

Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
 Prince George's County Planning Department
 Development Review Division
 301-952-3530

Note: Staff reports can be accessed at www.mncppc.org/pgco/planning/plan.htm

Departure From Sign Design Standards No. 586 (REMAND)

Application	General Data
Project Name Largo Plaza Location Northwest quadrant of MD 202 and Campus Way South, known as 10402-10696 Campus Way South. Applicant Carrollton Enterprises 11785 Beltsville Drive Calverton, Maryland 20705 Correspondent Abigale Bruce-Watson O'Malley, Miles, Nylan & Gilmore, P.A. 1185 Beltsville Drive Calverton, MD 20705	Date Accepted 4/23/02
	Planning Board Action Limit N/A
	Tax Map & Grid 068 A-3
	Plan Acreage 61.5
	Zone C-S-C
	Dwelling Units N/A
	Square Footage N/A
	Planning Area 73
	Council District 06
	Municipality N/A
	200-Scale Base Map 201NE9

Purpose of Application	Notice Dates
Departure from area requirements for three freestanding signs.	Adjoining Property Owners 4/23/02 (CB-15-1998)
	Previous Parties of Record 9/5/02 (CB-13-1997)
	Sign(s) Posted on Site 8/30/02
	Variance(s): Adjoining Property Owners N/A

Staff Recommendation			Staff Reviewer: Elsabett Tesfaye
APPROVAL	APPROVAL WITH CONDITIONS	DISAPPROVAL	DISCUSSION
	X		

August 27, 2003

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Prince George's County Planning Board
The Prince George's County District Council

VIA: Arie Stouten, Zoning Supervisor

FROM: Elsabett Tesfaye, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: **Departure from Sign Design Standards No. 586 (REMAND)**

A. Background: The Planning Board heard this case on October 3, 2002, and approved the application with conditions by resolution No. 02-204, adopted on October 31, 2002. The Planning Board action was later appealed to the District Council. Subsequent to the oral argument hearing, the Council remanded the case to the Planning Board.

B Remand Order: The Council's Order of Remand, April 21, 2003, cites the following reasons for the Remand:

- "A. The record does not show that the requested departure is the minimum necessary, given the specific circumstances or that the departure is necessary to alleviate circumstances that are unique to the site or prevalent in County areas developed prior to November 29, 1949. These proofs are required by §§ 27-239.01(b)(9)(A)(ii) and (iii) of the Zoning Ordinance.
- "B The record also does not reflect the position of the Lake Arbor Civic Association, which should be allowed to submit statements and proofs to the planning Board.
- "C. The applicant should explain why the proposed sign on Campus Way South has approximately a 10 percent area increase while the proposed sign on MD 202 and MD 214 are to be increased over 45 percent each. It is not clear to the District Council from this record what the relative visual impacts of the different signs will be or why the sign area expansions are needed at their locations."

Under **Item H, Required Findings**, the technical staff report dated September 11, 2002, addresses Sections 27-239.01(b)(9) (A)(1)(2)(3) and (4) as follows:

(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.**

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.**
- (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 which 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.**
- (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.**

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.

Largo Plaza has been in operation since 1973 and in the past ten years has been steadily expanding and growing, in terms of building space, types and number of stores. As such, Largo Plaza has been the subject of seven revisions since a Detailed Site Plan (SP-95033) was first approved in 1996. The plaza, which occupies 61.5 acres of land, currently has approximately 500,000 square feet of leaseable space; the Giant Food and Drug store, Target, and Lowe's are amongst its current major tenants. The applicant indicates that Starbucks, PetSmart, Mattress Discounters and BB&T Bank will soon be tenants at the shopping center occupying the buildings that are currently under construction.

The property has a total of 3,673.73 linear feet of combined street frontage. As such, the property would be allowed four freestanding signs with a maximum height of 25 feet and a maximum area of 200 square feet. However, a condition of approval attached to SP-95033/1 limits the number of freestanding signs on the property to three. The applicant is proposing to increase the area of each of the three existing freestanding signs. The increase

in area of the signs is needed to ensure adequate identification and advertising space for the new tenants as well as other retail establishments located in the shopping center.

Despite three long street frontages, the shopping center is surrounded by various restrictive features, including existing woodland, landscaping, berms, retaining wall, distance from the road intersections, the nature and types of the roads, and orientation of buildings on the property, which substantially reduce its visibility from the surrounding roads.

The proposed increase in the area of the existing signs will provide a somewhat improved visibility and more importantly, sufficient advertisement space for various uses in the shopping center with adequate notification to motorists and patrons. Moreover, the improved design and architectural changes to the signs and proposed landscaping enhances the aesthetic appearance of the shopping center.

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

Given the nature of the size of the property, its location relative to MD 214 and MD 202, topographical features, and design standards present around and on the property that placed a limitation on the visibility of the shopping center, the departure is the minimum necessary to provide adequate identification for the use.

3. The departure is necessary in order to alleviate circumstances that are unique to the site or prevalent in areas of the County developed prior to November 29, 1949.

The departure is necessary in order to alleviate circumstances that are unique to the site. The applicant's statement of justification indicates that Largo Plaza is situated between Old Largo Road, just off MD 202, Campus Way South, and MD 214. The two closest intersections to Largo Plaza are Campus Way South and MD 202 and Campus Way South and MD 214. At these intersections, Largo Plaza's visibility to motorists traveling along MD 202, Old Largo Road, and MD 214 is restricted by existing woodlands, building orientation and setbacks within the shopping center, and the sheer distance of the intersections to existing signs.

The applicant maintains that as a result of the significant distance from nearby intersections, coupled with the orientation of buildings within Largo Plaza, additional sign area is needed to allow the center and its retailers to be adequately identified. The sign along Old Largo Road is approximately 1,100 feet away from the intersection of MD 202 and Campus Way South. The Campus Way South sign is approximately 680 feet from the light located at Joyceton Drive, 2,040 feet away from the intersection of MD 202 and Campus Way South, and 1,100 feet away from the intersection of MD 214 and Campus Way South. The MD 214 sign is approximately 1,100 feet away from the intersection of MD 214 and Campus Way South.

The applicant further indicated that Largo Plaza is not directly visible from residential development along MD 202 and MD 214 because of existing on-site woodlands and off-site tree areas. Furthermore, although Largo Plaza is directly adjacent to residential development on Campus Way South, the site is significantly landscaped, and the buildings within the shopping center along Campus Way South are setback at a minimum

of 60 feet from the property line and at a maximum of 1,085 feet, not including the additional distance to the center line of Campus Way South (120-foot right-of-way).

A field inspection of the site by staff and analysis of the relationship of the site with the surrounding road system and the immediate neighborhood reveals that the applicant's concern regarding the visibility problem for both the shopping center and the freestanding signs is well founded. Although the desired objective can be achieved by relief of a lesser magnitude than that proposed by the applicant, doing so would mean to forgo a superior architectural design, decorative features, and better quality materials and finishes that would render the signs aesthetically appealing and visually compatible with the surrounding residential developments.

In a supplemental submission, the applicant has provided color renderings of the proposed signs including dimensions and descriptions of materials and colors. The proposed drawings need to include the dimensions of the widths for each of the three freestanding signs.

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, there is no change proposed with regard to the location of the signs and/or their heights. The proposed freestanding sign will not overwhelm the surrounding area in scale and proportion.

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

The landscape plan should be revised to incorporate the proposed additional landscaping as part of the overall landscape plan of the shopping center.

As noted, the two requirements cited in Item A of the Council's Order are adequately addressed in Item H of the technical staff report released on September 11, 2002. However, due to the fact that three lines (at the end of page two, and the beginning of page three of the resolution [PGCPB No. 02-204]) were inadvertently omitted, the order of the subsections in the required findings was out of sequence and required findings 2 and 3 were merged.

With regard to Item B of the Remand Order, the applicant has submitted a letter dated June 12, 2003, expressing unanimous support to the subject proposal by the Lake Arbor Civic Association and three other associations. The letter, which was signed by four citizen associations, states the following:

“Please be advised that a joint meeting was held on Tuesday, May 13, 2003, to discuss DSDS 586, which was attended by representatives of the Lake Arbor Civic Association, Kettering Civic Federation, and Campus Way South Home Owners Association. At the close of the meeting, all of the attending associations voted unanimously to support the

departure request for all three (3) signs located on Campus Way South, Old Landover Road and Central Avenue, respectively, in accordance with Planning Board Resolution, PGCPB No, 02-204 adopted on October 31, 2002.”

With respect to Item C of the Remand Order, in a supplemental justification statement, the applicant has provided results of site analysis (prepared by Ben Dyer Associates) concerning the visibility of the signs:

- “1. The existing Old Largo Road sign first becomes fully visible from northbound Landover Road, 560± feet away, however, it is not visible southbound;
- “2. The existing sign on Campus Way South first becomes fully visible from northbound Campus Way South, 1,240± feet away, and southbound 330± feet away; and
- “3. The existing Central Avenue sign first becomes fully visible from westbound Campus Way South, 1,000± feet away, however, it is not visible eastbound.”

The applicant also indicated that the Campus Way sign is designed to complement the adjacent residential development without overpowering it, and thus, a smaller increase is requested for this sign than the other two.

As indicated in the applicant’s statement of justification, the increase in the actual area devoted for advertising the various tenants represent 10 percent (20.38 square feet) for the Campus Way South sign, 20 percent (40.13 of the requested 90.13 square feet) for the Old Largo Road sign, and 22 percent (43.87 square feet of the requested 93.87) for the MD 214 sign. The 50 square feet from each of the Old Largo Road and MD 214 signs is devoted for architectural upgrades and decorative features that were recommended by staff in the interest of a superior design and esthetic appeal to complement the immediate neighborhood. As noted, four civic associations of the neighborhood, including the Lake Arbor Civic Association, have submitted a joint letter in support of the proposed increase in the area and design of the three freestanding signs for Largo Plaza.

In conclusion, staff’s finding and recommendation for the subject application remains the same as contained in the Planning Board’s resolution (attached) adopted on October 31, 2002.