



**PLANNING COMMISSION  
STAFF REPORT  
April 15, 2025**

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**Prepared by:** Lucy Rollins, Senior Planner

**DATA SUMMARY**

**Application Number:** 25PLN-06  
**Subject:** Sign Exception Permit for third wall sign  
**Location/APN:** 2085 Nevada City Hwy / APN 035-600-016  
**Applicant:** Matthews Signs, LLC, on behalf of owner  
**Zoning/General Plan:** Central Business District (C-2), Commercial Business Park (CBP) / Business Park (BP), Commercial (C)  
**Entitlement:** Sign Exception Permit  
**Environmental Status:** Categorical Exemption

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

1. That the Planning Commission approve the “Sherwin-Williams Paints” sign as presented, or as modified at the public meeting, which includes the following actions:
  - a. Determine the project Categorically Exempt pursuant to Section 15301, Class 1, of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and Guidelines, as detailed in the staff report;
  - b. Adopt Findings of Fact for approval of the Development Review Permit as presented in the Staff Report; and,
  - c. Approve the Sign Exception Permit for the “Sherwin-Williams Paints” sign in accordance with the Conditions of Approval, attached to the Staff Report.

**BACKGROUND:**

In 2024, Sherwin Williams received development review approval (23PLN-41) for the construction of a ±4,300 square foot retail paint store and subsequently applied for a building permit and grading permit to begin construction (24BLD-0216 and 24GP-06). While the building has not yet been constructed, the applicant applied for a sign permit to construct two “Sherwin Williams Paints” wall signs (24BLD-0734): one 45.1sf sign on the southwestern frontage facing Nevada City Highway and one 23.5sf sign on the southeastern frontage facing Gates Place. At this time, the applicant was informed that an additional wall sign would require a Sign Exception Permit pursuant to Section 17.38.070 to install a wall sign on a second secondary frontage.

The Development Review Committee (DRC) reviewed the proposed sign at their regular meeting on March 11, 2025. DRC members discussed concerns with an additional sign

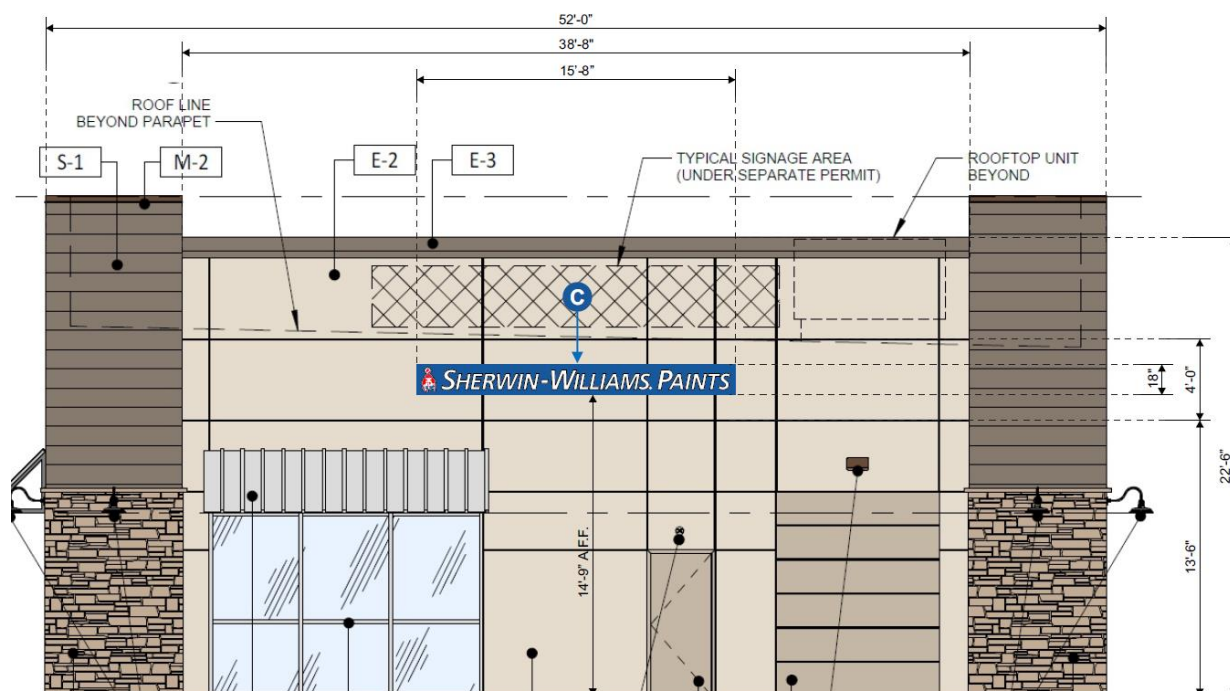
contributing to over-signage from the highway, illumination of highway-facing signage after dark, and the height of the sign given the intent of it being to orient customers in the business parking lot. The DRC recommended approval of the proposal with the following modifications:

- The sign not be illuminated; and
- The sign be lowered so as to not be visible from the highway.

The applicant has developed a modified design for Planning Commission's consideration in response to the feedback from the DRC.

### **PROJECT PROPOSAL:**

The applicant has proposed to a 23.5sf "Sherwin Williams Paints" wall sign on the northeastern frontage of the building, facing the parking lot and the currently vacant parcel to the north. The sign measures 18 inches tall by 15 feet, 8 inches wide. In response to DRC's recommendation, the applicant has modified the proposal so that the sign would be mounted centrally on the façade, approximately 6.5 feet below the parapet and 14.5 feet above the finished grade. The sign features a blue background with white lettering and a blue, white, and red logo.



***Sign Location***

The applicant requests to install this sign in order to improve customer access with a business sign facing the parking lot and improve the balance of the building. Further, the applicant states that the additional signage is not street-facing and therefore does not present excessive right-of-way facing signage.

**Regulatory Authority:** The proposed sign is considered a "Wall Sign," the standards for which are outlined in Section 17.72.030 (L) GVMC, and include the following provision:

1. One wall sign may be located on a primary structure frontage, and on one secondary structure frontage.
2. The area of a wall sign shall not exceed one square foot for each linear foot of primary tenant frontage and one-half additional square foot for each linear foot of secondary tenant frontage or ten percent of the area of the building facade on which the sign is mounted or painted, including the area of windows, doors, and recesses, whichever is less. The total area of all signs on a primary frontage shall not exceed one hundred square feet and the total area of all signs on a secondary frontage shall not exceed fifty square feet.
3. A wall sign shall not project more than twelve inches from the surface to which it is attached.

Pursuant to Table 3-9 GVMC, a sign exception permit may be granted by the planning commission, with a recommendation by the Development Review Committee, when a sign “exceeds standards specified in the sign ordinance.” In this case, the sign would be placed on a second secondary frontage, so a Development Review Committee recommendation, followed by Planning Commission is the appropriate review process.

### **GENERAL PLAN AND ZONING:**

**General Plan:** The project area has a land use designation of Commercial along Nevada City Highway and Business Park along Gates Place according to the City of Grass Valley 2020 General Plan. The Commercial designation is a broad category intended to encompass all types of retail commercial and commercial service establishments. The Business Park designation is intended to accommodate a variety of employment-generating land uses in a master-planned, campus-type setting, designed to preserve and enhance the natural environment and to be fully integrated into the larger community.

**Zoning:** The portion of the property on which the project is located is zones Central Business District (C-2) which is intended for auto-oriented commercial development

### **SITE DESCRIPTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING:**

The site currently vacant and being graded for the construction of a 4,300 square foot retail store and associated parking. Directly north, south, east, and west of the subject parcels contain commercial and residential development, with larger, partially developed parcels and a more rural setting to the east of the subject parcels on the east side of SR 49/20. Nevada City Highway is located adjacent to the west along with the Fowler Center across the highway. Lumberjack’s and the Honda Motorcycle dealership are located adjacent to the proposed Sherwin Williams site. Both Gates Place and SR 49 are located immediately along the southeastern and western borders of the subject parcels.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION:**

The proposed project qualifies for a Categorical Exemption pursuant to Section 15301, Class 1, of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and Guidelines. A Class 1 Categorical Exemption consists of the operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, licensing, or minor alternation of existing public or private structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, or

topographical features, involving negligible or no expansion of use beyond that existing at the time of the lead agency's determination. The proposed sign is intended to aid in customer orientation. Therefore, the proposed sign will not result in an expansion of use of the commercial property on which it will be located.

### **FINDINGS:**

1. The City received a complete application for Sign Exception Application 25PLN-06.
2. The Grass Valley Development Review Committee reviewed Sign Exception Application 25PLN-06 at their regular meeting on March 11, 2025.
3. The Grass Valley Planning Commission reviewed Sign Exception Application 25PLN-06 at their meeting on \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The Grass Valley Planning Commission reviewed the project in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act and concluded that the project qualifies for a Class 1, Categorical Exemption in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act and CEQA Guidelines.
5. This project is consistent with City's General Plan.
6. The project is consistent with the applicable sections and development standards in the Development Code.
7. The project, as conditioned, complies with the City of Grass Valley Community Design Guidelines, including that "signage should be designed as an integral architectural element of the project and site to which it relates".
8. The proposed use is allowed within the applicable zone and complies with all other applicable provisions of this Development Code and the Municipal Code.
9. The design, location, size, and operating characteristics of the proposed activity are compatible with the existing and future land uses in the vicinity.
10. The site is physically suitable in terms of design, location, shape, size, and operating characteristics. It ensures that the density, intensity, and type of use being proposed would not endanger, jeopardize, or otherwise constitute a hazard to the public convenience, health, interest, safety, or welfare, or be materially injurious to the improvements, persons, property, or uses in the vicinity and zone in which the property is located.

### **A. RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS:**

1. The approval date for Planning Commission review of the proposed sign is \_\_\_\_\_, with an effective date of Thursday, \_\_\_\_\_, pursuant to Section 17.74.020 GVMC. This project is approved for a period of one year and shall expire on \_\_\_\_\_, unless the project has been effectuated or the applicant requests a time extension that is approved by the Development Review Committee pursuant to the Development Code.

2. The final design shall be consistent with the Development Review application and plans provided by the applicant and approved by the Planning Commission (25PLN-06). The project is approved subject to plans on file with the Community Development Department. The Community Development Director may approve minor changes as determined appropriate.
3. Prior to any work occurring, building permits shall be obtained from the Community Development Department, Building Division.
4. The sign shall be maintained in good repair and functioning properly at all times.
5. The applicant agrees to defend, indemnify, and hold harmless the City of Grass Valley in any action or proceeding brought against the City of Grass Valley to void or annul this discretionary land use approval.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Aerial Map
2. Vicinity Map
3. Universal Application
4. Sign Exception Permit Application
5. Sign Plan Set
  - a. Revised Design
  - b. Original Design
6. Justification Letter