



**PLANNING COMMISSION  
STAFF REPORT  
February 18, 2025**

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

**DATA SUMMARY**

**Application Number:** 25PLN-02  
**Subject:** Master Sign Program Amendment for Pine Creek Shopping Center  
**Location/APNs:** 692 Freeman Lane / APN 029-290-033  
681 Freeman Lane / APN 029-290-020  
729 Taylorville Road / APN 029-290-019  
746 Taylorville Road / APN 029-290-018  
**Applicant:** Michael A. Lopata on behalf of Pine Creek Owner, LLC  
**Zoning/General Plan:** Central Business (C-2) – Commercial (C)  
**Entitlement:** Master Sign Program  
**Environmental Status:** Categorical Exemption

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

1. That the Planning Commission approve the Master Sign Program amendments for the Pine Creek Shopping Center as presented, or as modified by the Development Review Committee, 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 Development Review Permit in accordance with the Conditions of Approval, as presented in this Staff Report.

**BACKGROUND:**

Pine Creek Shopping Center at the intersection of Freeman Lane and Taylorville Road was proposed in 1987 and constructed in 1989. At that time, a Master Sign Program was adopted for the shopping center, providing standards for a range of sign types (e.g., freestanding monument sign, wall signs, canopy signs, etc.), with standards varying depending on the tenant space and location within the shopping center. Recently, tenants have sought to install new wall mounted signs to modernize their signs. However, many of these signs are not supported under the adopted sign criteria.

At their regular meeting on January 28, 2025, the DRC reviewed the proposed sign criteria and recommended a few minor changes: replace the language “considered on a case-by-case basis” with language to require written approval from the property owner for national brand logos, and to amend language regarding letter height to state the preferred height, and provide a clear mechanism for smaller letters. Both changes were addressed by the applicant for the sign criteria presented to the Planning Commission.

### **PROJECT PROPOSAL:**

The applicant seeks to amend the master sign program to modernize standards to support current and future tenants. Proposed amendments address national brand logos, colors, number of signs, and minimum letter sizing. The attached redlined Master Sign Program includes the full scope of the proposed standards (see Attachment 5).

#### Regulatory Authority:

Pursuant to Section 17.38.030 GVMC, a master sign program is to be reviewed and recommended by the Development Review Committee (DRC) and approved by the commission for any site with two or more tenants or five or more total signs. An approval may include exceptions for typical signage height, area, and lighting styles.

The Community Design Guidelines call for signs “to be compatible with other signs on the premises,” and to be “designed as an integral architectural element of the project.”

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

**General Plan:** The Grass Valley 2020 General Plan identifies the site as Commercial (COM). The intent of the Commercial General Plan designation includes all types of commercial retail and service establishments on the highway and along major streets.

**Zoning:** The C-2 Zoning designation applies to existing auto-oriented areas. The C-2 zone permits a full range of retail and restaurant uses. The Hills Flat Business District (HFBD) combining zone applies to an area around the Idaho-Maryland Road/East Main Street intersection. The combining district allows all uses permitted in C-2 with the exception of drive-through restaurants, which the city determined are not appropriate for this area due to traffic-related impacts.

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

Each of the four parcels is built out with buildings for retail, office, and restaurant tenants. Anchor tenants are located at 692 Freeman Lane, with additional pads on the other three 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 amendments to the Master Sign Program are intended to modernize signage standards to orient shoppers and aid in navigation to existing businesses. Therefore, will not result in expansion of use of the commercial property.

**FINDINGS:**

1. The City received a complete application for Master Sign Program Application 25PLN-02.
2. The Grass Valley Development Review Committee reviewed Master Sign Program Application 25PLN-02 at their regular meeting on January 28, 2025.
3. The Grass Valley Planning Commission reviewed Sign Exception Application 25PLN-02 at their meeting on February 18, 2025.
4. The Development Review Committee 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 the City's General Plan and any specific plan.
6. The project site has two or more tenants, or five or more total signs.
7. The project allows signs that relate to the architectural design of the shopping center.
8. The project ensures signs to not unreasonably block the sight lines of existing signs or adjacent properties.
9. The project ensures placement and size of signs to not impair pedestrian or vehicular safety.
10. The project encourages design, height, location, and size of signs that are visually complementary and compatible with the scale, and architectural style of the primary structures on the site, any prominent natural features on the site, and structures and prominent natural features on adjacent properties on the same street.
11. The project, as conditioned, complies with the City of Grass Valley Community Design Guidelines.

**B. RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS:**

1. All signs associated with the Pine Creek Shopping Center shall adhere to the standards set forth in the Master Sign Program, as approved by the Planning Commission.
2. 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. Vicinity Map
2. Aerial Map
3. Universal Application
4. Master Sign Program Application
5. Proposed Master Sign Program Amendments (redlined)