

Prince George's County Departure from Sign Design Standards Application No. 564

Applicant: Hannah Storch, Owner

Location: The subject property is located at the southeast quadrant of I-95 and MD 450

Request: Departure from Sign Design Standards

### R E S O L U T I O N

WHEREAS, the applicant is requesting a departure from the height limit (25 feet) and sign area restriction (max. 200 square feet) for freestanding signs to permit a 40-foot-high 476± square foot freestanding sign; 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 December 29, 1999, recommends APPROVAL, with conditions; and

WHEREAS, after consideration of the Technical Staff Report and testimony at its regular meeting on January 6, 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:

- A. Location and Field Inspection: The subject property is located at the southwest quadrant of I-95 and MD 450. The property is developed with a 70,909-square-foot shopping center known as A Lanham Shopping Center. This shopping center includes a one-story main retail building, a three-story office building, two pad sites and a large paved parking area.
- B. Request: The applicant wishes to erect a 40-foot-high, 476.33-square-foot freestanding sign. **Section 27-614(b) of the Zoning Ordinance establishes a maximum height of 25 feet for freestanding signs in all commercial zones (except C-O). Section 27-614(c)(3)(A) establishes a maximum sign area of 200 square feet for such freestanding signs.** A departure of 15 feet in height and 276.33 square feet of sign area are therefore, requested.
- C. Surrounding Uses:
  - North- Across Annapolis Road is an office building and hotel in the C-M Zone.
  - East- Fast-food restaurants vehicle repair shop and hotel in the C-M Zone.
  - South- Across the Amtrak railroad tracks are single-family homes in the R-R Zone.

West- I-95 / I-495, an apartment complex in the R-18 Zone and commercial uses in the C-S-C Zone.

D. Other Requirements:

1. Number of Required Spaces: The subject use is classified as an integrated shopping center (a group of three or more retail stores planned and developed under a uniform development scheme and served by common and immediate off-street parking and loading facilities). The parking requirement is 1 parking space per 250 square feet of Gross Floor Area (GFA). The subject 70,909-square-foot shopping center requires at least 284 parking spaces. The site plan indicates that 384 parking spaces are provided.
2. Landscape Manual: The subject proposal does not alter the use of the property or add square footage to the shopping center. This application is, therefore, exempt from the requirements of the *Landscape Manual*. The Urban Design Section, in a memo dated September 3, 1999, recommends, however, that a planting bed around the base of the sign planted with annuals and shrubs be included to further enhance the appearance of the sign.

E. Required Findings:

**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 purposes of this Subtitle will be equally well or better served by the applicant=s proposal. The purposes of the Sign Regulations are set forth in Section 27-589 as follows:

- (1) **To promote the health, safety, and welfare of the present and future inhabitants of the Regional District;**
- (2) **To encourage and protect the appropriate use of land, buildings, and structures;**
- (3) **To regulate unsightly and detrimental signs which could depreciate the value of property and discourage quality development in the Regional District;**
- (4) **To regulate signs that are a hazard to safe motor vehicle operation;**
- (5) **To eliminate structurally unsafe signs that endanger a building, structure, or the public;**
- (6) **To prevent the proliferation of signs that could detract from the scenic qualities of the landscape or the attractiveness of development; and**

**(7) To control the location and size of signs, so as to provide for adequate identification and advertisement in a manner that is compatible with land uses in the Regional District.**

The applicant points out that the erection of the proposed sign is in conjunction with the renovations to the Lanham Shopping Center. This renovation will promote the health, safety and welfare of the area, and encourage and protect the appropriate use of land, buildings and structures by improving both the visual quality and the services of the subject property.

In addition, the new sign requested by the applicant will enhance safe motor vehicle operation rather than create a hazard. The subject property is unusually located and lacks visibility from the roads on which it fronts because vehicles entering the property from the Beltway or from eastbound MD 450 must actually pass the property in order to turn into an entrance accessing the site. Thus, the new proposed sign will ensure that motorists can easily identify and locate the Lanham Shopping Center and will reduce motorists' confusion, thereby enhancing vehicle safety.

The applicant also submits that the requested departures will not result in a proliferation of signs which could detract from the scenic quality of the landscape or the attractiveness of development. The proposed sign will merely replace an existing freestanding sign. The number of freestanding signs on the subject property will not exceed what is permitted. The new proposed sign will provide adequate identification and advertisement in a manner compatible with land uses in the area.

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

Finding: The departure is the minimum necessary, given the specific circumstances of the request. The original application requested a 50-foot-high, 482-square-foot freestanding sign. The applicant has revised the application to request a 40-foot-high, 476.33-square-foot sign. The purpose of the departure is to increase the height of the sign so that 25 feet of the sign is visible from the Beltway.

The sign rendering submitted by the applicant indicates that the proposed sign includes a 64.18-square-foot sign identifying the shopping center as ALanham, @ and four smaller tenant identification signs (33± square feet each). The sign also includes some decorative elements such as piping and perforated aluminum to conform with the architecture of the recently renovated shopping center. The actual square footage of the sign panels which identify the shopping center and tenants is 196.18 square feet.

Unfortunately for the applicant, the decorative elements must be counted as part of the sign. Therefore, the total square footage of the sign is 476.33 square feet. The maximum sign area permitted for the sign is 200 square feet. If the decorative elements were not included in the sign area calculation, then at 196.18 square feet the proposed sign would meet the requirements. A departure of 15 feet in height and 276.33 square feet of sign area are, however, the minimum necessary for this application.

**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 departure is necessary in order to alleviate circumstances which are unique to the site. The applicant points out that the subject property has unique (and burdensome) characteristics, including poor visibility, no access on the main roadways which it abuts, and a location within an older retail area in the County that is in need of revitalization. The subject property is located below grade of the Beltway (I-95 / I-495), which abuts the site to the west. The purpose of the departure is to increase the height of the sign so that 25 feet of the sign is visible from the Beltway. At the proposed location of the sign, the travel lanes of the Beltway are 15 feet above the grade of the parking lot. The applicant has designed the sign so that 25 feet of the sign will be visible from the Beltway.

**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 not impair the visual, functional or environmental quality or integrity of the site or of the surrounding neighborhood. The primary purpose of the sign is to let motorists on the Beltway know the Lanham Shopping Center exists. The sign will be situated on the site to allow only the top 25 feet of the sign to be visible from the Beltway. The proposed sign is attractively designed to be consistent with the architecture of the recently renovated shopping center.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Departure from Sign Design Applications No. 564.33" is hereby APPROVED, subject to the following conditions:

1. The maximum sign height shall be 40 feet and the maximum sign area shall be 476 square feet.
2. A planting bed at the base of the sign which shall be provided and maintained with a variety of annuals, perennials and shrubs.

PGCPB No. 00-04  
File No. DSDS-564  
Page

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 adoption of this Resolution.

\* \* \* \* \*

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 Boone, seconded by Commissioner McNeill, with Commissioners Boone, McNeill and Hewlett voting in favor of the motion, and with Commissioner Brown absent, at its regular meeting held on Thursday, January 6, 2000, in Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

Adopted by the Prince George's County Planning Board this 27th day of January 2000.

Trudye Morgan Johnson  
Executive Director

By Frances J. Guertin  
Planning Board Administrator

TMJ:FJG:JDJ:aj