I. BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION

This is a continued public hearing to consider a new exterior wall sign at an existing retail building. The wall sign would be located on the east elevation of the facility, over the existing storefront windows. The application was initially reviewed by the Commission at its June 6, 2019 meeting. The Commission continued the item to the June 20, 2019 meeting, so that the applicant could revise the layout of the sign copy and logo, and to request a Minor Sign Adjustment for increased sign area. The item was subsequently continued at the June 20th and July 11th hearings to provide the applicant additional time. Approval of a Minor Sign Adjustment would allow the applicant to increase the sign area up to 20% over what is permitted under Chapter 18.60 of the Pleasant Hill Municipal Code, or up to approximately 38.8 square feet. The commission provided the following comments/direction to the applicant:

1) Revise the copy layout from stacked lines to one single line that reads “Minuteman Press”.

2) Revise the placement of the logo. Relocate from left side of copy to center above copy. OK to enlarge logo due to rounded arch roof line.

3) Revise sign area under guidelines of a Minor Sign Adjustment.

II. GENERAL INFORMATION

A. CEQA

Pursuant to Section 15301 and 15311 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) of 1970, as amended, this project is determined to be a Class 1 & 11 categorical exemption, which consists of replacement of on-premise signs.
B. Public Notices

Public notices were sent in advance of the public hearing to all property owners within 300 feet of the project site.

III. ANALYSIS

A. Proposed Signage

Wall Sign
The proposed sign would be mounted on the east facing building elevation. It includes the following design features:

- General Sign Design
  - Material: aluminum face and returns
  - Depth: ¼” thick letters, mounted to wall surface with ½” spacers
  - Sign Copy height:
    - “Minuteman Press” – 14.5-inches tall
    - “M” logo – 19-inches tall
    - Combined height: 35.15-inches tall
- Sign Copy Colors
  - “Minuteman Press” – 341 green
  - “M” logo – 341 green and 165 orange

Staff Comments

Wall Sign Design: The wall sign would be centered over the storefront window system. The colors are darker than the white background of the existing wall surface. The logo is taller than the largest letter, however it fits naturally on the building elevation, which displays a rolling arch roof line.

Wall Sign Area: The applicant is requesting a sign area that exceeds regulations under the City Sign Ordinance. The zoning ordinance permits 1 square foot of sign area for each linear foot of building frontage. The building is approximately 32-feet 4-inches in length, thus, their request for a 38.8 square foot sign would require approval of a Minor Sign Adjustment.

B. Minor Sign Adjustment

As noted below, a number of findings must be made in order to approve a minor sign adjustment; however, the key findings pertinent to the applicant’s request relate to the justification for the adjustment (i.e. practical difficulties and/or superior more creative design), whether the adjustment would result in any adverse effects on adjacent properties/tenants and whether the adjustment would result in a fair and equitable outcome. The applicant’s justification for the proposed adjustment is included in Attachment D. In summary, the applicant indicates that the proposed increase in sign
area is necessary because the unique characteristics of the structures façade and rounded arch roofline.

**Minor Sign Adjustment Findings**

A minor adjustment is proposed to increase the allowable sign area. In order to approve a Minor Sign Adjustment, appropriate findings must be made, a discussion of these findings are provided below:

1. Is consistent with the intent of the specific purposes noted in PHMC § 18.60.010;
   a. Provide each sign user an opportunity for effective identification by limiting the number and area of signs permitted on all sites. *The adjustment would not allow an increase in the number of signs allowed onsite. The increase in sign area will allow the tenant to create more continuity and balance with the existing retail building’s elevation and roofline by centering the logo over the text.*
   b. Maintain and enhance the quality of the City’s appearance by limiting off-premises signs to avoid clutter. *Not applicable.*
   c. Enable users of goods and services to readily identify establishments offering services to meet their needs. *The adjustment would allow an increase in the size of the text to improve visibility and better identify the business.*
   d. Regulate the number and size of signs according to standards consistent with the types of establishments in each zoning district. *The adjustment would not allow an increase in the number of signs. This sign area adjustment would allow a sign that would be consistent with other signs in the immediate vicinity.*
   e. Protect residential districts adjoining nonresidential districts from adverse impacts from excessive signs. *Existing signage along the Contra Costa Blvd. commercial corridor is already partially visible from residential neighborhoods bordering this stretch of road. Thus, allowing a minor increase in sign area would not significantly affect existing views. In addition, the proposed signage is partially screened from view by trees within and along Contra Costa Blvd. and the nearby residential properties.*
   f. Provide fair and equitable regulations throughout the community. *While the proposed adjustment would allow an increase in sign area, it would do so in order to achieve a more creative sign design that enhances the retail building at 1905 Contra Costa Blvd. The sign area increase would not result in a sign that is oversized for the building or to mainly provide advertising for the
business. The proposed sign is complementary to the building and appropriate for its location.

g. Provide substantial compliance with city-wide sign design guidelines. The following City-Wide Sign Design Guidelines are applicable to the project as summarized below:

a. SG.IV.C.3 – General Sign Guidelines: Signs should efficiently advertise the business so that passers-by can readily understand the message. The proposed signage uses bold colored, clear lettering that contrasts well against the light colored façade background.

b. SG.IV.C.5 – Signs should not by their appearance or size, dominate or overpower the setting, or be visually obtrusive. They should complement the visual character of the setting where they are located, whether it is a street frontage or storefront. The proposed sign area would provide continuity and balance with other signs within the surrounding shopping centers.

c. SG.IV.D.1 – Individual channel letters are strongly encouraged for signs on new commercial and retail. The proposed signage would consist of channel letters which is in conformance with this guideline.

h. Minimize the possible adverse effects of signs on nearby public and private property, including streets, roads and highways. The adjustment would have minimal adverse effects as it would be substantially screened from view of residential properties by offsite trees. Regulate signs in a manner so they do not physically interfere with or obstruct the vision of pedestrian or vehicular traffic. The adjustment would not have a negative effect on pedestrian or vehicular traffic as it is mounted on a wall and complies with all other provisions of the sign ordinance.

i. Avoid unnecessary and time-consuming approval requirements for certain minor or temporary signs that do not require review for compliance with the city’s building and electrical codes, while limiting the size and number of such signs so as to minimize visual clutter. No effect.

j. Respect and protect the right of free speech by sign display, while reasonably regulating the structural, locational and other noncommunicative aspects of signs. No effect.

k. Regulate signs in a constitutional manner, which is content-neutral as to noncommercial signs. No effect.

2. Will not adversely affect adjacent properties or tenants; and the proposed adjustment will result in a sign that is consistent with other signs along Contra Costa Blvd. The retail site is partially visible from a single-family residential
use, however, there are already signs facing this direction and is partially screened from view by trees.

3. Is necessary due to practical difficulties involved in the strict application of zoning ordinance standards to the project site or would result in a superior, more creative design. The proposed adjustment would allow the applicant to place the logo on top of a single line of copy. This particular layout would provide a superior design that would enhance the look of the retail building. Without the adjustment, the sign would be smaller in size and would not take advantage of the rolled arch roofline in the same way.

IV. CONCLUSION

The proposed wall sign would comply with the sign ordinance and many of the Sign Design Guidelines. The sign is clear to read and is designed with a simple color palette. Staff recommends the ARC discuss the proposed Minor Sign Adjustment for increased sign area and provide direction to staff and the applicant.

V. RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the ARC confirm that the project is exempt from CEQA and approve the proposed signage with the Minor Sign Adjustment, with any revisions that may be required, subject to the attached conditions of approval or as they may be modified by the Commission.

VI. ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A-1 Staff Recommended Conditions of Approval
Attachment B-1 Proposed Project Plans & Site Photos
Attachment C-1 Applicant’s Minor Sign Adjustment Analysis
Attachment D-1 June 6, 2019 Architectural Review Commission Staff Report
   (Including Attachment C – Project Plans / Photos. All other attachments are available for viewing online or in the Planning Division)
Attachment E-1 Public Notice