



Board Report

File #: ZA 20-049, **Version:** 1

PLN190348 - SALINAS SELF STORAGE

Public hearing to consider a Variance to allow an on-site advertisement sign for Salinas Self-Storage along Highway 101 with a maximum height of 50 feet, which is an increase of the maximum allowable height from 35 feet.

Project Location: 201 Harrison Road, Salinas (SR101 Offramp at Sala Road)

CEQA Action: Categorically Exempt per section 15311 of the CEQA Guidelines

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Zoning Administrator:

- 1) Find the project consists of construction, or placement of minor structures accessory to (appurtenant to) existing commercial facilities which qualifies as a Class 11 Categorical Exemption pursuant to section 15311(a) of the CEQA Guidelines; and there are no exceptions applicable as described in Section 15300.2 of the CEQA Guidelines; and
- 2) Approve a Variance increasing the maximum allowable height for an on-site advertising sign (17 feet by 12 feet, 204 square feet) from 35-feet to a maximum height of 50-feet.

PROJECT INFORMATION:

Owner: Salinas Self Storage

APN: 113-091-006-000

Zoning: Light Commercial ("LC")

Agent: Signs by Van/Jeremy Vanderkraats

Parcel Size: 5.01 acres

Planning Area: Greater Salinas

Flagged and Staked: No

SUMMARY:

The subject property is located on the southwest corner of Harrison and Sala Road, approximately one mile north of the City of Salinas. Salinas Self Storage is requesting approval of a 50-foot-tall sign with 204 square feet of space for advertisement for the self-storage facilities on-site. As designed, the proposed sign area is within the allowable maximum advertising square footage of 300 square feet. However, it would exceed the 35-foot maximum height limit, so a Variance to allow an additional 15 feet in height is required.

This proposed sign would replace an existing sign that was established before Caltrans completed highway improvements in 2004. The site is immediately adjacent to (west of) Highway 101, and additional height is requested due to the change in grade caused by construction of the Sala Road Interchange. These improvements obscure visibility of the existing 35-foot-tall sign on the property from Highway 101. According to the applicant, the business relies on advertisement to generate a substantial part of their business, and a 50-foot-tall sign is now required to restore visibility for motorists on Highway 101.

Although not in the Sphere of Influence, this project was routed to the City of Salinas as part of an agreement to work collaboratively on projects near the City. City staff commented that the sign would not be consistent if it were within Salinas jurisdiction predominantly due to the business not being visitor serving.

County staff finds that there are unique conditions such that granting a variance would not constitute special privilege for this project. Staff recommends approval based on the specific facts of this case, including the change in grade by Caltrans and information provided by the applicant about their reliance on advertising for the viability of their business.

DISCUSSION:

Pursuant to Monterey County Code, Section 21.60.090 - Commercial and industrial zoning district sign regulations; signs up to but not exceeding 300 square feet in total are allowed. There is currently a 165 sq. ft. sign that is 35 feet tall installed at the site. The proposed new sign would be 20% larger at 204 sq. ft. which meets the size requirements but would be 15 feet taller than allowed at a total of 50 feet. A mini storage complex has been established at the site since approval by the Planning Commission in 1996 (Salinas Self Storage - Resolution No. 96009/PC95088). The previous approval included a General Development Plan and elevation plans that identified the existing 35-foot-tall sign.

In September 2004, construction of the Sala Road Interchange and southbound Highway 101 Overcrossing at Russell Road and Espinosa Road in north Salinas was completed by Caltrans. The work was done to ensure safer travel along Highway 101 between Sala Road and Boronda Road in north Salinas. Part of that construction involved an off-ramp from Highway 101 adjacent to the subject site. With the elevated construction of this off-ramp, it created a limited view of the Salinas Self Storage business in addition to covering up most of the current 35-foot pole sign. It now appears the sign is sitting 10 feet off the ground instead of 35 feet because the construction of the ramp created an approximately 20-foot change in elevation between the highway surface and the property. According to Caltrans data, the clearance for the bridge connecting to the adjacent off ramp is at 19'9" and the roof of the bridge is at 23'5". As such, by adding the additional height to the sign, the view of the signage from Highway 101 would be similar to the pre-interchange views of the 35-foot sign (see Exhibit B).

Although the site is outside of the City of Salinas Sphere of Influence, County staff forwarded the project materials to the City of Salinas for review due to its location (northern approach to the City boundaries along Highway 101 and Russell Road). The City of Salinas stated that they would not be supportive of the sign if it were in their jurisdiction because the Salinas Zoning Code would not allow highway signs for a mini-storage business (Exhibit F). Only visitor serving uses such as restaurants, gas stations, and hotels are eligible for a Conditional Use Permit for a sign of this nature under City code. In addition, the City stated the proposed sign is too big in their opinion. County Staff considered comments from the City, however, MCC Section 21.60.090 allows a sign up to but not exceeding 300 square feet in total, so the applicant is well within this requirement. Further, since the site is in a commercial zoning district, the applicant is allowed to advertise their business. The only issue remaining for consideration then, is that the height proposed does not meet the height requirement, hence the request for a Variance.

Staff finds that the proposal qualifies for a Variance. Pursuant to Title 21 (Non-coastal Zoning Ordinance) Variances shall only be granted if the following findings can be made:

- A. That because of special circumstances applicable to subject property, including, size, shape, topography, location or surroundings, the strict application of this Title is found to deprive subject property of privileges enjoyed by other properties in the vicinity and under identical zone classification; and
- B. That the variance does not constitute grant of special privileges inconsistent with the limitations upon other property in the vicinity and zone in which such property is situated;

- C. A variance shall not be granted for a use or activity which is not otherwise expressly authorized by the zone regularly governing the parcel of property.

Pursuant to Section 21.18.010 of the Light Commercial (LC) zoning district, the purpose of this Chapter is to provide a zoning district to accommodate and maintain a broad range of light commercial uses suitable for the convenience of nearby residential areas. Staff finds that a Variance can be supported, and the necessary findings made based on the following:

- A. Special circumstances are applicable to this property due to the substantial change in grades introduced by the highway improvements that significantly limit the visibility of any signage from Highway 101 which would meet the height limits for this site.
- B. This circumstance does not constitute a grant of special privilege inconsistent with other properties in the vicinity and zoning area since nearby businesses have similar commercials signs which were not affected by the elevation change of Highway 101 and are still visible.
- C. The variance would not grant a use not authorized within the Light Commercial zoning designation since Commercial zoning districts in Monterey County allow for advertisement of businesses.

Any other commercial properties in the vicinity with views affected by the highway improvement would need to be considered on a case-by-case basis to determine if similar special circumstances exist to grant a Variance.

LUAC

There is no Land Use Advisory Committee (LUAC) for the Greater Salinas Planning Area. The proposed project was not reviewed by the LUAC.

CEQA

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15311 categorically exempts construction, or placement of minor structures accessory to (appurtenant to) existing commercial facilities. The project is a replacement of an existing commercial sign. Therefore, the proposed development is consistent with the parameters of this Class 11 exemption. There are no exceptions pursuant to Section 15300.2. No evidence of significant adverse environmental effects were identified during staff review of the development application. No significant vistas would be affected by increasing the sign height.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

The following agencies have reviewed the project, have comments, and/or have recommended conditions:

Environmental Health Bureau
RMA-Public Works
RMA-Environmental Services
City of Salinas
Monterey County Regional Fire Protection District

Prepared by: Son Pham-Gallardo, Associate Planner, 831-755-5226
Reviewed by: Brandon Swanson, HCD Planning Services Manager
Approved by: Carl P. Holm, AICP, HCD Director

The following attachments are on file with Housing and Community Development:
Exhibit A - Draft Resolution, including:

- Recommended Conditions of Approval
- Site Plan & Elevation

Exhibit B - Photos of Off-Ramp & Simulation of Sign

Exhibit C - Vicinity Map

Exhibit D - PC Resolution No. 96009

Exhibit E - Justification letter from applicant

Exhibit F - Letter from City of Salinas

cc: Front Counter Copy; Brandon Swanson, RMA Services Manager; Salinas Self Storage Applicant/Owner; Signs by Van/Jeremy Vanderkraats, Agent; The Open Monterey Project (Molly Erickson); LandWatch (Executive Director); John H. Farrow; Janet Brennan; Project File PLN190348