

May 24, 2000

TECHNICAL STAFF REPORT:

TO: The Prince Georges County Planning Board

VIA: Arie Stouten, Zoning Supervisor

FROM: Whitney Chellis, Planner

SUBJECT: **Departure from Sign Design Standards Application No. 566**

REQUEST: **Reduction in main building setback, and increase in height and area for freestanding sign.**

RECOMMENDATION: **DENIAL**

NOTE:

The Planning Board has scheduled this application for a public hearing on the agenda date indicated above. The Planning Board also encourages all interested persons to request to become a person of record in this application. Requests to become a person of record should be made in writing and addressed to the Development Review Division at the address indicated above. Please call 301-952-3280 for additional information.

FINDINGS:

- A. Location and Field Inspection: The subject property is located at the end of Bellefonte Place, 730 feet northeast of the intersection of Bellefonte Lane and Alexandria Ferry Road in Clinton. The site is currently vacant. The property lies in an industrially-zoned area just south of Andrews Air Force Base. While the area is industrially zoned (I-1 and I-4) and many industrial uses are located southwest of the subject site, several residences abut the property to the south, at the corner of Bellefonte Place and Bellefonte Lane.
- B. Request: The applicant proposes to develop the site with a consolidated storage use, a permitted use in the I-4 Zone. The applicant has received approval of a detailed site plan, DSP-99031, for a consolidated storage use. In conjunction with this development, the applicant proposes to construct a freestanding sign along the southwest property line. This sign requires several departures which are described in Section D of this report.
- C. Surrounding Uses: The subject property is surrounded entirely by industrially-zoned land with a mix of uses. To the north and east is vacant land zoned I-3. To the southeast are existing residential uses zoned I-3. To the southwest is primarily developed land with heavy-industrial uses including outdoor storage in the I-4 Zone. The Alexandria Ferry Road corridor, located approximately 800 feet further southwest of the subject site, is zoned primarily industrial and developed with industrial strip centers and freestanding industrial buildings. The majority of these structures do not exceed one story in height.
- D. Design Requirements:
1. **Section 27-614(a)(1) of the Zoning Ordinance allows a freestanding sign on properties where the main building associated with the sign is located at least forty (40) feet behind the front street line.**

The site plan proposes five consolidated storage buildings and one office building with a second-story resident manager unit. The office building with a second-story resident manager unit is an accessory structure to the consolidated storage use by definition. The consolidated storage buildings are the main buildings on site, with Building ■E• being located closest to the street line. Building ■E• is located 25 feet behind the front street line. A 15-foot departure is necessary from the requirement that all main buildings on site be located a minimum of 40 feet from the street line to allow a freestanding sign.
 2. **Section 27-614(b)(1) of the Zoning Ordinance specifies that the maximum height of signs in the I-4 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 to be located along the southwest property line is 35 feet high. A departure of 10 feet is required.
 3. **Section 27-614(C)(3)(B) of the Zoning Ordinance provides that in 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 four (4) lineal feet of street frontage, to a maximum of two hundred (200) square feet for each sign.

Based on the final plat of subdivision (VJ 188@ 5), the subject site has 330.68 linear feet of street frontage. Therefore, the maximum permitted area of a freestanding sign on this site would be 82.67 square feet ($330.68 \div 4 = 82.67$). The applicant is proposing a 240-square-foot sign. An increase in sign area of 157.33 feet is requested.

E. 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 applicant requests departures from three sections of Part 12 of the Zoning Ordinance to erect this one freestanding sign. In particular, Section 27-614(a)(1) sets forth specific guidelines regarding the site layout that is to be used to determine the appropriateness of a freestanding sign. Because three of the five main buildings on site are within 40 feet of the street line of Bellefonte Place, a freestanding sign is not permitted. Moreover, the proximity of the main buildings to the street provides adequate identification and advertisement along the subject site's street frontage through the use of building signs.

Part 12 of the Zoning Ordinance would allow 520 square feet of combined building signs on site. Section 27-613 (b)(1) allows a building sign to extend up to 12 feet above the roof line or parapet wall. This would allow a building sign on the office to extend to a maximum height of 36 feet above grade and would allow a maximum of 60 square feet of sign area. The proposed office building is located within 40 feet of the right-of-way of Bellefonte Place, the front street line. Staff recognizes that Bellefonte Place is virtually a dead end street and that vehicular traffic would be limited generally to customers with prior knowledge of the location of this business. Therefore, it is appropriate that for a sign to provide adequate advertisement and identification for this site it would need to be visible from Bellefonte Lane.

The applicant has requested a departure to erect a 35-foot-tall freestanding sign along the southwest property line abutting generally vacant industrially-zoned land with the Alexandria Ferry Road corridor further to the southwest. The purpose of the freestanding sign at this location is to advertise this use on Alexandra Ferry Road. For the sign to be visible on Alexandra Ferry Road the applicant has

requested a 157-square-foot departure from what would normally be allowed, if a freestanding sign was permitted. Alexandria Ferry Road is approximately 800 feet southwest of the subject site. This site does not have frontage on or direct vehicular access to Alexandria Ferry Road.

The purpose, location and excessive size of the proposed sign conflicts with the following purposes of the Subtitle:

- (6) To prevent the proliferation of signs that could detract from the scenic qualities of the landscape or the attractiveness of development.**
- (7) 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.**

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

The requested departure far exceeds the minimum necessary to provide adequate identification and advertisement for the property. The applicant's proposal has been designed to function as a billboard, attracting motorists traveling along Alexandria Ferry Road, approximately 800 feet away from the subject property.

Moreover, the proposed development is already well served by the Sign Section of the Zoning Ordinance. Currently, the applicant is allowed a maximum of 520 square feet of building-mounted sign area. This allowable square footage will provide adequate identification and advertisement for this development.

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.

The site is not unique. The subject site and the surrounding properties that extend southwest to Alexandria Ferry Road are relatively flat with no unique environmental features or topography. The subject site is located within an industrial area that is relatively vacant and in transition

In 1993, the subject site was rezoned from R-R to I-4 through the Sectional Map Amendment process. The property is currently vacant and was recently the subject of a preliminary plat to consolidate several industrial lots into this building site for purposes of constructing this consolidated storage use. Furthermore, this site is not located in an area of the County that was developed prior to November 29, 1949.

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

The proposed departure could impair the functional and visual integrity of the surrounding neighborhood by effectively functioning as a billboard, attempting to attract motorists from 800 feet away. In addition, the actual access route from Bellefonte Place would not be readily apparent from Alexandria Ferry Road.

Moreover, the Subregion V Master Plan provides guidelines in the ■Commercial Areas and Activity Centers• chapter which states:

■Signs at all commercial centers should be designed and sited so as to minimize the visual impact on the surrounding area and access road.●

It is foreseeable that approval of the request could be the first in a proliferation of freestanding signs on Bellefonte Lane and Bellefonte Place that proposes to exceed the height and size limit of the Sign Regulations to be seen and advertise along Alexandria Ferry Road.

CONCLUSION:

The proposed freestanding sign was reviewed in a comprehensive manner evaluating the balance between the need to provide adequate identification and advertising, and the responsibility to prevent the proliferation of signs which may otherwise detract from the scenic qualities of the landscape and the attractiveness of development. The proximity of the office/resident manager building to the front street line provides for adequate identification and advertising for this site along Bellefonte Lane through the use of building signage. The applicant's request to advertise this use on Alexandria Ferry Road will detract from the scenic qualities of the surrounding area. It could promote the proliferation of billboard-type signs for properties in the area that do not front on, but wish to be seen by advertising which is visible from Alexandria Ferry Road. The request for a freestanding sign and the proposed increase in sign height and area far exceed the minimum necessary for adequate identification and advertisement. Furthermore, the requested departure is not needed to alleviate any circumstance which is unique to this site.

Based on the proceeding discussion staff, recommends **DENIAL**.