

July 30, 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: Prince George's County Planning Board

VIA: Steve Adams, Urban Design Supervisor

FROM: Elizabeth Whitmore, Senior Urban Designer
Susan Lareuse, Planner Coordinator

SUBJECT: Prince George's Plaza
Departure from Design Standards, #515

The Urban Design Staff has reviewed the Departure from Design Standards for Prince George's Plaza. Based on that review and the findings in this report, the Development Review Division recommends Approval with conditions.

1. The site is located north of the Prince George's Plaza Metro Station, directly across East-West Highway. The site is zoned C-S-C and is entirely within the Prince George's Plaza Transit District Overlay Zone and encompasses 51.78 acres. The applicant is providing the required amount of parking and loading spaces.

The requests of the applicant in Departure from Design Standards DDS-515 are as follows:

- a. Relief from the bufferyard requirements of Section 4.7 of the *Landscape Manual*. The subject site is deemed a high intensity use by the *Landscape Manual*; to the north of the subject property is the Georgian Plaza apartment complex which is a low intensity use, and to the west is a medical office complex, which is a medium intensity use.
 - b. Reduction of the width of the required landscape yard along the northern property line from 40 feet to 0 feet (for approximately 1,637 linear feet), then gradually widening to 50 feet for 120 linear feet; along the western property line, reduction from 20 feet to 0 feet (for approximately 786 linear feet), then gradually widening to 50 feet for 300 linear feet.
 - c. Reduction of the required plant units from 2,811 plant units to 340 plant units along the northern property line and from 869 plant units to 250 plant units along the western property line.
2. Departure from Design Standards, DDS-330 (PGCPB No. 88-430) was approved on September 8, 1988 which granted relief from several sections which has resulted in the current small amount of landscaping. The Board of Zoning Appeals (Appeal No. 9274)

granted the request for a variance from Section 27-450(a)(2) (which required that one-half of the required side yard be landscaped when adjoining land is in a residential zone and that such yard be screened from the adjoining residential land). This approval predates the requirements of the *Landscape Manual*. A 3-foot-high fence is currently existing along the north property line as well as 340 plant units. The site became subject to the requirements of the *Landscape Manual* because the application is proposing more than 5,000 square feet of development and for the same reason is subject to the requirements of the Transit District Development Plan (TDDP) for Prince George's Plaza. The applicant requested alternative compliance from Section 4.7 of the *Landscape Manual*. The request for alternative compliance (AC-99059) was recommended for denial by the Planning Director.

3. 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:

a. The purposes of this Subtitle will be equally well or better served by the applicant's proposal.

The purposes of the Zoning Ordinance are set forth in Section 27-102. They are varied in nature, but in general are to protect the health, safety and welfare of the residents and workers in Prince George's County. In this instance, the facts establish that granting the requested departure will in no way jeopardize these purposes. The subject property is located in an older area inside the Beltway that was developed before most current zoning and development standards came into effect. The current condition of the immediate area can be described as an older shopping center with garden apartments to the north. While the shopping center has had a face-lift, several vacancies remain. The proposed application for the subject property will create an environment and related amenities that will enhance and revitalize the shopping center as well as provide a service to the residents who live in the area.

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

The applicant is proposing approximately 330 plant units in combination with 260 existing plant units for a total of 590 plant units out of 3,680 plant units required by current *Landscape Manual* standards. Staff believes that this is inadequate and is recommending a six-foot-high board-on-board fence with brick pillars and stone caps 20 feet on-center to help mitigate the lack of landscape materials that are required for these two bufferyards.

c. 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.

The departure is necessary to alleviate circumstances which are unique to the site. The subject application is part of the shopping center which predates the current requirements of the *Landscape Manual*. The subject shopping center has received previous approvals for Departure from Design Standards #330 (PGCPB No. 88-430), Alternative Compliance #99059, and Variance No. 9274 which have resulted in the current situation.

d. 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, functional or environmental quality or integrity of the site or of the surrounding neighborhood. Staff believes that the departure, if approved in accordance with the condition recommended below, will result in a visual improvement for both the Georgian Plaza apartment complex to the north and the medical office complex to the west. Staff believes that the applicant should be allowed to maintain the previously approved reduction, but given the increased requirement of the *Landscape Manual*, this reduction should be mitigated by provision of a six-foot-high board-on-board fence with brick pillars and stone caps 20 feet-on-center. The applicant should also be allowed to maintain the existing condition of the western property line, but for the same reason, the applicant should be required to provide a six-foot-high board-on-board fence with brick pillars and stone caps 20 feet-on-center. The fence should have 3 foot-wide breaks where existing access is provided to the shopping center. The fence will mitigate the reduction in the width of the bufferyard and plant materials and will ensure the visual, functional, and environmental quality, and integrity of the site and surrounding neighborhood.

e. For a departure from a standard contained in the *Landscape Manual*, the Planning Board shall find, in addition to the requirements above, that there is no feasible proposal for alternative compliance, as defined in the *Landscape Manual*, which would exhibit equal or better design characteristics.

The applicant applied for alternative compliance which was denied by the Planning Director. By virtue of this disapproval, it is apparent that there is no feasible proposal for alternative compliance which would exhibit equal or better design characteristics.

CONCLUSION:

Based on the preceding analysis and findings, it is recommended that DDS-515 be APPROVED, subject to the following condition:

1. The site plan shall be revised to include a six-foot-high board-on-board fence with brick pillars and stone caps, 20 feet on-center, with 3-foot-wide breaks where existing access is provided to the shopping center along the northern and western property line. A detail of said fence shall be added to the Detailed Site Plans.