



April 9, 2025

Ms. Angela Calvillo, Clerk  
Honorable Supervisor Melgar  
Board of Supervisors  
City and County of San Francisco  
City Hall, Room 244  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102

Re: **Transmittal of Planning Department Case Number 2025-001051PCAMAP:**  
3250 19th Avenue Special Sign District  
Board File No. 250100

**Planning Commission Recommendation: Approval with Modification**

Dear Ms. Calvillo and Supervisor Melgar,

On April 3, 2025, the Planning Commission conducted a duly noticed public hearing at a regularly scheduled meeting to consider the proposed Ordinance, introduced by Supervisor Melgar. The proposed Ordinance would amend the Planning Code and Zoning Map to establish the 3250 19th Avenue Special Sign District to provide signage opportunities commensurate with the size of the parcel. At the hearing the Planning Commission adopted a recommendation for approval with modifications.

The Commission's proposed modifications were as follows:

1. Modify the Ordinance to specify permitted Signs may be indirectly illuminated.

The proposed amendments are not defined as a project under CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(c) and 15378 because they do not result in a physical change in the environment.

Supervisor, please advise the City Attorney at your earliest convenience if you wish to incorporate the changes recommended by the Commission.

Please find attached documents relating to the actions of the Commission. If you have any questions or require further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Aaron D. Starr", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Aaron D. Starr  
*Manager of Legislative Affairs*

cc: Giulia Gualco-Nelson, Deputy City Attorney  
Jen Low, Aide to Supervisor Melgar  
John Carroll, Office of the Clerk of the Board

**ATTACHMENTS :**

Planning Commission Resolution  
Planning Department Executive Summary



## PLANNING COMMISSION RESOLUTION NO. 21718

**HEARING DATE:** April 3, 2025

*Project Name:* 3250 19th Avenue Special Sign District  
*Case Number:* 2025-001051PCAMAP [Board File No. 250100]  
*Initiated by:* Supervisor Melgar / Introduced January 28, 2025  
*Staff Contact:* Joseph Sacchi  
Joseph.Sacchi@sfgov.org, 628-652-7308  
*Reviewed by:* Aaron Starr, Manager of Legislative Affairs  
aaron.starr@sfgov.org, 628-652-7533

**RESOLUTION ADOPTING A RECOMMENDATION FOR APPROVAL OF A PROPOSED ORDINANCE THAT WOULD AMEND THE PLANNING CODE AND ZONING MAP TO ESTABLISH THE 3250 19<sup>TH</sup> AVENUE SPECIAL SIGN DISTRICT, ENCOMPASSING THE REAL PROPERTY CONSISTING OF A SESSOR'S PARCEL BLOCK NO. 7231, LOT NO. 003, TO PROVIDE SIGNAGE OPPORTUNITIES COMMENSURATE WITH THE SIZE OF THE PARCEL; AFFIRMING THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT'S DETERMINATION UNDER THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT; MAKING FINDINGS OF CONSISTENCY WITH THE GENERAL PLAN, AND THE EIGHT PRIORITY POLICIES OF PLANNING CODE, SECTION 101.1; AND MAKING FINDINGS OF PUBLIC NECESSITY, CONVENIENCE, AND WELFARE UNDER PLANNING CODE, SECTION 302.**

WHEREAS, on January 28, 2025 Supervisor Melgar introduced a proposed Ordinance under Board of Supervisors (hereinafter "Board") File Number 250100, which would amend the Planning Code and Zoning Map to establish the 3250 19th Avenue Special Sign District, encompassing the real property consisting of Assessor's Parcel Block No. 7231, Lot No. 003, to provide signage opportunities commensurate with the size of the parcel;

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission (hereinafter "Commission") conducted a duly noticed public hearing at a regularly scheduled meeting to consider the proposed Ordinance on April 3, 2025; and,

WHEREAS, the proposed Ordinance has been determined to be categorically exempt from environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act Section 15378 and 15060(c); and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission has heard and considered the testimony presented to it at the public hearing and has further considered written materials and oral testimony presented on behalf of Department staff and other interested parties; and

WHEREAS, all pertinent documents may be found in the files of the Department, as the Custodian of Records, at 49 South Van Ness Avenue, Suite 1400, San Francisco; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission has reviewed the proposed Ordinance; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission finds from the facts presented that the public necessity, convenience, and general welfare require the proposed amendment; and

MOVED, that the Planning Commission hereby adopts a **recommendation for approval with modifications** of the proposed ordinance. The Commission's proposed recommendation(s) is/are as follows:

1. Modify the Ordinance to specify that permitted signs within the Special Sign District may be indirectly illuminated.

## Findings

Having reviewed the materials identified in the preamble above, and having heard all testimony and arguments, this Commission finds, concludes, and determines as follows:

The proposed Ordinance would provide appropriate opportunities to adapt the campus signage commensurate with the size of the parcel.

## General Plan Compliance

The proposed Ordinance and the Commission's recommended modifications are consistent with the following Objectives and Policies of the General Plan:

### COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY ELEMENT

#### OBJECTIVE 2

MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE A SOUND AND DIVERSE ECONOMIC BASE AND FISCAL STRUCTURE FOR THE CITY.

##### Policy 2.1

Seek to retain existing commercial and industrial activity and to attract new such activity to the city.

##### Policy 2.3

Maintain a favorable social and cultural climate in the city in order to enhance its attractiveness as a firm location.

## URBAN DESIGN ELEMENT

### OBJECTIVE 1

EMPHASIS OF THE CHARACTERISTIC PATTERN WHICH GIVES TO THE CITY AND ITS NEIGHBORHOODS AN IMAGE, A SENSE OF PURPOSE, AND A MEANS OF ORIENTATION.

#### Policy 1.6

Make centers of activity more prominent through design of street features and by other means.

### OBJECTIVE 4

IMPROVEMENT OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD ENVIRONMENT TO INCREASE PERSONAL SAFETY, COMFORT, PRIDE AND OPPORTUNITY.

#### Policy 4.6

Emphasize the importance of local centers providing commercial and government services.

#### Policy 4.14

Remove and obscure distracting and cluttering elements.

*The proposed Ordinance allows for the continuation of the site as an educational institution and community asset, providing direct employment opportunities and positively contributing to the social and cultural climate of San Francisco. The Ordinance would provide appropriate opportunities to adapt the campus signage to visually communicate the new ownership and operation as the Chinese American International School, emphasizing the importance of the site with signage opportunities commensurate to the size of the parcel.*

## Planning Code Section 101 Findings

The proposed amendments to the Planning Code are consistent with the eight Priority Policies set forth in Section 101.1(b) of the Planning Code in that:

1. That existing neighborhood-serving retail uses be preserved and enhanced and future opportunities for resident employment in and ownership of such businesses enhanced;

*The proposed Ordinance would not have a negative effect on neighborhood serving retail uses and will not have a negative effect on opportunities for resident employment in and ownership of neighborhood-serving retail.*

2. That existing housing and neighborhood character be conserved and protected in order to preserve the cultural and economic diversity of our neighborhoods;

*The proposed Ordinance would not have a negative effect on housing or neighborhood character.*

3. That the City's supply of affordable housing be preserved and enhanced;

*The proposed Ordinance would not have an adverse effect on the City's supply of affordable housing.*

4. That commuter traffic not impede MUNI transit service or overburden our streets or neighborhood parking;

*The proposed Ordinance would not result in commuter traffic impeding MUNI transit service or overburdening the streets or neighborhood parking.*

5. That a diverse economic base be maintained by protecting our industrial and service sectors from displacement due to commercial office development, and that future opportunities for resident employment and ownership in these sectors be enhanced;

*The proposed Ordinance would not cause displacement of the industrial or service sectors due to office development, and future opportunities for resident employment or ownership in these sectors would not be impaired.*

6. That the City achieve the greatest possible preparedness to protect against injury and loss of life in an earthquake;

*The proposed Ordinance would not have an adverse effect on City's preparedness against injury and loss of life in an earthquake.*

7. That the landmarks and historic buildings be preserved;

*The proposed Ordinance would not have an adverse effect on the City's Landmarks and historic buildings.*

8. That our parks and open space and their access to sunlight and vistas be protected from development;

*The proposed Ordinance would not have an adverse effect on the City's parks and open space and their access to sunlight and vistas.*

### **Planning Code Section 302 Findings.**

The Planning Commission finds from the facts presented that the public necessity, convenience and general welfare require the proposed amendments to the Planning Code as set forth in Section 302.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Commission hereby ADOPTS A RECOMMENDATION FOR APPROVAL WITH MODIFICATIONS the proposed Ordinance as described in this Resolution.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was adopted by the Commission at its meeting on April 3, 2025.



Jonas P. Ionin  
*Commission Secretary*

Jonas P Ionin

Digitally signed by Jonas P Ionin  
Date: 2025.04.08 09:33:49 -07'00'

AYES: Campbell, McGarry, Williams, Braun, Imperial, Moore, So  
NAYS: None  
ABSENT: None  
ADOPTED: April 3, 2025



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# PLANNING CODE TEXT & ZONING MAP AMENDMENT

**HEARING DATE:** April 3, 2025

**90-Day Deadline:** May 6, 2025

*Project Name:* 3250 19th Avenue Special Sign District  
*Case Number:* 2025-001051PCAMAP [Board File No. 250100]  
*Initiated by:* Supervisor Melgar / Introduced January 28, 2025  
*Staff Contact:* Joseph Sacchi  
Joseph.Sacchi@sfgov.org, 628-652-7308  
*Reviewed by:* Aaron Starr, Manager of Legislative Affairs  
aaron.starr@sfgov.org, 628-652-7533  
*Environmental*  
*Review:* Not a Project Under CEQA

**RECOMMENDATION:** Approval with Modifications

### Planning Code Amendment

The proposed Ordinance would amend the Planning Code and Zoning Map to establish the 3250 19th Avenue Special Sign District, encompassing the real property consisting of Assessor's Parcel Block No. 7231, Lot No. 003, to provide signage opportunities commensurate with the size of the parcel.



	The Way It Is Now	The Way It Would Be
	Signs permitted in Residential Districts (PCS 606)	Signs permitted in the proposed SSD
<b>Number of signs</b>	One Nameplate and one Identifying Sign for each street frontage of the lot.	One Business Sign or Identifying Sign is permitted for each 130 linear feet of street frontage of the lot.
<b>Area</b>	Nameplate: Not exceeding one square foot.  Identifying Sign: Maximum area 12 square feet.	Wall Sign: Area shall not exceed one square foot per three linear feet of street frontage or 140 square feet, whichever is less.  Freestanding Sign: Area shall not exceed one square foot per seven linear feet of street frontage or 60 square feet, whichever is less.
<b>Height</b>	Nameplate and Identifying Signs: Lesser of 12 feet or the roofline of a building to which it is attached.	Wall Sign: Shall not exceed 50 feet or the height of the wall to which it is affixed, whichever is less.
<b>Location</b>	No Sign shall project beyond a legislated setback line, or into a required front setback area.	Freestanding Signs are permitted to be placed within a required front setback area or within a legislated setback line, provided that the Sign is located at least three feet from the street property line.



## Background

The subject property is approximately 5.4 acres and is developed as an educational campus, including a four-story academic building, fine arts building, and athletic facilities. Mercy High School – a Catholic, all-girls, college preparatory school – opened on the site in 1952, and operated there continuously until decreased enrollment and related financial difficulties forced its closure in 2020. The property was subsequently sold to the Chinese American International School (CAIS), a Mandarin immersion school founded in 1981. CAIS has operated at various locations in San Francisco prior to finding a more permanent home on the 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue campus. Following renovations, CAIS began operating at 3250 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Fall 2024, serving students in preschool through Eighth Grade.

During the renovation phase, CAIS approached the Department with a proposal to update the campus signage. However, the existing controls for signs within Residential Districts proved too restrictive to meet the needs of the school. They were encouraged to reach out to the District Supervisor's office for support. Planning has collaborated closely with the Supervisor's office and City Attorney's Office in developing contextually appropriate sign controls as part of the newly proposed Special Sign District (SSD).

## Issues and Considerations

### Regulating Signs

The sign controls exist to safeguard and enhance property values in residential, commercial, and industrial areas, and protect and enhance the distinctive appearance of San Francisco. To accomplish this, a permit is required for any sign unless it is specifically exempted from the regulations. The Planning Code regulates the types and combinations of signage that are allowed based on a site's zoning district and historic status of the building. The Planning Code also regulates the size, placement, height, and illumination of signs.

The sign controls for Residential and Residential Enclave Districts contained within Planning Code Section 606 impose the strictest limits on the various sign characteristics regulated by the Planning Code, reflecting the predominately low-scale, residential development pattern in these districts. The specific controls for

Residential Districts can be found in “The Way It Is” section of this report. Generally, signage in these districts is limited to Nameplates and Identifying Signs. An Identifying Sign serves to tell the name, address, and the permitted use of a location. A Nameplate Sign is a flat Sign affixed to the wall of a building and contains the name or profession of the people occupying the building.



*An example of Identifying and Nameplate Signs*

The Planning Code also regulates the illumination of permitted signs. Although illuminated signs can attract wanted attention to a business, they can also negatively affect neighboring tenants and residents if not illuminated appropriately. Within Residential Districts, signs may either be non-illuminated or indirectly illuminated. An indirectly illuminated sign is a sign illuminated with a light directed primarily toward the sign and shielded that no direct rays from the light are visible elsewhere than on the property where the sign is located.



*Example of an Indirectly Illuminated Sign*

### **3250 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue: Unique Location and Configuration**

The parcel at 3250 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue is located within an RH-1(D) (Residential-House, One Family Detached) Zoning District. While the existing sign controls for Residential Districts are largely appropriate for these districts, they assume a typical development type found in San Francisco, a single building closely fronting one or two streets.

By contrast, the subject property is approximately 235,000 square feet in area, nearly 10 times the size of a standard city lot. The parcel extends the full width of the block, with primary street frontage on 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue and secondary street frontage along Junipero Serra Boulevard. Under the proposed SSD, the number and area of permitted signs would be based on the length of street frontage, with the calculation based on the frontage of the street from which the sign is visible.



Pedestrian and vehicular access to the site is located off of 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Additional flexibility in the size and location of signage, as proposed in this legislation, would allow updated signage to provide a safe entry marker to the campus, with high visual awareness. Additionally, the property is located across 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue from the Stonestown Galleria, a large commercial shopping center that includes numerous large, directly illuminated business signs.

The property is developed with a four-story academic building, a fine arts center featuring a 455-seat theater, and a multipurpose athletic facility. The former Mercy High School included several signs visible from the 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue frontage, including (1) an engraved wall sign above the primary entrance of the academic building, (2) a painted wall sign on the fine arts building, and (3) a freestanding monument sign.



Although signs that pre-date existing sign controls are generally permitted to remain as non-conforming signs, any new signage is subject to the limitations in the Planning Code. Per Planning Code Section 602, a change of copy on a sign “shall in itself constitute a new Sign...if the new copy concerns a different person, firm, group, organization, place, commodity, product, service, business, profession, enterprise or industry.” Therefore, even if CAIS sought to almost exactly replicate the former signage on the site, they would be unable to do so since the number, size, and location of the Signs conflict with the Residential district sign controls.

## Special Sign Districts

Special Sign Districts (SSDs) act as an overlay that allow more flexibility or add additional restrictions on signs for a specific area. All the SSDs have a different set of rules based on the goals of the SSD. The proposed

SSD in this legislation allows for more flexibility for this site. The 3250 19th Avenue SSD is in keeping with other Special Sign Districts recently enacted by the City, including the Stonestown SSD (Planning Code Section 608.10), which provides additional signage opportunities for a large, undivided parcel that fronts the opposite side of 19th Avenue.

The subject property was developed as an educational campus and has operated as a school for over 70 years. The SSD would allow CAIS to implement a sign program generally commensurate with the former Mercy High's signage.

## General Plan Compliance

The proposed Ordinance supports the Commerce and Industry Element's objective of maintaining a sound and diverse economic base for the city. Specifically, the proposed Ordinance aligns with Policy 2.1 to retain existing commercial and attract new businesses. Although not a commercial venture, CAIS provides employment opportunities for workers in the area. The continuation of the historical use of the property as an educational institution also advances Policy 2.3 of the Commerce and Industry Element, which seeks to maintain a favorable social and cultural climate in the city in order to enhance its attractiveness as a firm location. The proposed Ordinance also aligns with the Urban Design Element. Policy 4.6 seeks to emphasize the importance of local centers for shopping, government services and congregation of people. The 3250 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue campus is located along a busy portion of 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue, which is a segment of California Highway 1. The proposed Ordinance would allow the campus to reinforce the address of the school, better integrate with recent entry site upgrades, and create a distinct entry to the campus.

## Racial and Social Equity Analysis

The proposed amendments only affect one property and therefore cannot be directly tied to a negative or positive impact in advancing the City's racial and social equity.

## Implementation

The Department has determined that this ordinance will not affect our current implementation procedures.

## Recommendation

The Department recommends that the Commission ***adopt a recommendation for approval with modifications*** of the proposed Ordinance and adopt the attached Draft Resolution to that effect. The Department's proposed recommendations are as follows:

1. Modify the Ordinance to specify permitted Signs may be indirectly illuminated.

## Basis for Recommendation

The Department supports the goals of this Ordinance because it will allow for the continuation of the site as an educational institution and community asset. The area encompassed by the SSD was developed as an educational campus and operated as a school for over 70 years. The proposed Ordinance would provide

appropriate opportunities to adapt the campus signage to visually communicate the new ownership and operation as the Chinese American International School, while preserving the City's attractiveness as a place to live, work, visit, and shop.

**Recommendation 1: 1. Modify the Ordinance to specify permitted Signs may be indirectly illuminated.**

The draft Ordinance does not address sign illumination. To avoid ambiguity and provide the flexibility intended by the Ordinance, staff recommend updating the language to allow permitted signage in the SSD to be indirectly illuminated.

## **Required Commission Action**

The proposed Ordinance is before the Commission so that it may adopt a recommendation of approval, disapproval, or approval with modifications.

## **Environmental Review**

The proposed amendments are not defined as a project under CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(c)(2) and 15378 because they do not result in a physical change in the environment.

## **Public Comment**

As of the date of this report, the Planning Department has not received any public comment regarding the proposed Ordinance.