned PQP-D-S (Public/Quasi-Public, Design Control and Site Plan Review Districts). Additionally, the State Department of Transportation (Caltrans) also has authority in what type of signs may or may not be placed adjacent to the State Scenic Highway.

Running along the north side of Highway 68 in this location is a drainage swale that the existing sign and replacement sign must straddle. This leads to a “two-columned” foundation spanning the drainage. Additionally, the “D” Design Control district overlay would only allow a maximum sign face area of 35 square feet for identification of the County Park. This would represent nearly a 75% reduction in sign area of the existing non-conforming sign that has been in place since the 1970s. Such a reduction in sign face would be counter to the needs of Parks Department and would not serve the public well.

Design Issues

The new design proposal is primarily driven by two factors: having to straddle the drainage swale running parallel to Highway 68 and wanting to remove the precarious practice of hand-changing text for events and park services. Additionally, the Parks Department did not wish to exceed the present 120 square feet of the existing sign face area.

¹ The Monterey-Salinas Highway is a California Scenic Route because of its views of the chaparral and springtime lupin for 14 miles (23 km) between State Route 1 in Monterey to the Salinas River.

The Existing Sign



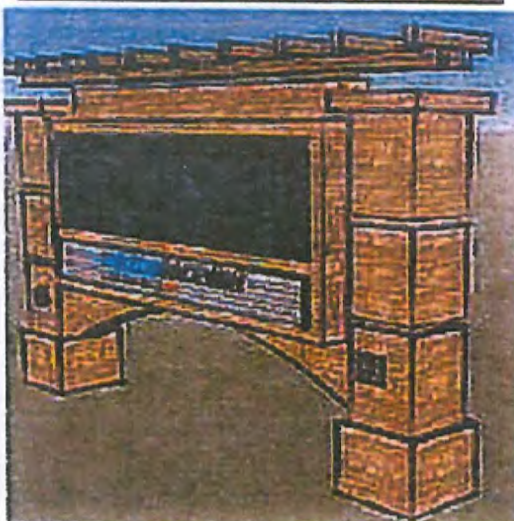
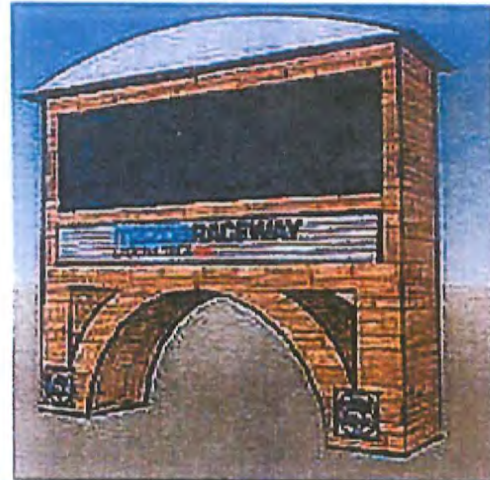
So with these constraints and opportunities, each of the designs attempted to date include a two-leg, two column-type feature and a remotely adjustable reader/display board. An additional design consideration is what “permanent” text or logos would be included, such as “Mazda” and the County Park’s Department emblem. These items moved around the several designs.

The first sign presented to the Planning Department drew upon several “futuristic” high-technology-looking elements that are common to themes and design elements used by Mazda internally at the race track and not visible to the highway or general public. Staff thought that while new and fresh, the design of the monument sign was out of context with the Highway 68 driving experience and that it didn’t draw from any local “Monterey” elements or history. Staff encouraged the applicant to draw from Monterey County’s history, architecture, sense of place, and to use stone, wood, brushed metals or other natural materials.

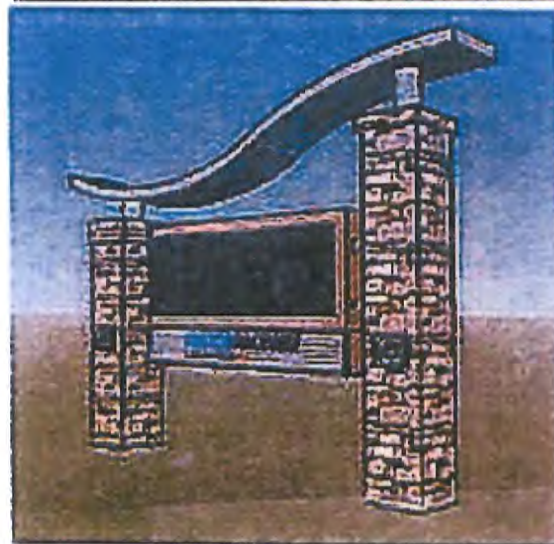
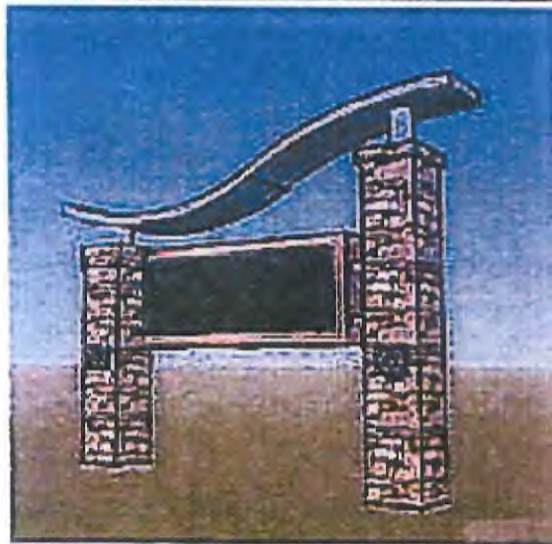
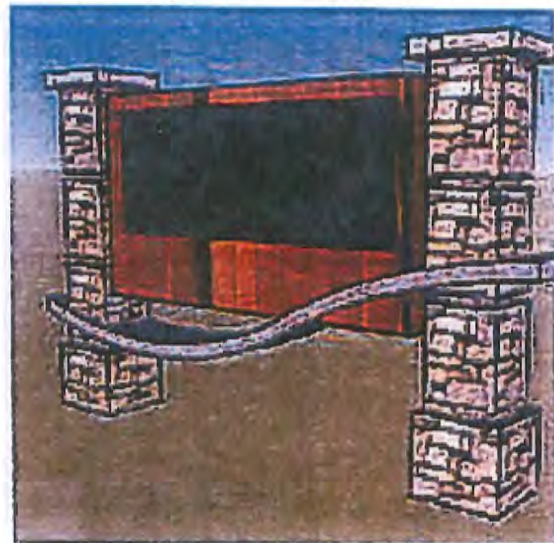
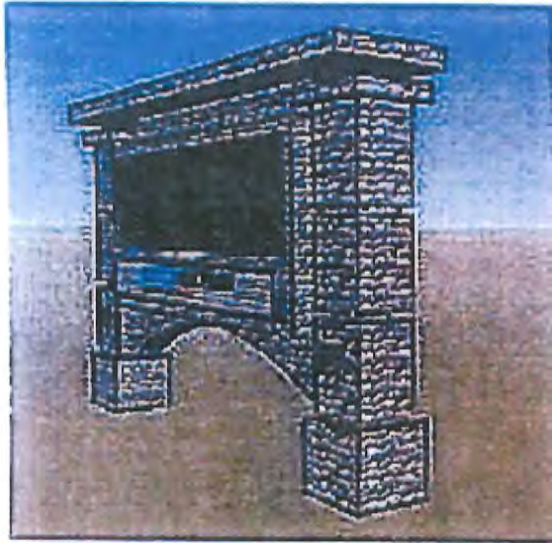




Several of the next few attempts did incorporate more brick or stone, combined with uses of metal or wood, but staff believed these designs were not necessarily unique, and did not include a Monterey County “signature.” These signs, in staff’s opinion, resembled shopping mall signs or large indistinguishable commercial center monuments.



Encouraging the designer to make yet another attempt at a “signature” Monterey County sign that would meet the needs of Monterey County Parks and Mazda, and one that would fit this unique and particular place, the applicant’s designers worked through the following progressions.

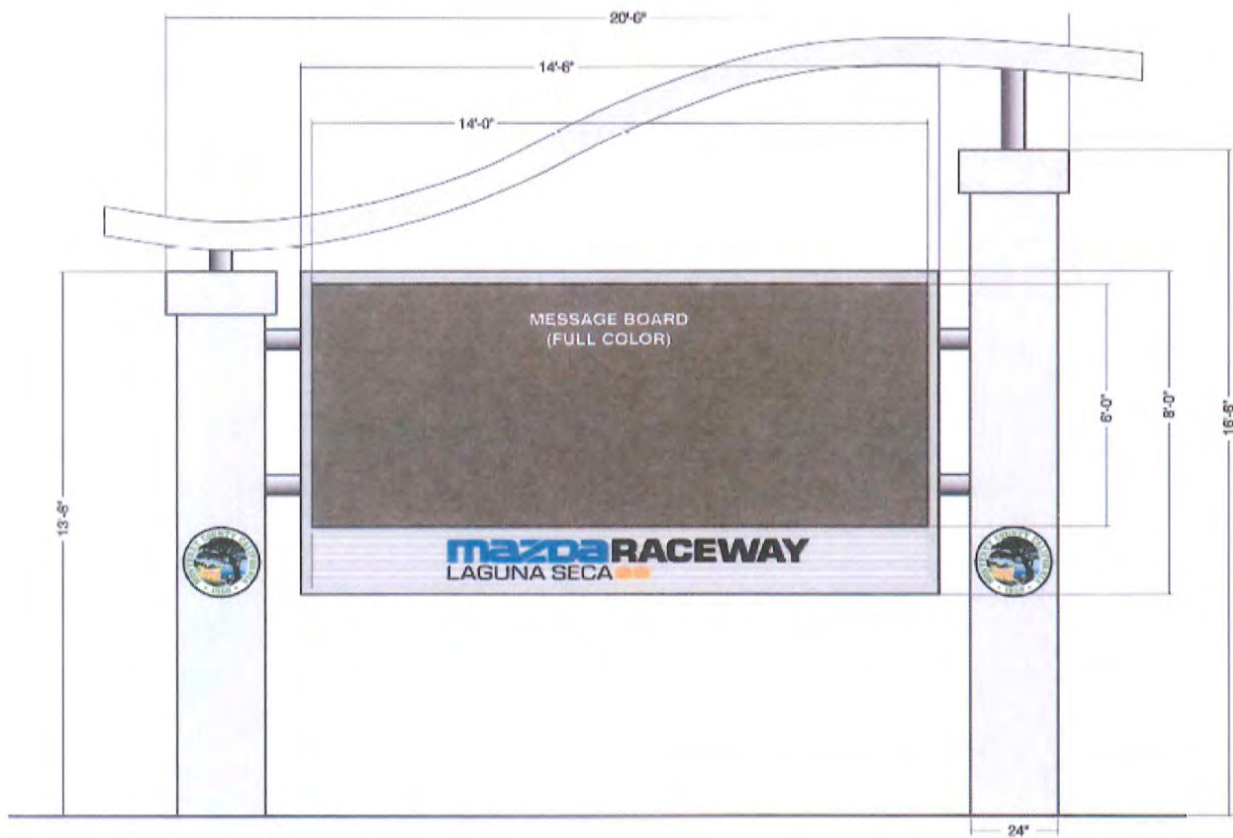
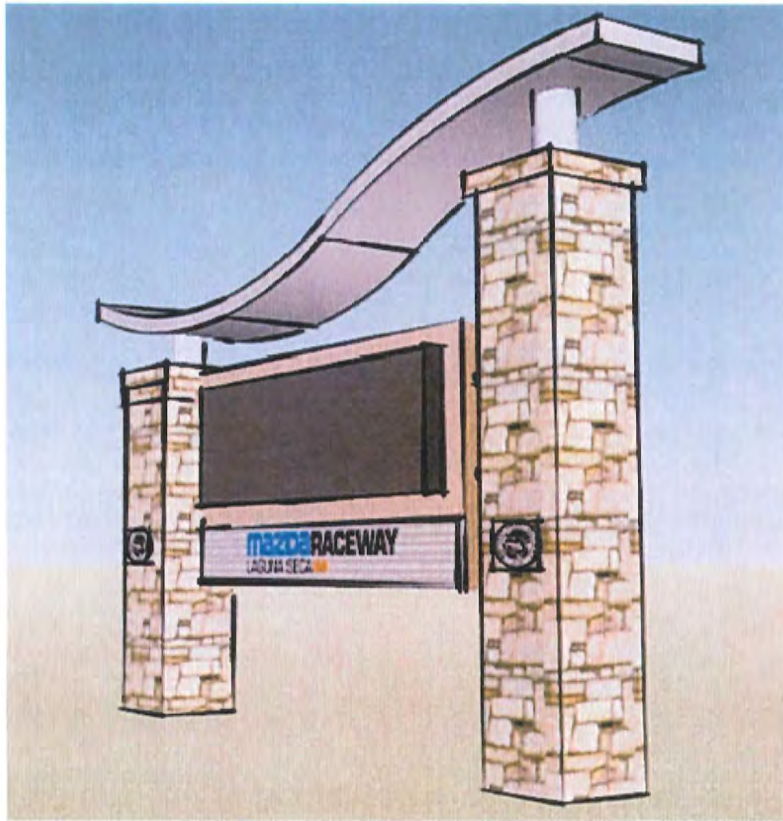


The Latest Design

Elements:

- Draws from stone materials and colors often used in architecture in Monterey County.
- Has a modern metallic “swoosh” on the top of two asymmetric Carmel Stone columns that present a blend of elemental stone and metal. The “swoosh” is meant to suggest the famed “Corkscrew” of the Laguna Seca Raceway, but is also reflective of the rolling hill-tops of the Highway 68 corridor: low adjacent to the Highway, and growing taller away from the road.
- One column and the swoosh are taller by 4.5 feet than the old sign, yet the shorter column and reader display height are no taller than the existing sign in place.
- Is smaller in display area by 4 square feet.
- Straddles the drainage, yet does not require on-site human effort to change the text.

Workshop to consider the Laguna Seca Park Monument Sign Replacement
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The latest design combines an 84 square foot Light Emitting Diode (LED) sign (6' x 14') plus 28 square feet (2' x 14') for the permanent lettering and County Parks logos.

The applicant has also considered moving the sign placement 55 feet to the west for better visibility for both sides of the sign. This would place the sign 210 feet east of the park entrance and drivers' safety and site distance has been considered.

The Electronic Display, Monterey County Sign Code and Caltrans

Monterey County Code Section 21.60.140 discusses prohibited signs in Monterey County. While it is true that the proposed sign has the capacity to be operated in a manner prohibited by the Zoning Code, the Parks Department and Mazda North America have worked with Planning Department Staff and the Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to develop an Operations Plan or operational conditions, whereby the electronic display can be operated safely in keeping with County Codes, and also to not be subject to the Outdoor Advertising Act (administered through Caltrans).

While not generally a staff practice to restate adopted codes in a staff report, staff has included the following section for this workshop to review against the applicant's proposed Operational Considerations that follow.

21.60.140 - Prohibited signs.

The following signs are prohibited in all zoning districts:

- A. Any sign or device which is an imitation of, or resembles, an official traffic control device, or which attempts to direct the movement contrary to the rules set by traffic officials, or which hides from view any official traffic control device.*
- B. Advertising signs that include the words, "Stop," "Look," "Listen" or any other word, phrase, symbol, lights, motion, sound, fumes, mist, or other effluent that may interfere with, mislead, or confuse the driving public.*
- C. Permanent structure signs which rotate, move, present moving images or the illusion thereof or flashes, scintillates, or utilizes animated illumination.*
- D. Signs on wheeled, non-motorized vehicles.*
- E. Devices which are inflatable or activated by wind, air or forced gas, whether free floating or tethered to the ground, and which are used for commercial advertising messages. This rule does not apply to inflatable gymnasiums used for parties, or to displays used in parades.*
- F. Moving or rotating signs, pennants, or banners.*
- G. Signs extending above roofs, and roof signs, except where specifically provided for under the provisions of this Chapter for signs attached to structures.*
- H. Any other advertising device attached to a structure, fence, pole, or vehicle on display not specifically authorized by this Chapter.*

The applicant is considering an electronic reader board with the potential to conflict with the County Code regulations above; however such a sign could potentially be operated in a manner in keeping with County Code requirements and Caltrans requirements. The applicant offers the following operational plan:

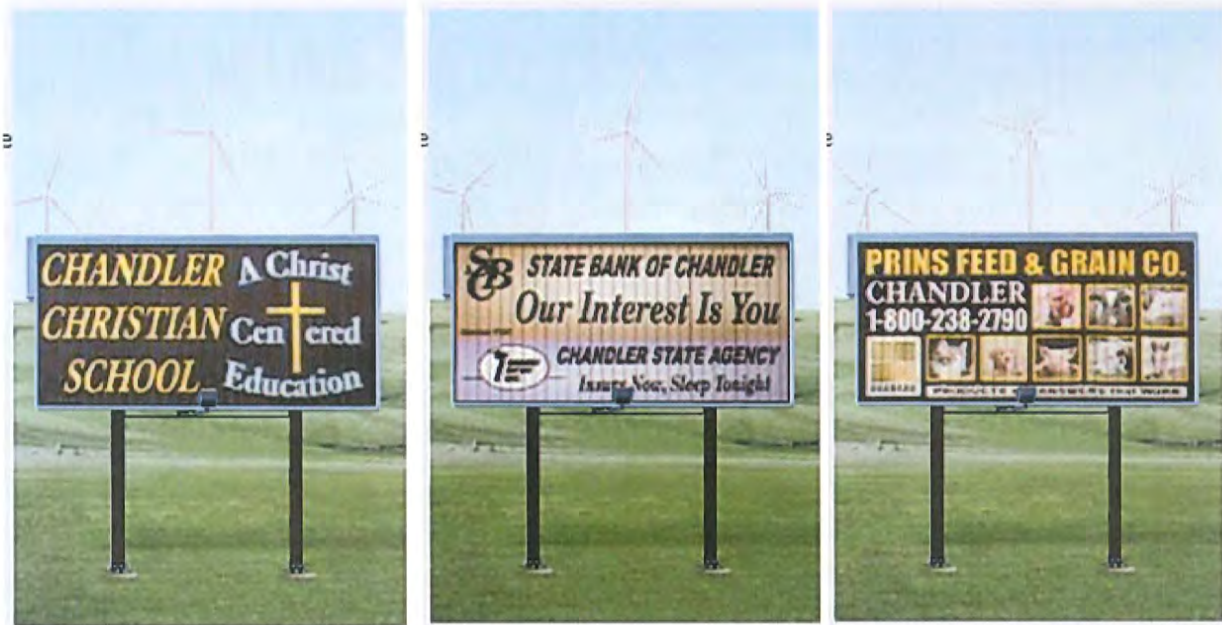
Operational Considerations Proposed by the Applicant:

- Sign fitted with daylight sensor enabling automatic dimming at night. Sign can be programmed for continuous operation or can be programmed to operate only between pre-determined hours.
- The display will display graphics (logos etc.) and will ***not*** be programmed to scroll, fade, flicker, or rapidly change messages or in any other way use animation or video. The primary use of the sign is for the advance notice of events.
- A display of this size is large enough that it may be used for announcing events as well as camping availability etc. simultaneously. No items or merchandise will be listed “for sale and/or purchase”.
- For a viewing distance of 500-ft the minimum recommended size of letters should be 10".
- Sign can be controlled by authorized personnel via an internet connection. The LED display is capable of being changed at any time, remotely, via an internet connection.
- Messages will be rotated; the timing can be set by the day or by the hour or portion thereof.
- If deemed appropriate, the sign can be used for emergency warnings... “slow accident ahead”, etc.
- During the non-event season, the sign will promote camping, RV camping, shooting range, racing school, etc. Specific messages will reflect each aspect of the Laguna Seca Recreational Area's activities, e.g....
 - “For camping information, call (831) 755-4899”
 - “For racing school information go to www.skipbarber.com”
 - “Shooting range now open to the public”
- During the event season, the events will be promoted with ticket information e.g.
 - “Coming July 27-29 Red Bull U.S. Grand Prix for ticket information go to www.skipbarber.com”
 - “This weekend, the best in sports car racing, the American Le Mans Series presented by Patron.”
- The season's events can be set to rotate throughout the day.
- For special activities, such as Souvenir Store
 - “Souvenir Store sale on now”, (yet no specific item or merchandise would be listed for sale or purchase).
- Welcome messages for track renters and special activities:
 - “Welcome Mazda employees”
 - “On track today, Hooked on Driving”

Other Changeable Message Displays

Staff has also explored alternative technologies to the applicant’s proposed LED electronic message board. One alternative technology is called a Triple Faced Automatic Changeable Message Face. Another technology involves messages on a canvas roller and moved through several cycles within an enclosed cabinet that stops at various points to display the desired message at the desired time. These are called Rotational Signs.

Triple Faced Automatic Changeable Message Face



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Another Triple Faced Automatic Changeable Message Face with external illumination.



Rotational Signs



Rotational signage is a mechanical process similar to a 'motorized window shade,' where different segments of the window shade each contain a frame showing off its own advertising spot in place. The system contains up to 30 different spots and during certain parts of the game, will rotate from one sign face to another. Rotational units can be placed courtside or overhead along the fascia frontage. (Explanation borrowed by staff from <http://www.signindustry.com> for non-commercial purposes.)

Caltrans

As the Parks Department and Planning Department discussed the requirements of the Outdoor Advertising Act with Caltrans staff, it was determined that the agency does not have jurisdiction to issue an Outdoor Advertising Permit as they can only issue permits for such signs in either

Commercial or Industrial Zone Districts along State Highways. The sign is located in the County's PQP-D-S Zone District (Public/Quasi Public) and within the County right-of-way, and is therefore exempt. Although, Caltrans staff did warn that if the sign advertises products, merchandise or sale items, and if additional banners or displays are added to the proposed sign, then it would be under Caltrans authority to enforce, which may result in a violation.

Entitlements Potentially Necessary

According to County Code the sign requires a Use Permit if it is between 75 square feet and 300 square feet, and also requires a variance to exceed 35 square feet in the "D" District. A portion of one column and the "Swoosh" exceed 15 feet in height, also requiring a variance.

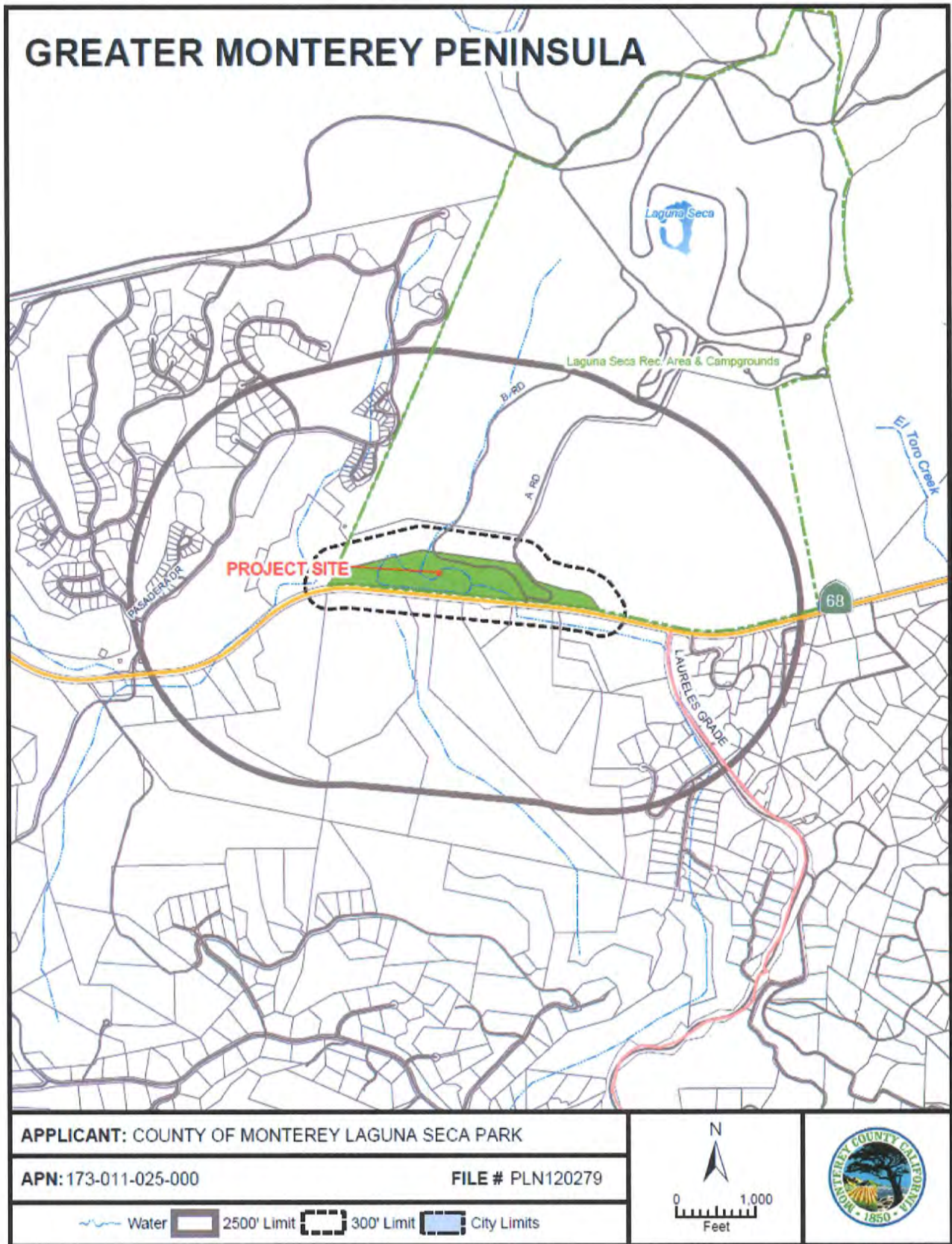
Drawing from the Applicant's Justification Statement for a potential Variance:

- A. **Special Circumstance:** Laguna Seca is a regional gathering place for special events as well as a world-class racing venue that operates year-round. This differentiates it from neighboring single use properties along Highway 68 such as residential and neighborhood commercial. The facility includes the outdoor staging of events and many onsite public recreational facilities such as camping, a rifle range, and trail heads to the Ft. Ord National Monument. These activities and sites are not visible to the highway traveler, due to the topography of the rolling hills. Additionally, the Park has displayed 120 square feet of sign area for many decades and new visitors often can't find the entrance, and try to reach the Parks Department for directions and points of identification along the Highway.
- B. **Not a Special Privilege:** The Parks Department considers that the sign needs to be in proportion to the world-class stature of the Laguna Seca racing venue while being considerate and complimentary to the character of the highway experience, such as the asymmetric column height reflecting the low valley floor and the rolling hills. Other Monterey County Parks, such as Toro Park and Jack's Peak Park, do not have a world-class racing venue, Rifle and Pistol Range, Trackview Pavilion (which can be rented for large indoor gatherings such as weddings and conferences), or a Racing School.

Workshop

The Parks Department would like to make a presentation along the lines of their suggested Workshop Outline (Exhibit D). Following the presentation by the Parks Department, staff would recommend opening the item to the public and Planning Commission for input, guidance and direction.

EXHIBIT C
VICINITY MAP



PLANNER: KINISON BROWN

Workshop to consider the Laguna Seca Park Monument Sign Replacement
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EXHIBIT D
PARKS DEPARTMENT – SUGGESTED WORKSHOP DISCUSSION ITEMS



P.O. BOX 5249, 855 E. LAUREL DRIVE, BLDG. "G"
SALINAS, CALIFORNIA 93915
(831) 755-4695

Date: January 15, 2013
To: Planning Commission
From: John Akeman, Park Planning Manager
RE: JANUARY 30, 2013 WORKSHOP FOR THE PROPOSED SIGN AT THE
LAGUNA SECA RECREATIONAL AREA

Dear Members of the Planning Commission:

Please consider the following outline provided to help frame a discussion for our upcoming workshop to review the proposed sign for the Laguna Seca Recreation Area.

It is our intent to use this workshop as an opportunity to share with your commission our design process and the information we considered that resulted in our proposal for a new sign. It is our hope to be able to seek input, guidance and direction from the Planning Commission for the new sign, and ultimately your commission's approval.

Workshop Outline

- The proposed design concept for the new sign
- History of the current sign at Laguna Seca
- The standard of review for guiding policies, regulations and requirements
- Opportunities and constraints that were identified
- Other design alternatives/concepts that were considered
- The identification of proposed "Operational Conditions", and
- Input, guidance and direction from the Planning Commission
- Next steps

"Quality Recreation with a Personal Touch"