

Prince George's County Departure from Sign Design Standards DDS-573

Applicant: Rivertowne Commons Limited  
Location: The subject property is located between the Capital Beltway and Oxon Hill Road, approximately 1,800 feet west of St. Barnabas Road  
Request: Departure from Sign Design Standards

R E S O L U T I O N

WHEREAS, the applicant is requesting an increase in height and area for a 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 April 5, 2001, recommends APPROVAL with conditions; and

WHEREAS, after consideration of the Technical Staff Report and testimony at its regular meeting on April 12, 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. Location and Field Inspection: The subject property is located between Oxon Hill Road (MD 414) and the Capital Beltway (US 95) , approximately 1,800 feet west of St. Barnabas Road. The site is rectangularly-shaped and consists of approximately 36.2 acres of land. It is developed with an integrated shopping center known as Rivertowne Commons. The shopping center consists of various retailers, with Safeway and K-Mart stores being the anchors. The main part of the shopping center is located along the property=s northern (Capital Beltway frontage) and western boundaries. Six additional freestanding buildings, occupied by banks and restaurants are located on the southern portion of the property, spaced along Oxon Hill Road. The property has 1,883 feet of frontage on Oxon Hill Road (south) and 2,304 feet of frontage on the Capital Beltway (north). It is accessed from Oxon Hill Road through three driveways.
- B. History: The property was placed in the R-R Zone by adoption of the 1949 Maryland-Washington Regional District Act. Zoning Map Amendment A-4080 changed the property=s zoning from R-R to C-2. The approved 1984 Sectional Map Amendment (SMA) for Subregion VII rezoned the property from the C-2 Zone to the C-S-C Zone.
- C. Master Plan Recommendation: The Approved 1981 Master Plan for Subregion VII recommends the site for Mixed Employment and High Density Residential use.
- D. Request: The applicant proposes to increase the height and area of an existing freestanding sign located in the southern portion of the property along Oxon Hill Road, at the main entrance to the

shopping center. The proposed sign will have a height of 35 feet and an area of 437.5 square feet. The current sign has a height of 25 feet and an area of 100 square feet. This application proposes to increase the permitted sign area from 200 square feet to 437.5 square feet and increase the permitted sign height from 25 feet to 35 feet. The applicant also proposes another sign on the northwestern portion of the property, along the Capital Beltway. This sign will have a height of 19.11 feet and an area of 197.16 square feet and it meets all requirements.

E. Surrounding Uses: The property is surrounded by the following uses:

North: Capital Beltway and single-family residential uses in the R-55 Zone

South: Across Oxon Hill Road, commercial uses in the C-S-C, C-O and C-2 Zones.

East: Commercial uses in the C-S-C Zone

West: Commercial uses in the C-S-C Zone and garden apartments in the R-18 Zone

F. Sign Requirements:

1. **Section 27-614(d)(2) of the Zoning Ordinance allows one freestanding sign for a property with street frontage of 40 to 1,100 feet, and one additional sign is permitted for each additional 1,000 feet or fraction thereof.**

The subject property has 1,883 feet of frontage on Oxon Hill Road and 2,304 feet of frontage on the Capital Beltway for a total of 4,187 feet. Therefore, the site is allowed five freestanding signs. The applicant is proposing two freestanding signs.

2. **Section 27-614(a)(4) requires that freestanding signs shall be located at least 10 feet behind the ultimate right-of-way line.**

Review of the site plan indicates that the existing sign is located at least 10 feet behind the street line of Oxon Hill Road. No change in location is proposed. However, the site plan needs to show the exact location of the proposed sign. The site plan currently shows and refers to only the existing sign. With respect to the second freestanding sign along the Capital Beltway, the site plan shows that it is located 21 feet behind the street line.

3. **Section 27-614(b)(1) specifies that the maximum height of signs in the C-S-C Zone shall be 25 feet, measured from the finished grade at the base of the sign to the top of the sign.**

The proposed freestanding sign is 35 feet high; a departure of 10 feet is requested.

4. **Section 27-614(c)(3)(A) provides that in all Commercial Zones (except the C-O Zone) and all Industrial Zones (except the I-3 Zone), the area of the freestanding sign shall be not more than one (1) square foot for each two (2) linear feet of street frontage, to a maximum of two hundred (200) square feet for each sign, if the**

**building is located in an integrated shopping center, other commercial center with three (3) or more businesses served by common and immediate off-street parking and loading facilities, industrial center, or office building complex. The street frontage shall be measured on the property occupied by the center or complex associated with the sign.**

The applicant is proposing an area of 437.5 square feet for the proposed 35-foot-high, freestanding sign along Oxon Hill Road. A departure of 237.5 square feet is requested.

**5. Section 27-589 contains the following purposes for regulating signs:**

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

G. 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.

In general, the purposes of the Sign 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 proposed replacement of the freestanding sign is a part of an overall renovation of the existing integrated shopping center, Rivertowne Commons. The center is located on 36.2 acres of land and has a total of 4,187 feet of combined street frontage on the Capital Beltway and Oxon Hill Road. As such, the property is allowed five freestanding signs with a maximum height of 25 feet and a maximum area of 200 square feet for each sign.

The applicant is proposing to erect only two freestanding signs, one at each of the two street frontages. As noted, the proposed sign for the Capital Beltway frontage meets all requirements with regard to height, area and setback. However, the proposed sign for the Oxon Hill Road frontage exceeds the maximum height and area permitted for a freestanding sign. The proposed sign, which is 437.5 square feet in area and 35 feet tall, will replace the existing freestanding sign, which is 100 square feet in area and 25 feet tall. A departure of 237.5 square feet in area and 10 feet in height is needed for the proposed sign.

The increased height and area are needed to ensure adequate identification and advertising space for the various retail establishments located in the shopping center. Due to the extent of the 1,883 feet of road frontage on Oxon Hill Road, individual tenants' signs are not visible from the adjacent road. The proposed sign will be of sufficient height and size to provide sufficient advertisement space for the various uses in the shopping center with adequate notification to motorists and patrons. The purposes of this Subtitle will be equally well or better served by the applicant's proposal.

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

The departure is necessary given the specific circumstances of the property, which occupies nearly 2,000 feet of frontage along Oxon Hill Road with three driveway entrances. It is developed with an integrated shopping center with various uses, some needing an individualized identification sign within the proposed freestanding sign. As noted, the property has a combined total of 4,187 feet of road frontage; five signs, each having an area of 200 square feet are permitted. This represents 1,000 square feet of total sign area. The total sign area for the two freestanding signs proposed by the applicant is 634.66 square feet. This is substantially less than what would otherwise be permitted by right.

The proposed sign advertises six of the major tenants in the shopping center. The area of the effective lettering for the six sign panels and the shopping center name totals 234 square feet, exceeding the permitted maximum area by 34 square feet. The design elements, including the decorative bronze color metal roofing, the white and blue trims, and the dryvit-stucco-faced columns and top, account for the remaining 203.5 square feet of sign area.

The proposed sign is designed to provide space to advertise individual tenants of

the shopping center in a manner that will ensure adequate visibility from the adjacent road. In addition, the increased size and height of the proposed sign will readily identify the main vehicular entrance to the site.

**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.**

Although the property has frontage on the Capital Beltway and Oxon Hill Road, it is accessed only from Oxon Hill Road. The majority of the uses on the property are located along the northern (rear) and western property lines, behind a sizeable parking area and substantially set back from the property's Oxon Hill Road frontage. While the larger stores (Safeway, K-Mart) are easily identifiable from a distance, the majority of the smaller uses and their individual signs are not.

The proposed sign is located near the middle section of the road frontage within clear view for motorists traveling eastbound and westbound on Oxon Hill Road. The increased size and height will provide needed advertisement and identification space for the various uses in the shopping center. The location, size and number of the smaller uses in the shopping center, coupled with the relatively large size of the property and the extended length of its road frontage, constitute unique circumstances which are alleviated by the requested departures.

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

The departure will not impair the visual integrity of the site or surrounding area. As indicated, the proposed sign is centrally located on the long-stretched frontage with substantial distances (over 800 feet) from the adjoining commercially-zoned properties both to the east and west. The proposed sign will not overwhelm the surrounding area in scale and proportion. Any potential adverse impact from the increase in area and height is minimized by the size of the property and the substantial distances between the proposed sign and the adjoining properties and other signs in the area.

Moreover, both freestanding signs are attractively designed in a manner that complement the design, colors and decorative features of the recently renovated shopping center. Also, the applicant has provided landscaping at the base of the proposed freestanding sign. The applicant's supplemental submission of a landscape plan shows a combination of shrubs and ground covers. The landscaping at the base of the sign further enhances the visual quality of the site and projects an aesthetic appearance.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Departure from Sign Design Standards Application No. 573 is hereby APPROVED subject to the following conditions:

1. The site plan shall be revised to show the precise location of the proposed sign along Oxon Hill Road.
2. There shall be no more than two freestanding signs on the property.

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 Brown, seconded by Commissioner Hewlett, with Commissioners Brown and Hewlett voting in favor of the motion, Commissioner Lowe opposing the motion and Commissioner Eley absent at its regular meeting held on Thursday, April 12, 2001, in Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

Adopted by the Prince George's County Planning Board this 17th day of May 2001.

Trudye Morgan Johnson  
Executive Director

By Frances J. Guertin  
Planning Board Administrator

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