

Prince George's County Departure from Design Standards Application No. 510

Applicant: Lincoln Memorial Park, Inc., Owner

Location: South side of Suitland Road, approximately 1,305 feet east of Southern Avenue.

Request: Reduction in the commercial landscaping strip.

R E S O L U T I O N

WHEREAS, the applicant is requesting a reduction in the commercial landscaping strip; and

WHEREAS, the advertisement of the public hearing was posted on the property in accordance with the adopted Rules of Procedure of the Prince George's County Planning Board; and

WHEREAS, the Technical Staff Report released June 21, 2000, recommends APPROVAL; and

WHEREAS, after consideration of the Technical Staff Report and testimony at its regular meeting on June 29, 2000, the Prince George's County Planning Board agreed with the staff recommendation; and

WHEREAS, the Prince George's County Planning Board decision is based on the findings and conclusions found in the Technical Staff Report and the following DETERMINATIONS:

Departure from Design Standards Application No. 510:

The applicant seeks permission to substitute a combination of existing woodlands and large expanses of open space for a 25-foot-wide commercial landscaped strip required pursuant to Section 4.2 of the Landscape Manual.

A. Required Findings:

(A) Section 27-239.01(b)(9) of the Zoning Ordinance provides that in order for the Planning Board to grant the departure, it shall make the following findings:

1. The purposes of this Subtitle will be equally well or better served by the applicant=s proposal.

Finding: The subject cemetery has been in existence for more than 70 years. While the existing woodlands adequately provide for the requirements of the Landscape Manual in some sections, it is not continuous. Its frontage

along Suitland Road contains a mixture of existing woodlands and shrubbery as well as sections which have no landscaping, but do provide for scenic views into the site.

The requirement for a commercial landscaped strip is necessary to soften the appearance of development from the road. Here we are talking about several 19-foot high mausoleums which will be located almost 1/4 mile from Suitland Road. The 4,000 square foot addition to the office will be well hidden behind a 70" foot-wide swath of mature trees.

A cemetery is not a commercial use, but rather a quasi-public use that has the appearance of open space. It would make little sense to require a commercial landscaped strip to Asoften@ a use that is essentially open space. Allowing the applicant to use the existing woods to buffer the office addition while allowing the scenic vistas into the site to remain unencumbered by additional plantings will serve the purposes of Section 27-102 equally well as compliance.

- 2. The departure is the minimum necessary, given the specific circumstances of the request.**

Finding: Allowing the existing woodlands and scenic vistas into this mature cemetery to substitute for new landscaping is the minimum departure necessary. All new development proposed on this site plan will either be hidden by existing woods (the office expansion) or distance (the new mausoleums).

- 3. The departure is necessary in order to alleviate circumstances which are unique to the site or prevalent in areas of the County developed prior to November 29, 1949.**

Finding: The subject property was established as a cemetery in 1927. A cemetery is significantly different than most commercial developments in that it involves a minimal amount of buildings and is predominantly open space. Thus, there is little need for a commercial landscaped strip.

4. **The departure will not impair the visual, functional or environmental quality or integrity of the site or of the surrounding neighborhood.**

Finding: The departure will allow for a continuation of the existing situation, which uses a combination of mature trees, existing woodlands and scenic views to substitute for plantings along Suitland Road. This approach has remained virtually unchanged for the 70+ years that this use has been established in this area. It has not, and will not impair the visual, functional or environmental quality or integrity of the site or of the surrounding neighborhood.

- (B) **For a departure from a standard contained in the *Landscape Manual*, the Planning Board shall find, in addition to the requirements in paragraph (A) above, that there is no feasible proposal for alternative compliance, as defined in the *Landscape Manual*, which would exhibit equal or better design characteristics.**

Finding: Alternative Compliance Application No. AC-99022 was denied in part by the Planning Director with the recommendation that the applicant either plant in accordance with the requirements of the Landscape Manual, or obtain a DDS. We conclude that allowing the applicant to maintain the scenic views into and out of the site without requiring additional plantings is the correct action in this case. We can find no

alternative which would result in a better design.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Departure from Design Standards Application No. 510 is hereby APPROVED.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appeal of the Planning Board=s action must be filed with the District Council of Prince George=s County within thirty (30) days following the final notice of the Planning Board=s decision.

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This is to certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the action taken by the Prince George's County Planning Board of The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission on the motion of Commissioner McNeill, seconded by Commissioner Boone, with Commissioners McNeill, Boone, Brown and Hewlett voting in favor of the motion, at its regular meeting held on Thursday, June 29, 2000, in Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

Adopted by the Prince George's County Planning Board this 20th day of July 2000.

Trudye Morgan Johnson
Executive Director

By Frances J. Guertin
Planning Board Administrator

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