



## DEPARTURE FROM SIGN DESIGN STANDARDS 578

Application	General Data
<b>Project Name</b> Evangel Church  <b>Location</b> South side of Central Avenue approximately 1,520 west of Church Road, known as 13901 Central Avenue.  <b>Applicant</b> Evangel Church 13901 Central Avenue Upper Marlboro, Maryland 20772 Attention: Reverend Virgil Meares	<b>Date Accepted</b> 7/18/01
	<b>Planning Board Action Limit</b> N/A
	<b>Tax Map &amp; Grid</b> 069 D-3
	<b>Plan Acreage</b> 53.30 Acres
	<b>Zone</b> R-A
	<b>Dwelling Units</b> N/A
	<b>Square Footage</b> N/A
	<b>Planning Area</b> 74A
	<b>Council District</b> 06
	<b>Municipality</b> None
<b>200-Scale Base Map</b> 201NE12	

Purpose of Application	Notice Dates
Departure from the number of permitted signs and the area and height of freestanding sign - 27-617(a)(1)(2) and (5) and 27-239.01(b)(9)(A)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)	<b>Adjoining Property Owners</b> (CB-15-1998) 1/29/02
	<b>Previous Parties of Record</b> (CB-13-1997) 7/24/01
	<b>Sign(s) Posted on Site</b> 1/25/02
	<b>Variance(s): Adjoining Property Owners</b> N/A

Staff Recommendation			Staff Reviewer
<b>APPROVAL</b>	<b>APPROVAL WITH CONDITIONS</b>	<b>DISAPPROVAL</b>	Catherine H. Wallace
	X		

February 6, 2002

**TECHNICAL STAFF REPORT:**

TO: The Prince George's County Planning Board

VIA: Arie Stouten, Zoning Supervisor

FROM: Catherine H. Wallace, Planner Coordinator

SUBJECT: **Departure from Sign Design Standards Application No. 578**

REQUEST: **Departure from the number, area and height requirements for a free-standing sign**

RECOMMENDATION: APPROVAL, with conditions

---

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 301-952-3530 for additional information.

---

## FINDINGS:

- A. Location and Field Inspection: The subject site is located south of Central Avenue, about 1,520 feet west of Church Road. It is 53.3 acres in area, developed with two church buildings and extensive parking lots. The main church structure is 84,308 square feet in size, and is set back approximately 617 feet from the Central Avenue right-of-way. The height of the church structure is 40 feet, and a steeple on top of the structure reaches 173 feet above grade at its highest point. The church is a monumental structure located generally at the center of the site, surrounded by parking and open space. There is a freestanding sign located near the eastern driveway entrance to the site from Central Avenue. A second sign advertising the church bookstore is located along Central Avenue but is not shown on the site plan. The proposed sign is to be located on a large sculpture which is centrally located between the two entrances to the site, approximately 175 feet from the edge of the Central Avenue roadway pavement. There is currently no landscaping around the base of the sculpture. A second, taller sculpture surrounded by a sitting area is located closer to the church building.
- B. History: The property has been in the R-A Zone since 1975. (Evangel Church, the applicant in this case, was the applicant in the 1991 rezoning of 320 acres, which surround this site, to the R-L Comprehensive Design Zone.)
- C. Master Plan Recommendation: The 1991 *Bowie-Collington-Mitchellville and Vicinity Master Plan* recommends large lot residential development consistent with the R-A Zone.
- D. Request: The applicant requests approval of a free-standing sign, 10.5 feet in height and 229.5 square feet in area. Constructed out of fiberglass, it is an unusual sign in that it appears to be a three-dimensional stone carving. Section 27-617 of the Zoning Ordinance permits a maximum height of eight feet for an institutional sign (in a residential zone) and limits its area to 48 square feet. Therefore, an area departure of 181.5 square feet and a height departure of 2.5 feet are requested. A free-standing sign already exists on the property and only one institutional sign is allowed unless a departure for the number of freestanding signs is granted. Therefore, the request has been amended to include a request for an additional freestanding sign. A third freestanding sign, advertising church bookstore hours, has not been included in this request.
- E. Surrounding Uses: The property is surrounded by the following uses:
- North ● Across Central Avenue is parkland in the R-O-S Zone and the Six Flags Amusement Park in the R-A Zone
- East and South ● Undeveloped land in the R-A Zone and the R-L Zone, part of the Cameron Grove Comprehensive Design Zone property
- West ● Planned retirement community in the R-L Zone, part of the Cameron Grove property
- F. Design Requirements:
- Sec. 27-617. Institutional - Other than Temporary.**

(a) In any zone (except Comprehensive Design and Mixed Use Zones) where a church; library; school; hospital; fire station; community center; day care center for children; service, fraternal, or civic organizations; or other similar institution is allowed, a sign may be erected. Institutional signs shall meet the following design standards:

- (1) Maximum area for each sign - 48 square feet.
- (2) Maximum height - 8 feet above finished grade at base of sign.
- (3) Minimum setback - 15 feet from adjoining land in any Residential Zone (or land proposed to be used for residential purposes in a Comprehensive Design, Mixed Use, or Planned Community Zone).
- (4) Type allowed - freestanding or attached to a building.
- (5) Maximum number - 1 per street the property fronts on (must face street frontage).

The applicant requires a departure from subsections (1) (2) and (5). A departure of 181.5 square feet is required from subsection (1) to permit the requested sign area of 229.5 square feet. A departure of 2.5 feet is required from subsection (2) to permit the requested height of 10.5 feet. A departure of one additional sign is required from subsection (5) to permit the second freestanding sign on this property. A departure would also be required for the bookstore sign, but it is not shown on the site plan and appears to be temporary in nature.

G. 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:

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

The general purposes of the Zoning Ordinance are summarized in the first general purpose: **To protect and promote the health, safety, morals, comfort, convenience and welfare of the present and future inhabitants of the county.** To do so, the Zoning Ordinance promotes orderly growth and the most beneficial relationship between the uses of land and buildings. These purposes are further refined by the purposes of the Sign Regulations (Part 12, of the Zoning Ordinance):

(a) **The purposes of regulating signs are:**

- (1) **To promote the health, safety, and welfare of the present and future inhabitants of the Regional District;**
- (2) **To encourage and protect the appropriate use of land, buildings, and structures;**
- (3) **To regulate unsightly and detrimental signs which could depreciate the value of property and discourage quality development in the Regional District;**
- (4) **To regulate signs that are a hazard to safe motor vehicle operation;**

- (5) **To eliminate structurally unsafe signs that endanger a building, structure, or the public;**
- (6) **To prevent the proliferation of signs that could detract from the scenic qualities of the landscape or the attractiveness of development; and**
- (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.**

The proposed sign and requested departures are in harmony with these purposes. The subject property consists of 53.3 acres. The main building is set back more than 600 feet from Central Avenue, and the property has about 1,640 feet of road frontage. The church building itself is large, in keeping with the size of the site. The existing free-standing entrance sign, which conforms to the maximum institutional sign dimensions, appears to be dwarfed by the scale of the church development. The departures requested for the proposed sign are to increase by one the number of permitted free-standing signs, to increase the height by 2.5 feet and to significantly increase the permitted area for an institutional sign.

Given the large scale and setbacks of the subject site, the purposes of the Zoning Ordinance and Part 12 will continue to be met. The proposed additional sign will not contribute to a sign proliferation in the area in that the lengthy frontage of this site ensures that no additional signs will be placed near the existing and proposed signs. The effect of the increase in height is almost imperceptible due to the sign's generous setback from the road. The impact of the increase in area, while significant, is similarly reduced due to the scale of the development, as well as the setback of the sign and main building.

These findings assume that the apparently temporary sign advertising the bookstore will be removed from the site. It is recommended that the bookstore operating hours be included on the primary sign at the eastern entrance to the site.

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

The proposed sign is an identification of the church name on what would otherwise be an outdoor sculpture. However, in computing the sign area, the area peripheral to the sign's message must also be counted. Although the requested departure is large, it is the minimum required to permit the church identification on this sculpture.

**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 and the proposed sign are both unique due to the generous and dramatic scale of the development and the unusual situation of the outdoor sculpture carrying the name of the institution.

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

Due to the generous setbacks and scale of the property, the proposed sign will blend quite harmoniously with its surroundings. This portion of Central Avenue is still sparsely developed. The most striking feature in the immediate vicinity is the Six Flags Amusement Park. The scale of the proposed sign and its surrounding development compare favorably with this nearby use and will not impair the visual or functional quality of the surrounding neighborhood.

**CONCLUSION:**

The requested departures would allow the use of a large sculpture as a freestanding sign. Although the proposed lettering is relatively small and well within the permitted area requirements, the sculpture itself is considerably larger. To use outdoor artifacts of this size as the backdrop for a sign would generally not conform to the purposes of the Zoning Ordinance and the Sign Regulations (Part 12). Given the extremely generous setback, however, the proposed sign is compatible with the scale of the property, the building on the site and the general surroundings. The proposed landscape detail shows trees and shrubs which will help provide a visual framework and context for the structure. The approval of a third freestanding sign has not been requested, nor is one recommended. It is suggested that the bookstore information be incorporated into the primary freestanding sign. Based on the above findings, it is recommended that Departure from Sign Design Standards Application No. 578 be APPROVED, subject to the following conditions:

1. The proposed landscaping around the sign shall be installed within 90 days of the final approval of this departure.
2. The applicant shall remove the wooden sign advertising the church book store.