

R E S O L U T I O N

WHEREAS, the Prince George's County Planning Board has reviewed Departure from Sign Design Standards Application No. 571 requesting a departure of 35 feet from the maximum height of a freestanding sign, three feet from the maximum height of a building-mounted sign and two off-site freestanding signs in accordance with Subtitle 27 of the Prince George's County Code; and

WHEREAS, after consideration of the evidence presented at the public hearing on June 12, 2003, the Prince George's County Planning Board finds:

- A. **Location and Field Inspection:** The site is located on the east side of Branch Avenue, 362± feet south of its intersection with Old Alexandria Ferry Road. The site comprises approximately two acres and is improved with a small strip shopping center. A separate one-story building houses a church and a tavern. The site has frontage along Branch Avenue, but access is provided only through other commercial properties fronting either on Coventry Way and Old Alexandria Ferry Road.

- B. **Development Data Summary:**

	<b>EXISTING</b>	<b>PROPOSED</b>
Use(s)	Shopping Center	Shopping Center
Acreage	1.99±±	1.99±±
Square Footage/GFA	1,844	1,844

- C. **History:** The 1993 Sectional Map Amendment for Subregion V placed the subject property in the C-M Zone.

- D. **Master Plan Recommendation:** The 1993 Master Plan for Subregion V recommends retail-commercial use for the property.

E. **Request:** The applicant proposes to increase its visibility along this elevated section of Branch Avenue by substantially raising the height of its freestanding sign to 60 feet, while raising its roof-mounted signs to 15 feet. Because these heights are restricted to 25 feet and 12 feet, respectively, departures of 35 feet and 3 feet are necessary. The applicant also proposes to place two off-site signs along Coventry Way and Old Alexandria Ferry Road. Off-site signs are considered to be billboards and are prohibited in Prince George's County. This report will, therefore, address the freestanding sign and the roof-mounted signs.

- F. **Surrounding Uses:** The site is surrounded on all sides by strip commercial uses in the C-S-C and C-M Zones.

- G. **Sign Regulations—**

**Section 27-593 – Prohibited Signs**

**(a)(13) Outdoor Advertising Signs (Billboards):** A “Sign” (including “Painted Bulletin” and Poster Panel”) which directs attention to a business, commodity, service, entertainment, event or other activity conducted, sold, or offered elsewhere than upon the property on which the “Sign” is located.

**Section 27-613 – Building Mounted Signs:**

**(b) Height:** In all Commercial and Industrial Zones (except the I-3 Zone) no sign shall extend more than twelve feet above the roofline or parapet wall (whichever is higher) of that part of the building to which the sign is attached.

**Section 27-614 – Freestanding Signs:**

**(b) Height:** The maximum height of a freestanding sign in the C-M Zone shall be 25 feet as measured from the finished grade at the base of the sign to the top of the sign.

The applicant is requesting a departure of 35 feet from the maximum height for a freestanding sign, as well as three feet from the maximum height for a building-mounted sign.

**(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:** In general, the purposes of Part 12 (Signs) of the Zoning Ordinance are to regulate unsightly and hazardous signs, to provide adequate identification and advertisement, to promote the general welfare of the residents of the county, and to foster the appropriate use of land, buildings and structures. The facts set forth in this application establish that by granting the requested departures, within certain limits, these purposes will not be jeopardized. These departures are requested to address visibility issues created by the reconstruction of Branch Avenue as an elevated highway. As a result of this reconstruction, the existing shopping center is difficult to see from Branch Avenue, particularly as one travels north. The departures will allow for taller freestanding and building-mounted signs that will provide adequate identification and advertisement.

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

**Finding:** The applicant proposes a 60-foot-tall freestanding sign. This extraordinarily tall sign would be necessary to allow a driver headed north on Branch Avenue adequate notice to exit onto Coventry Way. Access to the shopping center is then gained by driving through a fast-food restaurant parking

lot located on Coventry Way. However, a freestanding sign of this magnitude would be wholly inconsistent with existing signage along this stretch of Branch Avenue.

Directly across Branch Avenue, similar issues were addressed in DSDS-562 (1999) for the Coventry Plaza Shopping Center. In that case, a departure of ten feet for sign height and 40 square feet for sign area was found to be adequate to provide enhanced visibility. A 35-foot-tall sign, while not visible before Coventry Way, would give greater visibility to the center, albeit as the northbound traveler is driving past. A ten-foot departure to allow a 35-foot-tall freestanding sign, as found in DSDS-562, would be the minimum necessary.

The building-mounted signs are proposed to be 15 feet above the roofline. The depictions of these signs show two different designs—some are mounted on a new extended roof façade, while others are shown mounted on bars of scaffolding extending from the roof, giving them the appearance of miniature billboards. However, the scaffold-mounted signs are unsightly and they should not be allowed. The applicant should submit elevations of roof façade improvements for approval by staff, prior to signature approval of the sign details and the issuance of permits.

**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 to alleviate circumstances that are unique to the site. The circumstances are that Branch Avenue, a major artery that the site fronts on, has been reconstructed and elevated. As a result, the site is no longer clearly visible from the roadway. The existing 25-foot-tall freestanding sign and building signage is only partially visible to motorists, especially from the south. However, this situation can be improved by increasing the height of the freestanding sign to 35 feet and the height of the building-mounted sign to 15 feet.

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

**Finding:** With reasonable limitations in place, the departures will not impair the visual, functional or environmental quality or integrity of the site or the surrounding neighborhood. The recommended departures will permit the existing shopping center to be adequately advertised in a compatible manner that is portionally equal to similar departures recently approved for Coventry Plaza Shopping Center.

**(B) Not applicable to this application**

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that pursuant to Subtitle 27 of the Prince George's County Code, the Prince George's County Planning Board of The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission adopted the findings contained herein and APPROVED the request to increase the height of the freestanding sign to 35 feet and the height of the building-mounted signs to 15 feet, subject to the following conditions:

1. The building-mounted signs shall be designed to appear as if mounted directly to a parapet wall or extended roof façade, and the use of structural steel rods or scaffolding supports shall be effectively screened from view.
2. The applicant shall provide revised elevations of the sign details, including building modifications, for approval by staff as the Planning Board's designee, prior to the issuance of permits.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Planning Board DENIED the proposed off-site advertising/billboard signs; and

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

\* \* \* \* \*

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 Eley, seconded by Commissioner Lowe, with Commissioners Eley, Lowe, Scott, Vaughns and Hewlett voting in favor of the motion, at its regular meeting held on Thursday, June 12, 2003, in Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

Adopted by the Prince George's County Planning Board this 3rd day of July 2003.

Trudye Morgan Johnson  
Executive Director

By Frances J. Guertin  
Planning Board Administrator

TMJ:FJG:TL:rmk

(Revised 8/9/01)