



City of Grass Valley City Council Agenda Action Sheet

Title: Appeal of Sign Exception Application 25PLN-0031 at 2001 Nevada City Highway.

CEQA: Exempt under CEQA Guideline §15301, Categorical Exemption Class 1 (“Existing Facilities”)

Recommendation: Find the project Categorical Exempt pursuant to Section 15301, Class 1, of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and Guidelines, as detailed in the staff report; Review appeal made by the applicant and determine whether to overturn or uphold the planning commission’s decision to deny the internal illumination of the “Shell” symbol on the two canopies at three locations and on the monument price sign at 2001 Nevada City Highway.

Prepared by: Amy Wolfson, City Planner

Council Meeting Date: October 28, 2025

Date Prepared: October 14, 2025

Agenda: Administrative

Background Information: This appeal was heard by City Council at their regular meeting held on October 14, 2025, but due to technical difficulties, the applicant was unable to participate. Council continued the item so that the applicant had a chance to provide comment and present their appeal. The subject gas station was constructed around 1980 when the property was in the jurisdiction of Nevada County. The monument sign appears to have been installed around 1990. Most recently, the site has been operated by the gas company, Speedway. The property owner has decided to rebrand as a Shell station. In the process of this rebranding, and in reviewing the proposed signage, staff determined that several proposed sign features, all having to do with lighting, were in conflict with the signage code.

Applicant Sal Pablo, on behalf of SEI Fuel Services, applied for a sign exception permit in August 2025. The application included the following three sign exception requests to allow for the following sign features:

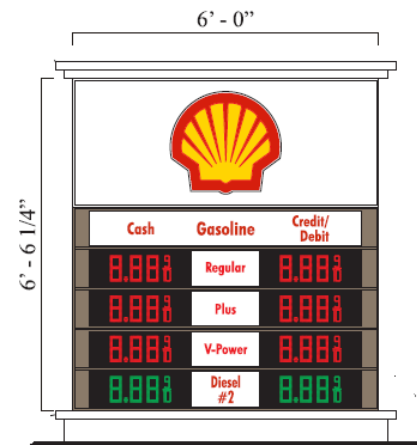
- A light bar proposed around the perimeter of the two pump canopies;
- An internally illuminated price sign; and
- An internally illuminated “Shell” symbol on the two canopies at three locations, as well as on the monument sign.

The Development Review Committee reviewed the sign exception at their meeting on September 9, 2025, and unanimously recommended that the Planning Commission approve the internally illuminated price signage, as well as the internally illuminated “Shell” symbol signage. However, they recommended against approving the light bar proposed around the canopy structures citing that they could not make the required finding that the feature “enhances the building architecture.”

The planning commission reviewed the sign exception at their meeting on September 16, 2025 and they approved only the price sign illumination and denied both the illuminated logos and the illuminated light bars around the canopies with 3 ayes (McDonald, Wich, and Brouillette), 1 no

(Gross), and 1 absent (Speights). Commissioner Gross voted no to the motion because he was in favor of allowing the illuminated “Shell” symbol signage.

The applicant filed an appeal of the decision to deny the illuminated “Shell” signs only. Their appeal form and correspondence to staff have indicated they are only seeking overturning of the decision to deny the illuminated “Shell” signage at three locations on the two canopies and on the monument sign. They have indicated that they are open to reducing light levels during nighttime hours as may be specified by City Council.



Proposed internally illuminated “Shell” symbol and price sign (Light bar not sought under appeal)



Existing Site

Regulatory Authority: Section 17.38.050 of the City Municipal Code prohibits internally illuminated signage “except where authorized by a sign exception permit and determined by the review authority to constitute a design element that is integrated with and enhances building architecture.”

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 proposed signage exceeds the standard of prohibiting internally illuminated signage and explicitly states that it can only be allowed with a sign exception permit.

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 exception is intended to aid in navigation to the business and will not result in an expansion of use of the commercial property on which it will be located.

Council Goals/Objectives: This appeal is not in support of a specified strategic goal but is a required step in the applicant's due process for a sign exception application.

Fiscal Impact: Drafting of the ordinance required staff time.

Funds Available: None **Account #:** TBD **Reviewed by:** City Manager

Attachments:

1. Vicinity/Aerial Map
2. Applications (Appeal, Universal, Sign Exception)
3. Sign Proposal (as presented to planning commission)