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**DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

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**ACTION DATE:** February 16, 2006

**TO:** Planning Commission

**APPLICANT:** Wm. Paul Companies for Archstone Company  
2740 E. Regal Park Drive  
Anaheim, CA 92806

**CASE NOS.:** 05-SP-059 and 05-VAR-009

**LOCATION:** 29128 Oak Creek Lane  
(A.P.N. 2048-011-045, 046, 047 & 048)

**REQUEST:** Request for approval of a Sign Program for Oak Creek Apartments; and a request for a Variance from Zoning Ordinance Section 9655.6.(B)(2) to install two monument identification signs instead of one.

**ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION:** Categorically Exempt from CEQA per Section 15311(a).

**RECOMMENDATION:** Staff recommends approval of Sign Permit Case No. 05-SP-059 and Variance Case No. 05-VAR-009, subject to Conditions, based on the findings of the attached Draft Resolutions.

**ZONING DESIGNATION:** RH-CD-FC (Residential High Density - Cluster Development Overlay - Freeway Corridor Overlay)

**GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION:** RH (Residential High Density)

## **I. BACKGROUND AND PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

On June 12, 2002, the City Council approved Tentative Tract map No. 53752 and Conditional Use Permit No. 01-CUP-009, allowing for the development of 336 apartment units on the east side of Canwood Street, east of Kanan Road. Prior to completion of the Oak Creek Apartments in 2004, the developer, J.h. Snyder Co., received approval in October of 2003 of the Sign Program for the complex (Case Nos. 03-SP-052 and 03-VAR-008). The apartment complex has since been sold to Archstone Company who desires to incorporate their name within the existing on-site signage. Archstone Company is requesting approval of a new Sign Program, as well as a Variance to install two new monument signs to identify the complex, similar to the previous Sign Program approved for this apartment complex, instead of one sign as is allowed per the City Sign Ordinance.

## **II. STAFF ANALYSIS**

The proposed Sign Program consists of detailed design and location plans for various street signs, information signs, building identification signs and project identification signs. Listed below are the specific sign proposals and staff analysis of each.

### Street Signs:

A decal (E9 in the attached Sign Program Brochure) is proposed to be applied on the existing street signs to substitute the logo graphic of an oak tree with the words “Archstone Oak Creek”. The decal is 6” by 6”. A total of 18 decals are proposed within the project. The City Sign Ordinance does not regulate street signs. Rather, public street signs are subject to the standards of the City Public Works Department. In this instance, however, the streets signs are proposed entirely within private property and on private streets and, therefore, are not subject to City Public Works Department standards. The proposed change to the street signs closely matches the existing colors and staff supports the proposed design.

### Traffic Regulations Signs:

Two new signs (reference E4 and E8 in the attached Sign Program Brochure) are proposed at the entry point of the property to inform the public of on-site parking restrictions. These types of signs are not included in the City Sign Ordinance but the Planning Commission has discretion over their design and location as they are new to the Sign Program. Staff supports the proposed colors, materials and locations of these signs, finding them to be consistent with the Sign Program.

### Vehicular Directional Signs

A face change of a directional sign (reference E10 in the attached Sign Program Brochure) located at the T-intersection of Oak Creek and Medea Lane is also included in the proposal. This sign would include directional arrows for the three streets and clubhouse serving the complex.

Standards for vehicular identification signs are not included in the City Sign Ordinance. However, staff finds that the proposed vehicular directional sign to be appropriately placed for safe vehicular movement.

#### Pedestrian Directional Signs

A face change is proposed for four pedestrian directional signs near the leasing office (reference L1, L2, L3 and R3 in the attached Sign Program Brochure). The changes include substituting the existing logo with the new logo and changing the font style of the sign copy. All signs were previously approved under the original sign program entitlement.

The Sign Ordinance includes directional sign provisions for businesses, but not multi-family developments. Thus, the proposed directional signs are at the discretion of the Planning Commission. Directional signage for businesses is intended primarily to direct motorists and pedestrians from within a business parking lot. Business directional signs are limited by the Sign Ordinance to three feet in height. The proposed leasing office signs are designed to be similar to a street sign. Since the signs serve strictly this residential project and are to be located on the private street, rather than within a parking lot, staff finds the applicant's directional sign proposal to be in keeping with the intent of the Sign Ordinance. Staff also finds the number and design of the directional signs to be subtle and limited in number so as not to create visual clutter.

#### Pool Safety Signs:

A total of 12 pool safety signs (reference P1, P2, P3, (2) P4, (6) P8 and P9 in the attached Sign Program Brochure) will be replaced to reflect the new design. The changes including reformatting the signs shape and content as well as the font style and adding the new logo. Pool safety signs, although exterior signs, are not subject to review by the Planning Department but rather the Building and Safety Department, which will review the signs upon the applicant's submittal of a Building Permit for their installation.

#### Building Address and Gates Signs:

A face change is proposed for the 25 address signs located in front of each building by the private street (reference E5 in the attached Sign Program Brochure). The changes include changing the font style of the sign copy and adding a new logo. In addition, new gate warning signs are proposed to be attached to the front and back of each access gate of the underground parking areas (reference R2 in the attached Sign Program Brochure). These types of signs are not included in the City Sign Ordinance but the Planning Commission has discretion over their design and location as they are new to the Sign Program. Staff supports the proposed colors, materials and locations of these signs, finding them to be consistent with the Sign Program.

#### Monument Signs:

Per the Sign Ordinance, apartment complexes may have one monument identification sign for each street frontage. Access to the project is taken from the realigned Canwood Street, via one private street entrance (Oak Creek Lane). As such, one monument sign, not to exceed 48 square feet in area and 6 feet in height may be permitted.

The applicant, in the original Sign Program, had requested approval of two monument signs, each of 24 square feet in size. The signs were built single-sided and were located on the northeast and southeast corners of Canwood Street and Oak Creek Lane. Both signs were identically designed with individual 1.25-foot high metal letters (“Oak Creek”) mounted on top of a 1-foot high stone clad base that would include the mounted word “Apartments”. Both signs were externally illuminated. Although the total size of each monument sign did not exceed the 48 square foot maximum size that is allowed by Code, on a 4-1 vote, the applicant received approval of a Variance Case No. 03-VAR-003 with the Sign Permit Case No. 03-SP-052 to allow the installation of two monument signs instead of one. The applicant, for the current project, is requesting to remove both monument signs and replace them with 2 new signs incorporated onto the existing perimeter wall on both sides of the apartment complex entry driveway. While these are not free-standing signs, the Code defines these as monument signs even though they are incorporated into the project perimeter walls (reference E1 in the attached Sign Program Brochure). This proposal calls for a 72” high by 96” long structure with a 20 square foot copy area for each sign. Although the combined sign area will not exceed the 48 square feet of signage permitted by the Sign Ordinance, a Variance is still technically required to allow more than one monument sign. The proposal for the monument, being considered by the Planning Commission, in this Sign Program is a redesign from the original concept, in that the signage was incorporated into an existing wall instead of an additional free-standing structure. Staff worked with the applicant to coordinate the colors and style of the signs into the existing project. The sign copy now includes the name of the owner and the name of the project. The custom-built signs will be built with materials that already exist on the site. Although the new corporate identity requires displaying more information on the sign, the applicant created a face to be attached to an existing retaining wall instead of a free-standing structure that would impact the landscaped planters. The sign would be externally illuminated similarly to the first proposal.

## VARIANCE

In order for the Planning Commission to grant the Variance, the Zoning Ordinance requires that the following five (5) findings be made. Staff has analyzed the applicant’s requests per the required findings and recommends that the Variance be approved.

### 1. Required Finding

That because of special circumstances applicable to the subject property, including size, shape, topography, location or surroundings, the strict application of the Zoning Ordinance deprives such property of privileges enjoyed by other property in the vicinity and under identical zoning classification.

### Staff Analysis

Although the residential tract is 15.5 acres in size and includes 336 apartment units, it is served by only one driveway that is adjacent to Canwood Street. One project identification monument sign would likely serve motorists traveling in one

direction on the four-lane Canwood Street. The proposed single-sided signs are intended to serve motorists traveling in both directions of Canwood Street, which is the only public street that provides access to this fairly new project.

2. Required Finding

That the granting of the Variance will not constitute a grant of special privileges inconsistent with the limitations upon other properties in the vicinity and zone in which the subject property is situated.

Staff Analysis

Staff finds that the granting of the Variance to allow two monument signs will not constitute a grant of special privileges in that the applicant would be entitled to one monument sign that does not exceed 48 square feet in size and 6 feet in height. The combined size of the proposed two monument signs will not exceed 48 square feet.

3. Required Finding

That the strict interpretation and enforcement of the provisions of the Zoning Ordinance would result in practical difficulty or unnecessary hardship inconsistent with the objectives of this the Zoning Ordinance.

Staff Analysis

A single project identification monument sign would not properly identify the project entrance for motorists traveling in both directions on Canwood Street. The placement of one sign on each corner of the project entrance will allow motorists sufficient visibility of the project to enter the private street.

4. Required Finding

That the granting of the Variance will not be detrimental to the public health, safety or welfare, or materially injurious to properties or improvements of the aesthetic value in the vicinity.

Staff Analysis

Staff finds that the granting of the Variance will not be detrimental to other properties or improvements in that the proposed project identification monument signs are to be located entirely on private property so as not to block visibility of motorists. With this design alternative, the setback distances of the signs from the right-of-way are greater than a free-standing structure. The base will remain screened by landscaping and the sign structure will not exceed the maximum height of 6 feet. The signs incorporate the building materials already existing at the site. The construction of the sign is also required to be in compliance with the Agoura Hills Building Code.

5. Required Finding

That the granting of the Variance will be consistent with the character of the surrounding area.

Staff Analysis

One of the purposes of the Sign Ordinance is to preserve and enhance the unique character and visual appearance of the City. The proposed monument signs comply with this purpose. The proposed materials (stone façade) and the colors used for the two signs will match the buildings within the project and will not significantly impact the existing landscaping. The signs are to be incorporated in the existing perimeter walls which will add architectural interest to the walls.

**III. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

This project consists of minor signs/structures that are accessory to the apartment project they serve. The project is, therefore, categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) per Section 15311(a).

**IV. RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the above analysis, staff recommends the Planning Commission adopt two separate motions to approve Sign Program Case No. 05-SP-059 and Variance Case No. 05-VAR-009, subject to Conditions, per the findings of the attached Resolutions.

**V. ATTACHMENTS**

- Sign Program Draft Resolution and Conditions of Approval
- Variance Draft Resolution and Conditions of Approval
- Exhibit A: Applicant's Variance Burden of Proof
- Exhibit B: Vicinity/Zoning Map
- Exhibit C: Sign Program Exhibit
- Exhibit D: Photographs of the Site

**Case Planner:** Valerie Darbouze, Associate Planner