

The 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.mnccppc.org/pgco/planning/plan.htm.

DEPARTURE FROM SIGN DESIGN STANDARDS NO. 604

Application	General Data
Project Name: Shell Gas Station (St. Barnabas Road at Larry Avenue) Location: Southeast quadrant of St. Barnabas Road and Larry Avenue, known as 5604 St. Barnabas Road. Applicant/Address: Motiva Enterprises, L.L.C. 3800 Pickett Road Fairfax, Virginia 22031	Date Accepted: 8/11/03
	Planning Board Action Limit: N/A
	Plan Acreage: 0.61
	Zone: C-M
	Dwelling Units: 0
	Square Footage: 3,722
	Planning Area: 76A
	Council District: 08
	Municipality: N/A
	200-Scale Base Map: 208SE03

Purpose of Application	Notice Dates
Departure of 25.48 sq. ft. from area of freestanding sign and departure of 1 foot from setback of freestanding sign from street line.	Adjoining Property Owners: (CB-15-1998) 7/9/03
	Previous Parties of Record: (CB-13-1997) 7/9/03
	Sign(s) Posted on Site: 10/17/03
	Variance(s): Adjoining Property Owners: N/A

Staff Recommendation		Staff Reviewer: Tom Lockard	
APPROVAL	APPROVAL WITH CONDITIONS	DISAPPROVAL	DISCUSSION
	X		

October 29, 2003

TECHNICAL STAFF REPORT:

TO: The Prince George's County Planning Board

VIA: Arie Stouten, Zoning Supervisor

FROM: Tom Lockard, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: **Departure from Sign Design Standards Application No. 604**

REQUEST: **Departure from area of a freestanding sign and setback being less than 10 feet from the street line.**

RECOMMENDATION: **APPROVAL, subject to 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 site is located at the southeast quadrant of St. Barnabas Road and Larry Avenue. The site comprises approximately 0.61± acre and is improved with a gas station constructed in 1970. A one-story building houses a gas station with three service bays. The site has 272± feet of frontage on St. Barnabas Road, which it accesses via a pair of 30-foot-wide driveways. Along Larry Avenue, the site has 103± feet of frontage, with one 33-foot-wide entrance drive.

- B. **Development Data Summary:**

	EXISTING	PROPOSED
Use(s)	Full Service Gas Station (3 bays)	Full Service Gas Station (3 bays)
Acreage	0.61±	0.61±
Square Footage/GFA	3,722	3,722
Freestanding Sign Area	93.68 square feet	119.16 square feet

- C. **History:** A gas station was first established at this site in 1970, pursuant to Special Exception Application No. 2233. In 1995, the applicant received variances for a one-foot reduction in the five-foot-wide sidewalk requirement. The 1984 Sectional Map Amendment for Subregion VII placed the property in the C-M Zone.
- D. **Master Plan Recommendation:** The 1981 Master Plan for Subregion VIII recommends retail-commercial use for the property. The 2002 General Plan places the site in the Developed Tier.
- E. **Request:** Shell proposes to increase the size of their freestanding sign to 119.16 square feet as part of a nationwide color-scheme and architecture program (“Retail Visual Identity” or “RVI”) to make their stations more visually identifiable. Because the maximum allowable sign area for this site is 93.68 square feet, a departure of 25.48 square feet is requested. The applicant has also requested a departure of one foot from the ten-foot setback from the street line for a freestanding sign, to allow the sign to remain in its existing location.
- F. **Surrounding Uses:** The property is surrounded by the following uses:

North: Across St. Barnabas Road, townhouses in the R-M Zone.

Northeast: Auto-related strip commercial uses in the C-S-C Zone

East: Single-family residences in the R-80 Zone.

South: Strip commercial uses in the C-O and C-S-C Zones.

West: Across St. Barnabas Road is undeveloped woodland in the R-T Zone.

G. **Sign Requirements:**

1. ***Section 27-614(d)(2) of the Zoning Ordinance allows one freestanding sign for a property with street frontage of 40 to 1,100 feet, and one additional sign is permitted for each additional 1,000 feet or fraction thereof.***

The subject property has 374.72 linear feet of street frontage on St. Barnabas Road and Larry Avenue. Therefore, the site is allowed one freestanding sign. There is an existing sign on the property; no additional freestanding sign is proposed.

2. ***Section 27-614(a)(4) requires that freestanding signs shall be located at least 10 feet behind the ultimate right-of-way line.***

The existing sign is shown to be set back nine feet from the streetline for St. Barnabas Road. The applicant has requested a departure of one foot from the ten-foot setback requirement, so that they can simply re-face the existing sign.

3. ***Section 27-614(b)(1) specifies that the maximum height of signs in the C-S-C 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 is 25 feet tall.

4. ***Section 27-614(c)(3)(A) provides that in all Commercial Zones (except the C-O Zone) and 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 (4) linear feet of street frontage, to a maximum of two hundred (200) square feet for each sign, if the building is not located in an integrated shopping center, other commercial center with three (3) or more businesses served by common and immediate off-street parking and loading facilities, industrial center, or office building complex. The street frontage shall be measured on the property occupied by the center or complex associated with the sign.***

The applicant is proposing a total area of 119.16 square feet for the proposed sign. With 374 linear feet of street frontage, the property is allowed one sign with an area of 93.68 square-feet. A departure of 25.48 square feet is requested.

5. **Section 27-589 of the Zoning Ordinance 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 which 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.**

H. **Required Findings:**

- 1. *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.**

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. In this instance, the facts establish that granting the requested departures will not conflict with these purposes.

The applicant proposes to modify and upgrade the existing freestanding sign as part of “a program to revise and update the image of all Shell stations in the United States and world wide.” The applicant indicated that these changes generally include changing the appearance of the building, canopy and signage through color and lighting changes to create a harmonious and aesthetically appealing appearance for the entire site.

The proposed improvement and modification to the site include one building sign with a total area of 4.31 square feet (approximately 6 percent of the total permitted area), and a canopy sign of 12.82 square feet (approximately 45 percent of the allowable area). The proposed freestanding sign, with a total area of 119.16 square feet, is 25.48 square feet (approximately 27 percent) over the maximum 93.68 square feet of area allowed for the subject property.

The applicant points out that two blank panels with a total area of 34.2 square feet generate all of the excess sign area. The applicant maintains that due to the relatively small size of the property, a more pronounced sign is needed to adequately advertise the site. The applicant contends that a more pronounced sign would allow motorists sufficient opportunity to realize that the gas station is located at the intersection and provide time to safely enter the site. The applicant further argues that a combination of the allowable building and canopy signs that are not used at the site would more than offset the proposed increase to the area of the freestanding sign.

The cumulative area of the building and canopy signs is, indeed, substantially below

that allowed by the Zoning Ordinance. Thus, given the resulting upgrading and aesthetically pleasing appearance of both the proposed sign and the other improvements to the site, offsetting the increased freestanding sign area with the unused canopy and building sign area can be justified, provided the property and the proposed sign meet the following conditions:

- (1) The two blank, gray panels may not be used for any type of advertisement and shall remain blank as proposed.
- (2) The color, position and size of the two blank panels shall not change.
- (3) The total building sign area shall not exceed 4.31 square feet, and the canopy sign area shall not exceed 12.82 square feet.

These conditions ensure conformance with the purposes of the Ordinance in a manner that is compatible with land uses in the surrounding area.

The applicant's request for a nine-foot setback in lieu of the required ten-foot setback from the streetline is not problematic, considering the fact that the sign is actually more than 50 feet from the existing travel lanes of St. Barnabas Road.

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

The departures are the minimum necessary given the specific circumstances of the property. The site is relatively small in size and fully developed, with limited alternatives for a freestanding sign to accommodate both current sign standards and current demands of the gas station industry for continuous modification in terms of appearance and design.

- c. **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.**

Although this property was not developed prior to 1949, it is located in an older, developed area of the county. The .61-acre property has been in use as a gas station for over 30 years. The original special exception for gas station use was approved in 1970. In addition, to bring the property in compliance with zoning standards of the time, a variance from the five-foot sidewalk requirement was approved in 1995.

In the instant application, the substandard size of the property, coupled with the continuous evolution in the nature of gas stations and new zoning development standards, constitute unique circumstances that are alleviated by the requested departures.

- d. **The departure will not impair the visual quality or integrity of the site or of the surrounding neighborhood.**

The departures will not impair the visual, functional and environmental integrity of

the site and surrounding area. The proposed renovation and upgrading of the property will enhance the visual quality of the property and the immediate area.

CONCLUSION:

Based on the preceding analysis and findings, it is recommended that DSDS-604 be APPROVED, subject to the following conditions:

1. The two blank, gray panels on the freestanding sign shall not be used for any type of advertisement and shall remain blank as proposed.
2. The color, position and size of the two blank panels on the freestanding sign shall not change.
3. The total building sign area shall not exceed 4.31 square feet, and the canopy sign area shall not exceed 12.82 square feet.