



THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

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File No. DSP-87048/45

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Prince George's County Planning Board is charged with the approval of Detailed Site Plans pursuant to Part 3, Division 9 of the Zoning Ordinance of the Prince George's County Code; and

WHEREAS, in consideration of evidence presented at a public hearing on April 22, 2010, regarding Detailed Site Plan DSP-87048/45 for Six Flags America, the Planning Board finds:

1. **Request:** This application has filed to obtain approval of a revision to Detailed Site Plan DSP-87048/45 to construct Thomas Town, which includes Thomas the Train, Knapford Station, a gift shop and concession stand, a "meet and greet" gazebo, benches, a children's play structure, the Tidmouth Hault, Balloon Ferris Wheel, Convoy Ride, Bertie Bus Ride, Pop Jet Fountain, Cranky Tower Ride, and Harold the Helicopter Ride. Thomas Town will be located within Gotham City, on the interior of the subject property.

2. **Development Data Summary:**

Zone(s)	R-A and R-S
Use(s)	Commercial Recreational
	Attraction
Acreage	265.62
Square Footage	2,507

Re-Themed Rides
Bertie the Bus
Convoy Ride
Balloon Ferris Wheel

Rides
Thomas the Train
Harold the Helicopter
Cranky the Crain Tower Ride

Structures and Features
Knapford Station
Tidmouth Hault
Meet and Greet Gazebo
Play Structure
Portholes
Pop-Jet Fountain

The parking requirements for a commercial recreational attraction are set by the approved special exception and the associated concept plan. Special Exception applications SE-2635 and SE-3400 found that the parking which was approved at the time of those applications was sufficient for the needs of the park as it was then shown on the concept plan, although a provision was made for additional parking to be provided if the park's operating experience showed it to be necessary. Twenty-four hundred additional parking spaces were added during the 1999 season. The applicant has stated that ample parking was available during the 2009 season. The addition of Thomas Town, an attraction for small children, is not expected to necessitate more parking than is currently available on-site.

3. **Location:** The Six Flags America Amusement Park is located north of Central Avenue (MD 214), with the main entrance approximately one mile east of Church Road. The site is in Planning Area 74A, Council District 6, in the Developing Tier.
4. **Surroundings and Uses:** To the north, the park adjoins an existing residential neighborhood, Woodmore Meadows. To the west, the park adjoins Potomac Electric Power Company (PEPCO) transmission right-of-way (ROW) and the existing Kettering residential neighborhood. To the east, the park is adjacent to the Belt Woods, an area of historic and undisturbed old-growth forest.

A historic site, the Partnership site and cemetery, is located on the subject property, approximately 730 feet northeast of the proposed Thomas Town.

5. **Previous Approvals:** The site is the subject of the approved special exception plans for the commercial recreational amenity use, SE-2635 and SE-3400. Special Exception SE-2635 was first approved in 1972, while Special Exception SE-3400 was first approved in 1983 District Council Order 11-1999. As required by Section 27-342 of the Zoning Ordinance, a concept site plan was approved as part of SE-2635 and SE-3400 generally establishing the park layout. Smaller mobile rides and attractions may be constructed and distributed throughout the designated General Activity Area, while larger rides and attractions with foundations require detailed site plan approval and are limited to those approved on the concept site plan.

Following approval of Special Exception applications SE-2635 and SE-3400, the applicant filed a Detailed Site Plan, DSP-87048 for the park, which has been revised numerous times in order to approve in detailed form the rides that were approved on the concept site plan, as well as to make adjustments to other aspects of the park over the course of its operations.

In 1999, the attractions which had been approved on the concept site plan had all been constructed, and the applicant received approval for a revision to the concept site plan and to SE-2635 and SE-3400, approving seven additional rides. Revisions to Detailed Site Plan DSP-87048 have continued since that time.

The most recent Detailed Site Plan DSP-87048-43 reviewed by the Planning Board was approved on February 19, 2009, to permit two new rides, the Tony Hawk Half Pipe and the Speed Slide. The most recent revision, Detailed Site Plan DSP-87048-44, was approved at the Planning Director level on November 16, 2009, to add a warehouse and revise the handicap parking in the west overflow lot.

6. **Design Features:** The plan will add Thomas Town, a children's attraction, to the amusement park, within the General Activity Area. The Thomas Town is from a fictional cartoon whose main character is Thomas the Tank Engine. Thomas Town includes the following rides and features: the Tidmouth Hault, Balloon Ferris Wheel, Thomas Town Convoy Ride, Pop Jet Fountain, Themed Play Structure, Bertie the Bus, Cranky Tower, Thomas the Train, Knapford Station Retail, Harold the Helicopter, Meet and Greet Gazebo, and Portholes (gateway sign). Thomas Town will be

located centrally within the site, within an attraction called Gotham City, near the Superman Roller Coaster and the Joker's Jinx, and within the "General Activity Area."

The Thomas Town Portals are gateway style signs that mark the entrance and exit of Thomas Town. Thomas the Train is a mini-train engine that travels on a set of tracks that runs the perimeter of Thomas Town and takes patrons past each of the rides and features. This train is associated with the Knapford Station, where passengers board and disembark the train. Knapford Station is a 50-by 40-foot building with a gift shop, concession stand, and patio with seating area. Tidmouth Hault is a train station façade prop. The Tidmouth Shed displays the image of Thomas the Tank Engine's friends and is roughly 16 by 40 feet and 13.5 feet tall. The Tidmouth Hault is located in the northwest corner of Thomas Town.

The Meet and Greet Gazebo is located centrally within Thomas Town and consists of a roughly 16-foot-square gazebo with seating. The structure is almost 11 feet tall at its peak. The applicant has provided a generous and well-designed planting plan for Thomas Town which will provide ample shade as it matures. The gazebo provides interim shade until the new vegetation grows to maturity.

The Pop Jet Fountain is a platform with a water tower intended for interactive play. Children can engage the water coming from a pipe in the water tower or ground-mounted pop jets. The tower is 16.8 feet tall. The Pop Jet Fountain provides a good place for children to cool off on a hot day. The Pop Jet Fountain is located adjacent to the play structure, on the southwestern border of Thomas Town.

The Thomas Town Themed Play Structure is a large but standardized piece of playground equipment. The structure is 36.8 feet at the peak of a roof, the tallest point. Children are not typically more than 18 feet from ground level while playing.

The Cranky the Crain Tower Ride is a slow moving, vertical drop ride for children. The ride is almost 50 feet at its highest peak when raised. The passenger compartment travels 32.8 feet vertically. The tower ride is located on the northeastern edge of Thomas Town, between Bertie the Bus and Knapford Station.

Harold the Helicopter features small helicopters with a passenger compartment for patrons. The helicopters are attached to long arms that spin the helicopters around a central point while moving up and down. This ride is roughly 30 feet at its highest point and roughly 35 feet in diameter. Harold the Helicopter is located near the southeastern entrance.

Several of the rides were previously approved and located in other sections of the park. The following rides have been re-themed for the Thomas Town attraction: Bertie the Bus, the Convoy Ride, and the Balloon Ferris Wheel.

Bertie the Bus is a bus on a set of arms that swings in an upward vertical arch. The rise is almost 23 feet at its highest point and travels 30 feet horizontally. Bertie the Bus is located on the

northeastern edge of the site, near the north entrance, and adjacent to the Cranky the Crain Tower Ride. Bertie the Bus is a remodeled ride that already is in operation at Six Flags America.

The Thomas Town Convoy Ride consists of a small convoy of connected ride units that travels on a set of wheels along a guided track. There is a retaining wall with a safety fence located near the convoy ride. The convoy ride is located along the western edge of Thomas Town, between the Balloon Ferris Wheel and the play structure. This existing park ride has been re-themed in the subject proposal.

The Balloon Ferris Wheel is 52.5 feet tall and 46.5 feet in diameter. The cars are shaped like hot air balloons. The Balloon Ferris Wheel is located just to the south of the Tidmouth Hault, north of the convoy ride. This ride was previously approved in a different section of the park.

The rides are located within the already-developed portion of the park, adjacent to and among existing rides and attractions, so that the impact on adjoining properties would not be appreciably different from existing conditions. The nearest residential properties to the rides are located on the opposite side of Central Avenue (MD 214), approximately 1,800 feet south of Thomas Town. The closest residential properties on the north side of Central Avenue are further away, approximately 3,300 feet to the west of Thomas Town.

COMPLIANCE WITH EVALUATION CRITERIA

7. **Zoning Ordinance:** The Six Flags America Amusement Park is a commercial recreational attraction as provided for in Section 27-342 of the Zoning Ordinance. The plan is in conformance with the applicable requirements of the Zoning Ordinance.
8. **Prior Approvals:** The most recent revision of the Special Exception Plans, SE-2635 and SE-3400 District Council Order 11-1999 was approved in 1999 with 37 conditions of approval, most of which are related to the approval of detailed site plans. The following conditions of approval warrant discussion at this time:

1. **No structure, including any observation tower, shall be constructed higher than 200 feet in height measured from grade.**

No structure associated with Thomas Town will exceed 53 feet in height at its highest point, as measured from grade. Most of the attractions will be considerably lower in height. The plan is in conformance with this requirement.

2. **A noise study shall be submitted with the Detailed Site Plan for each new ride or activity that will demonstrate that noise levels from any sounds (including any crowd noise) will not exceed 55 dBA at all property lines, except as permitted in Condition 19 herein.**

The applicant has submitted a noise study prepared by Phoenix Noise and Vibration, LLC, demonstrating that the new rides will not generate any noise exceeding 55 dBA at the property lines. This study was reviewed by the Environmental Planning Section and found to be acceptable.

6. **The Six Flags management shall have the discretion within the General Activity Area to freely locate movable rides, food stands, concessions, and/or ticket stands, or similar facilities, but not major rides or structures with substantial foundations.**

This condition provided the trigger for this Detailed Site Plan revision, as several structures within the Thomas Town proposal include foundations.

14. **Each Detailed Site Plan shall provide information indicating the type of glare and light that can be expected to be generated by the proposed use(s), and that such lighting will have no adverse impact on adjoining properties.**

The applicant has affirmed that the lighting associated with these rides will be minimal and limited to downward-directed lights, which will only be needed during the period after sunset and just before the park closes for the night. As the rides are located at a great distance from all adjoining properties, there will be no off-site adverse impact.

15. **The facility, where feasible, shall incorporate barrier-free design to provide accessibility for handicapped patrons.**

All of the rides and features incorporate some degree of accessibility. The following rides and features have a ground level entry: Thomas the Tank Engine, Knapford Station, Tidmouth Hault, Meet and Greet Gazebo, Themed Play Structure, Portholes, Harold the Helicopter, Bertie the Bus, Cranky the Crain Tower, Convoy, and the Pop-Jet Fountain. The Balloon Ferris Wheel has ground-level access and one handicap accessible car.

The Planning Board revision to Detailed Site Plan DSP-87048-41, was approved by the Planning Board on July 14, 2005, PGCPB Resolution No. 05-149 with two conditions of approval, one of which relates to the review of this plan:

18. **The applicant's Detailed Site Plans shall include a safety plan for patrons, employees, surrounding property residents and animals.**

The applicant has submitted a letter indicating that Thomas Town will have fencing surrounding the rides as required by ASTM (American Society for Testing Materials), prohibiting guests from entering the non-rider safety zone. In addition, the applicant has provided information on railroad crossings with crossing arms, flashing lights, audible warning bell, and a safety line on the pavement. This condition has been met.

2. **Prior to future revisions of the subject detailed site plan, the applicant shall take measures to preserve the history of the property where Partnership sits in a manner satisfactory to the applicant and the historic preservation staff.**

The Planning Board found that the Historic Site, Partnership and Cemetery 75A-015 and its environmental setting shall be shown and labeled on the site plan.

9. ***Prince George's County Landscape Manual:*** The rides do not generate any additional landscaping requirements under the *Prince George's County Landscape Manual*. The area where Thomas Town will be located is largely paved already. The applicant has provided ample landscaping and screening for the children's park and is conformance with the landscaping requirements of Special Exception applications SE-2635 and SE-3400 District Council Order 11-1999.
10. **Referral Agencies and Departments:** The subject application was referred to the concerned agencies and departments. The referral comments are summarized as follows:
 - a. **Historic Preservation Section**—The Planning Board found the that Historic Site, Partnership and Cemetery 75A-015 and its environmental setting, must be delineated and labeled on the site plan prior to signature approval.
 - b. **Transportation Planning Section**—The Planning Board accepts that the revision raises no traffic, master plan, access, or circulation issues, and is acceptable. A referral was sent to The Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA), and no response had been received at the time of the writing of this technical staff report.
 - c. **Permit Review Section**—The Planning Board found that the landscape plan must be revised to add a note that states that the landscaping is exempt from the *Prince George's County Landscape Manual* per Section 1.1g. The Permit Review Section had no other comments.
 - d. **Environmental Planning Section:** The Planning Board found that there are no environmental issues with the plan, and that the DSP is in conformance with previously approved Type II Tree Conservation Plan TCP11/045/98.
 - e. **Department of Public Works & Transportation (DPW&T):** The Planning Board found that the site plan is in conformance with approved Stormwater Management Concept Plan 32134-2009-00 and that existing utilities may require adjustments that the applicant will need to coordinate with the various utility companies.
 - f. **Department of Environmental Protection (DER):** The Planning Board found that the subject property is in Water and Sewer Category 3, and that water and sewer lines abut the property.

11. As required by Section 27-285 (b) of the Zoning Ordinance, the detailed site plan represents a reasonable alternative for satisfying the site design guidelines of Subtitle 27, Part 3, Division 9, of the Prince George's County Code without requiring unreasonable cost and without detracting substantially from the utility of the proposed development for its intended use.

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 Detailed Site Plan DSP-87048/45, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to certification of Detailed Site Plan DSP-87048-45, the applicant shall revise the site plan as follows:
 - a. Delineate and label the Historic Site, Partnership and Cemetery 75A-015 and its environmental setting.
 - b. Bertie the Bus shall be shown in the same location on the landscape and lighting plan and the detailed site plan.
 - c. Provide details and materials for the retaining wall and pavers.
 - d. Revise the Landscape and Lighting Plan to add a note that states: "The landscaping is exempt from the *Prince George's County Landscape Manual* per Section 1.1g."

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 Clark, seconded by Commissioner Vaughns, with Commissioners Clark, Vaughns, Cavitt, Squire and Parker voting in favor of the motion at its regular meeting held on Thursday, April 22, 2010, in Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

Adopted by the Prince George's County Planning Board this 13th day of May 2010.

Patricia Colihan Barney
Executive Director

Frances J. Guertin
By Frances J. Guertin
Planning Board Administrator

PCB:FJG:CJ:arj

APPROVED AS TO LEGAL SUFFICIENCY.
Janella J. [Signature]
M-NCPPC Legal Department
Date 4/29/10