



DEPARTURE FROM SIGN DESIGN STANDARDS No. 610

Application	General Data
Project Name: Maple Springs Baptist Church Location: South side of Belt Road approximately 825 feet east of the Southern Avenue and Pennsylvania Avenue intersection, known as 4131 Belt Road. Applicant/Address: Maple Springs Baptist Church 4131 Belt Road Capitol Heights, Maryland 20743-5712 Correspondent: Abigale Bruce-Watson O'Malley, Miles, Nylen & Gilmore, P.A. 1185 Beltsville Drive Calverton, MD 20705	Date Accepted 11/03/03
	Planning Board Action Limit N/A
	Tax Map & Grid 80/C1
	Plan Acreage 5.21
	Zone R-55
	Dwelling Units N/A
	Square Footage N/A
	Planning Area 75A
	Council District 07
	Municipality N/A
	200-Scale Base Map 203SE04

Purpose of Application	Notice Dates
Departure from the area and height requirements for a freestanding sign	Adjoining Property Owners 8/5/03 Previous Parties of Record Registered Associations: (CB-12-2003)
	Sign(s) Posted on Site 1/23/04

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

February 4, 2004

TECHNICAL STAFF REPORT:

TO: The Prince George's County Planning Board

VIA: Arie Stouten, Zoning Supervisor

FROM: Elsabett Tesfaye, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: **Departure from Sign Design Standards Application No. 610.**

REQUEST: **Departure to Increase the Area and Height of a Freestanding Sign.**

RECOMMENDATION: **APPROVAL**

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 property is located on the south side of Belt Road, approximately 825 feet east of the Southern Avenue and Pennsylvania Avenue (MD 4) intersection. The subject property comprises approximately 5.21 acres of land. It is improved with a 30,845-square-foot church (Maple Spring Church) and a parking lot with 253 parking spaces. The property is zoned R-55, and it has approximately 819 feet of street frontage on Pennsylvania Avenue and approximately 650 feet of frontage on Belt Road. It has three driveway entrances—all on Belt Road. Access to the property from MD 4 is not allowed; however, the proposed sign is located on the property's frontage along MD 4.

- B. **Development Data Summary:**

	EXISTING	PROPOSED
Zone(s)	R-55	R-55
Use(s)	Church	Church
Acreage	5.21	5.21
Signs	1 freestanding	1 freestanding
Sign Area	48 square feet	64 square feet
Sign Height	8 feet	11 feet

- C. **History:** The subject church was originally constructed in 1977. The Planning Board approved a Preliminary Plat, 4-94090, on October 6, 1994, to allow a subdivision of two parcels, Parcel A (the subject of this application) and Parcel B (located across Belt Road). In October 1998, Detailed Site Plan SP-98017 was approved to allow the addition of an annex building on Parcel B. The approved 1986 Sectional Map Amendment (SMA) for Suitland, District Heights and Vicinity retained the property in the R-55 Zone.
- D. **Master Plan Recommendation:** The 1985 Master Plan for Suitland, District Heights and Vicinity recommends the property for high-urban residential use with development density of 6.7 dwelling units per acre. The 2002 General Plan places the subject site within the Developed Tier. The vision for the Developed Tier is a network of sustainable, transit-supporting, mixed-use pedestrian-oriented, and medium to high-density neighborhoods.
- E. **Request:** The applicant proposes to increase the area and height of the existing freestanding sign. The proposed sign will have a total area of 64 square feet and a height of 11 feet. Departures of 16 square feet from the maximum sign area and 3 feet from the maximum height requirements are requested.
- F. **Surrounding Uses:** The property is surrounded by the following uses:
- North: Across Belt Road, Church Annex and residential development in the R-55 Zone.
- West: Unimproved property in the R-55 Zone
- South: Across Pennsylvania Avenue, Cemetery in the O-S Zone.
- East: Residential development in the R-55 Zone

G. **Sign Requirements:**

1. **Section 27-617(a)** provides the following design standards for churches.

1. **Maximum area for each sign — 48 square feet.**
2. **Maximum Height — 8 feet above finished grade at a base of sign.**
3. **Minimum setback — 15 feet from adjoining land in any residential Zone.**
4. **Type allowed — freestanding or attached to a building.**
5. **Maximum number — 1 per street the property fronts on.**

With an area of 64 square feet and a height of 11 feet, the proposed freestanding sign exceeds the maximum allowable area and height by 16 square feet and 3 feet, respectively.

2. **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 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:**

(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.

As noted, the subject property has two frontages—650 feet on Belt Road, a secondary residential street with a 50-foot-wide right-of-way, from which it is accessed, and 819 feet on an expressway with a 200-foot-wide right-of-way (access to the property restricted). Belt Road at this location runs east-west for approximately 1,750 feet. The property is accessed via Southern Avenue to Belt Road. Although the property is not accessed from MD 4, the proposed sign will be located on its MD 4 frontage, replacing the existing sign currently standing on the same location.

The applicant reasons that existing heavy vegetation along Pennsylvania Avenue and the setback of the church building from the road substantially reduce the church's visibility from the road. Moreover, the relatively high traffic speed on MD 4 has a potential for creating a dangerous situation on the road when motorists attempt to locate the church within sufficient time to make the turn to Southern Avenue at the MD 4/Southern Avenue intersection.

A field inspection and analysis of the relationship of the site with the two adjoining roads reveals that the applicant's concern regarding the visibility problem for both the church and the freestanding sign has merit. It should also be noted that although the property is allowed two freestanding signs (one on each of the property's street frontage), the applicant is proposing only one freestanding sign.

The proposed increase in the area and height of the freestanding sign will provide improved visibility and adequate notification to motorists and patrons of the church. The sign will not conflict with the purposes of this Subtitle. However, to ensure conformance with the purposes of the ordinance in a manner that is compatible with land uses in the surrounding area, the proposed sign must meet the requirements of Section 27-592(a), (b) and (c). Accordingly, no lights may flash or blink on less than a five-second cycle, and no illumination or glare from the sign may shine directly onto a street so as to constitute a hazard to motorists.

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

The departure is necessary given the specific circumstances of the request. Given the relatively large size of the property (with 819 feet frontage on a major roadway), its location adjacent to an expressway, and the presence of matured vegetation along the road, the proposed departures are 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 subject property, which was developed with a church use in 1977. The location of the property along a major roadway and the extended length of its road frontage that is densely vegetated constitute unique circumstances, which are alleviated by the requested departures.

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

The departure will not impair the visual, functional and environmental integrity of the site and surrounding area. The proposed freestanding sign will not overwhelm the surrounding area in scale and proportion. Any potential adverse impact from the increase in area and height is minimized by the size of the property, the abundance of existing vegetation along the road frontage, and the substantial distances between the proposed sign and the adjoining properties and other signs in the area. To preserve a harmonious and aesthetically appealing appearance for the entire site, landscaping at and around the base of the sign shall be maintained in accordance with the approved detail site plan (DSP-98017).

CONCLUSION:

Based on the preceding analysis and findings, it is recommended that DSDS-610 be APPROVED.