



**COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO  
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND BUILDING  
STAFF REPORT**

**Planning Commission**

Promoting the wise use of land  
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MEETING DATE October 22, 2015	CONTACT/PHONE Airlin M. Singewald (805) 781-5198 asingewald@co.slo.ca.us	APPLICANT San Luis Obispo Council of Governments / City of San Luis Obispo	FILE NO. DRC2014-00123
EFFECTIVE DATE November 6, 2015			
SUBJECT A request by the San Luis Obispo Council of Governments and City of San Luis Obispo for a Conditional Use Permit to allow the construction of a new community identification sign to read "San Luis Obispo" and an exception to Section 22.20.060(C)(2) to allow for a 326 square foot signage area. The monument sign will act as a gateway to the city. The sign will have a mission style design with stucco finish, clay tiles, decorative bell, and stone base. The monument will not exceed 24 feet in height from the lowest point on grade to the tallest point on sign structure. The project will result in approximately 250 square feet of site disturbance on a 0.64-acre parcel in the Public Facilities land use category. The project is located on the southern corner of the intersection of southbound State Highway 1 and Highland Drive, bordering the northern limits of the City of San Luis Obispo in the San Luis Obispo Sub-area (north) of the San Luis Obispo planning area.			
RECOMMENDED ACTION Approve Conditional Use Permit DRC2014-00123 based on the findings listed in Exhibit A and the conditions listed in Exhibit B.			
ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION A Class 3 categorical exemption was issued on August 15, 2015 (ED15-034).			
LAND USE CATEGORY Public Facilities	COMBINING DESIGNATION None	ASSESSOR PARCEL NUMBER 073-341-025	SUPERVISOR DISTRICT(S) 5
PLANNING AREA STANDARDS: San Luis Obispo Gateways			
LAND USE ORDINANCE STANDARDS: Signs, Setbacks, Landscape Plans			
EXISTING USES: Vacant			
OTHER AGENCY / ADVISORY GROUP INVOLVEMENT: The project was referred to: Building Division, Public Works, Cal Trans, and City of San Luis Obispo			
SURROUNDING LAND USE CATEGORIES AND USES: <i>North:</i> Public Facilities / Cal Poly faculty housing <i>South:</i> City of San Luis Obispo / apartments		<i>East:</i> Agriculture, Public Facilities / Cal Poly campus <i>West:</i> City of San Luis Obispo / apartments, single family residences	
TOPOGRAPHY: Gently sloping to moderately sloping		VEGETATION: Non-native grasses	
PROPOSED SERVICES: Water supply: City of San Luis Obispo Sewage Disposal: N/A Fire Protection: Cal Fire		ACCEPTANCE DATE: July 23, 2015	
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED BY CONTACTING THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & BUILDING AT: COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER γ SAN LUIS OBISPO γ CALIFORNIA 93408 γ (805) 781-5600 γ FAX: (805) 781-1242			

## PROPOSED PROJECT

The proposed project is a request by the San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG) and City of San Luis Obispo to construct a new community identification sign to read “San Luis Obispo.” The sign would be located at the City’s northern gateway, at the southwest corner of Highway 1 and Highland Drive, and would face southbound traffic entering San Luis Obispo on Highway 1. The sign would be a monument design with a maximum height of 24 feet and sign area of 326 square feet. Conditional Use Permit approval is required to modify the 100 square-foot sign area and 12-foot height limit for a community identification sign.

As the County’s Regional Transportation Planning Agency, SLOCOG is responsible for allocating state and federal funds for transportation-related projects. SLOCOG is acting as the lead on this project because it is the recipient of a National Scenic Byways Program grant from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to construct the monument sign. On May 16, 2011, the City’s Architectural Review Committee (ARC) reviewed and approved the City’s Wayfinding Program, including the design of the Highland Drive gateway sign. The design was also reviewed by the City’s Promotional Coordinating Committee, the Cultural Heritage Committee, and the City Council. The City is funding approximately half the project cost.

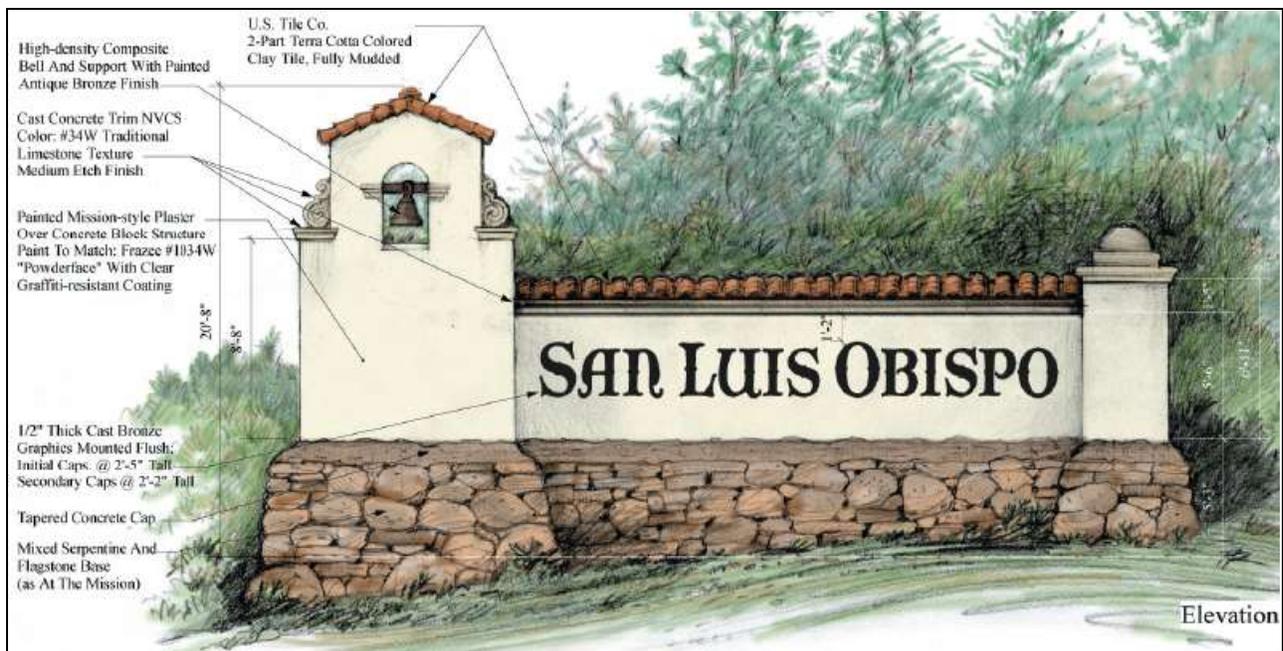


Figure 1: Proposed Monument Sign

The design of the monument sign is based on historical references to the Mission, Mission School, historic Motel Inn (at north end of Monterey Street) and a Spanish-style word mark found in historic photos of the San Luis Obispo Train Station. The sign’s base, which is about 38 feet wide, is a mix of serpentine and flagstone similar to the above ground foundation of the Mission. The sign’s tallest feature is a bell tower reaching a height of 24 feet above ground level. The sign’s facade is composed of hand-troweled mission-style plaster, capped with terra cotta colored clay tile. The display area of the sign is 326 square feet and reads San Luis Obispo in flush-mounted cast bronze letters.

According to the ARC staff report, the scale of the sign structure was determined by the size of the message it was designed to accommodate. The 24" height of the letters was arrived at by calculating the viewing distance (up to 250 feet away and 60 feet laterally from traffic lane) and factoring in the traffic speed (up to 55 mph). The City ARC staff report for the City's Wayfinding Program notes that one criticism of the City's existing gateway signs on Highway 101 is that they are too small to be adequately noticed. The proposed monument sign is designed to be grander in scale to create a sense of entry into the City along Highway 1.

When viewed from Highway 1 southbound, the sign would be backdropped by a grove of mature eucalyptus trees. The project also proposes a landscape plan, which would include the planting of small accent shrubs around the base of the sign and a combination of wildflowers and groundcovers in the foreground closer to the adjoining streets. Groupings of coast live oaks and deodar cedars are proposed behind the sign to provide a future backdrop of large-scale trees when and if the eucalyptus trees are ultimately thinned out or replaced.

The San Luis Obispo Area Plan of the County Land Use Element notes that a San Luis Obispo gateway sign is needed at the City's entrance on Highway 1.

## LAND USE ORDINANCE STANDARDS

### **Section 22.20.060 – Signs Allowed – Type and Area**

Land Use Ordinance Section 22.20.060(C)(2) allows for one community identification sign at or within an urban or village reserve line on each arterial street entering a community with a maximum area of 100 square feet and a maximum height of 12 feet. The sign may include the community name, slogans or mottos, names of civic or religious organizations, but no names of businesses or commercial products. Subsection D allows for larger signs with Conditional Use Permit approval.

The monument sign would have a maximum height of 24 feet above grade and a sign area of 326 square feet. Since this exceeds the 12-foot height limit and 100 square-foot sign area size limit, the project requires Conditional Use Permit approval. As described above (see Proposed Project), the size of the sign area was determined based on the viewing distances and average traffic speed on this section of highway. The large size and scale of the sign is also to create a sense of entry into the city.

Another consideration is that the size limits for community signs were likely determined based on the scale of the county's unincorporated communities and villages. As the largest city in the county and economic and political center of the region, a larger gateway sign is appropriate for San Luis Obispo.

### **Section 22.20.070 – Sign Construction Standards**

The design and construction of signs shall comply with Uniform Sign Code Sections 401 through 1402, and the following:

- A. Height. The height of any sign or sign support structure shall be a maximum of 24 feet, or no higher than the building, whichever is less, except where otherwise provided by Section 22.20.060 (Sign Design Standards).
- B. Lighting. Signs shall be indirectly lighted by continuous, stationary, shielded light sources, directed solely at the sign, or internal to it.

The proposed project complies with this standard because the applicant has applied for a Conditional Use Permit to allow for a maximum height of 24 feet. The project is conditioned to require a lighting plan consistent with this standard.

### **Section 22.10.140 – Setbacks**

The required setbacks for this parcel are as follows: front – 25 feet, side – 10 feet, and rear – 10 feet.

The proposed monument sign has a front setback of 94'-2" from Highland Drive; a 75' side setback from Ferrini Road, and a 1' side setback from the Cal Trans right-of-way on Highway 1.

Section 22.20.060(C) states that the setback requirements for freestanding signs may be adjusted through Conditional Use Permit approval. The applicant is requesting an adjustment to allow the sign to be located within the 10' side setback from Highway 1. The sign would be located within 1' of the Highway 1 right-of-way. The location for the sign was determined in consultation with Cal Trans to maximize visibility from Highway 1 while minimizing traffic safety concerns.

### **Section 22.16.020 – Landscape Plans**

Public projects that require land use permit approval shall include a landscape plan. The project complies with this standard because the applicant submitted a landscape and irrigation plan consistent with the requirements of this section. As described above, the landscape plan includes the planting of small accent shrubs around the base of the sign and a combination of wildflowers and groundcovers in the foreground closer to the adjoining streets. Groupings of coast live oaks and deodar cedars are proposed behind the sign to provide a future backdrop of large-scale trees when and if the eucalyptus trees are ultimately thinned out or replaced.

### **PLANNING AREA STANDARDS / AREA PLAN PROGRAMS**

There are no planning area standards applicable to this project. San Luis Obispo Area Plan Areawide Program #4 encourages the County to work with the City to prepare and implement policies to protect, improve and restore the entryways to the city along the main road corridors. One of the recommended policies is to "obtain highway signage with Cal Trans that provides

information about institutional and commercial destinations within San Luis Obispo.” Approval of the proposed project would help to implement this General Plan policy.

#### AGENCY REVIEW

Public Works: A stormwater control plan is not required. Finishing of the curb, gutter, and sidewalk is not required. (Tim Tomlinson, April 17, 2015)

Cal Fire: No concerns.

Building: A building permit is required. (Michael Stoker, April 16, 2015)

City of San Luis Obispo: Supports project.

#### LEGAL LOT STATUS

The one existing parcel is former highway right of way property that was superseded by a change in the location of State Highway 1. In 1975 the California Highway Commission relinquished this parcel to the City of San Luis Obispo for use as a city street per recorded document, Volume 1871 of Official Records, Pages 902-903.

Staff report prepared by Airlin M. Singewald and reviewed by Karen Nall.