

Prince George's County Departure from Sign Design Standards

Applicant: Carrollton Enterprises

Location: The subject property is located on the northeast corner of Riverdale Road and Annapolis Road

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 and area requirements of Section 27-614 for a freestanding sign; and

WHEREAS, the applicant's original request for a departure of 20 feet from the height requirement and 606 square feet for the area departure has been revised to a departure of 15 for the height of the sign and 317 square for the area of the 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 February 28, 2001, recommends approval with conditions; and

WHEREAS, the Technical Staff recommendation was revised to reflect more accurate measurements of the proposed sign; and

WHEREAS, after consideration of the Technical Staff Report, as revised, and testimony at its regular meeting on March 8, 2001, 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. The subject site is an integrated shopping center currently known as Carrollton Mall and Carrollton Shopping Center. Located in the northern quadrant of the intersection of Annapolis Road (MD 450) and Riverdale Road, it is made up of Parcels A and B of the Carrollton Shopping Center Subdivision. The proposed sign is to replace a sign located in Parcel B which is also the site of a major renovation of the Carrollton Mall.
- B. A significant difference in elevation (10.8 feet) exists between the base of the sign and surrounding roadways. North and west of the site are residential uses; while commercial uses are located to the east, south and southwest.
- C. The applicant requests a departure of 15 feet for a sign height of 40 feet, exceeding the maximum permitted height of 25 feet.. The base of the sign is actually located 10.8 feet below the grade of

the intersection of Annapolis Road and Riverdale Road. Therefore, the height of the sign, as viewed from the surrounding roadway, appears to be closer to 29 feet.

The applicant also requests a departure of 317 square feet from the maximum permitted sign area of 200 square feet. The total area for the proposed sign is 517 square feet.

- D. The applicant notes, and the letter from the City of New Carrollton concurs, that the sign contains the seal of the City of New Carrollton and functions in some ways as a gateway sign for the city. The area of the city seal (about eight square feet) is not included in the area calculations for the sign. The site plan also notes the proposed removal of an existing freestanding sign along Riverdale Road and its replacement by another freestanding sign closest to the westernmost entrance to the site.
- E. Permits have been released recently for the reconstruction of this shopping center. Parking and loading needs and landscaping issues were addressed at that time. An approval of this sign departure will, therefore, not constitute approval of the submitted plans except as they pertain to the characteristics and location of the signs proposed for the property.
- F. In accordance with Section 27-239.01(b)(9)(A) of the Zoning Ordinance, **the purposes of this Subtitle will be equally well or better served by the applicant=s proposal.** The applicant=s proposal will serve the purposes of the Zoning Ordinance. Due to the difference in elevation, height and bulk of the sign, it will be less visible than its dimensions indicate. The additional area allows the supporting columns of the sign to be constructed of materials which complement the main buildings, thereby promoting a beneficial relationship between this property and surrounding uses.
- G. As required by Section 27-239.01(b)(9)(B), **the departure is the minimum necessary, given the specific circumstances of the request.** A minimum departure of 10.8 feet to offset the difference in grade between the base of the sign and the surrounding roadway is necessary, simply to offset the disadvantage of the elevation difference. Another four to five feet in height is taken up by the proposal to include the city seal, a public sign, which is exempt from these requirements.

The proposed height of 40 feet is needed to have the information on the sign visible to traffic on the surrounding roads. The proposed sign details show that the bottom of the lowest tenant sign is about 14 feet above grade at the base of the sign, or a little over three feet above the grade of Annapolis Road.

At 250 square feet, the area of the sign panels for the six major tenants and the shopping center name exceed the permitted maximum by 50 feet. The design of the sign, including a pediment which tops the sign and surrounds the city seal, and the brick faced columns add another 267 square feet to the area calculation. This proposal is the minimum required to erect a sign that conforms in style and building materials to the new building facades of the shopping center. The attractive incorporation of the city seal in the ornamentation of the sign, also affects the overall area of the sign. This is still a large area, but is one which can be justified as the minimum

necessary, given the architectural elements proposed.

- H. **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** [Section 27-239.01(b)(9)(c)]. The significant change in elevation between the base of the sign and the surrounding roadways is a unique feature of this site, justifying a departure from the height limitation of about 11 feet. It is also noted that a portion of the sign will function as a gateway sign for the City of New Carrollton since it will incorporate the city seal and surrounding ornamentation. This unique circumstance justifies the additional height of four feet which is added by the city seal and surrounding decorative elements.

The incorporation of the city seal also provides justification for the additional area created by the seal and its surrounding ornamentation. Furthermore, the difference in elevation between the roadways and the base of the sign is also justification for an increase in the area of the sign, particularly given the fact that the face of the columns must be considered part of the area of the sign and a significant portion of that area is not visible. Therefore, there are elements unique to this sign at this location which justify both the requested height and area departures.

- I. In accordance with Section 27-239.01(b)(9)(D), **the departure will not impair the visual, functional or environmental quality or integrity of the site or of the surrounding neighborhood.** This sign with its attractive design elements and materials, will be an asset to this commercial area. The overall height and bulk of the sign are significant departures from the norm. However, a the major portion of the additional height is not visible to passersby in the surrounding area, due to the elevation differences. Much of the additional bulk is, likewise, hidden from view.

These departures will allow the sign the necessary visibility, while exceeding the height above the grade of the roadway, only by enough room to allow for the city seal and surrounding ornamentation. Although the base of the sign will not be visible from the surrounding roadways, it will be very visible to pedestrians and drivers in the parking lot of the shopping center. Landscaping at the base of the sign is not shown on current approved landscape plans. Therefore, this approval is conditioned upon the provision of landscaping in the form of shrubs and perennial groundcover to soften the appearance of the base of the sign.

- J. Approval of this request is further conditioned upon a corresponding *decrease* in the maximum permitted height of 25 feet for the proposed new sign along Riverdale Road. That sign, which will identify the Lowe=s store, is recommended to not exceed 20 feet in height. This sign will be more visible to the residential portion of the surrounding neighborhood and therefore it is appropriate to reduce the visual impact of signage at this location. By allowing the minimum necessary increase in height and area at the commercial focal point of the center and decreasing the height of the sign closest to residential development, the proposed departure will not impair the visual, functional or environmental quality or integrity of the site as it relates to the surrounding neighborhood.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Departure from Sign Design Standards is hereby

APPROVED subject to the following conditions:

1. The proposed freestanding sign for Lowe=s along Riverdale Road shall be limited to twenty feet in height.
2. Landscaping at the base of the AShoppes at New Carrollton@ sign shall be provided as follows:
  - a. Twenty-five shrubs: taxis boccata Ahicksii@ (yew) or similar, 24 inches, staggered 3 feet OC; surrounded by
  - b. Thirty-five to 40 perennials: lirope Abig blue,@ or similar.

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 Eley, seconded by Commissioner Brown, with Commissioners Eley, Brown, Lowe and Hewlett voting in favor of the motion, at its regular meeting held on Thursday, March 8, 2001, in Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

Adopted by the Prince George's County Planning Board this 19th day of April 2001.

Trudye Morgan Johnson  
Executive Director

By Frances J. Guertin  
Planning Board Administrator

TMJ:FJG:CW:rmk