



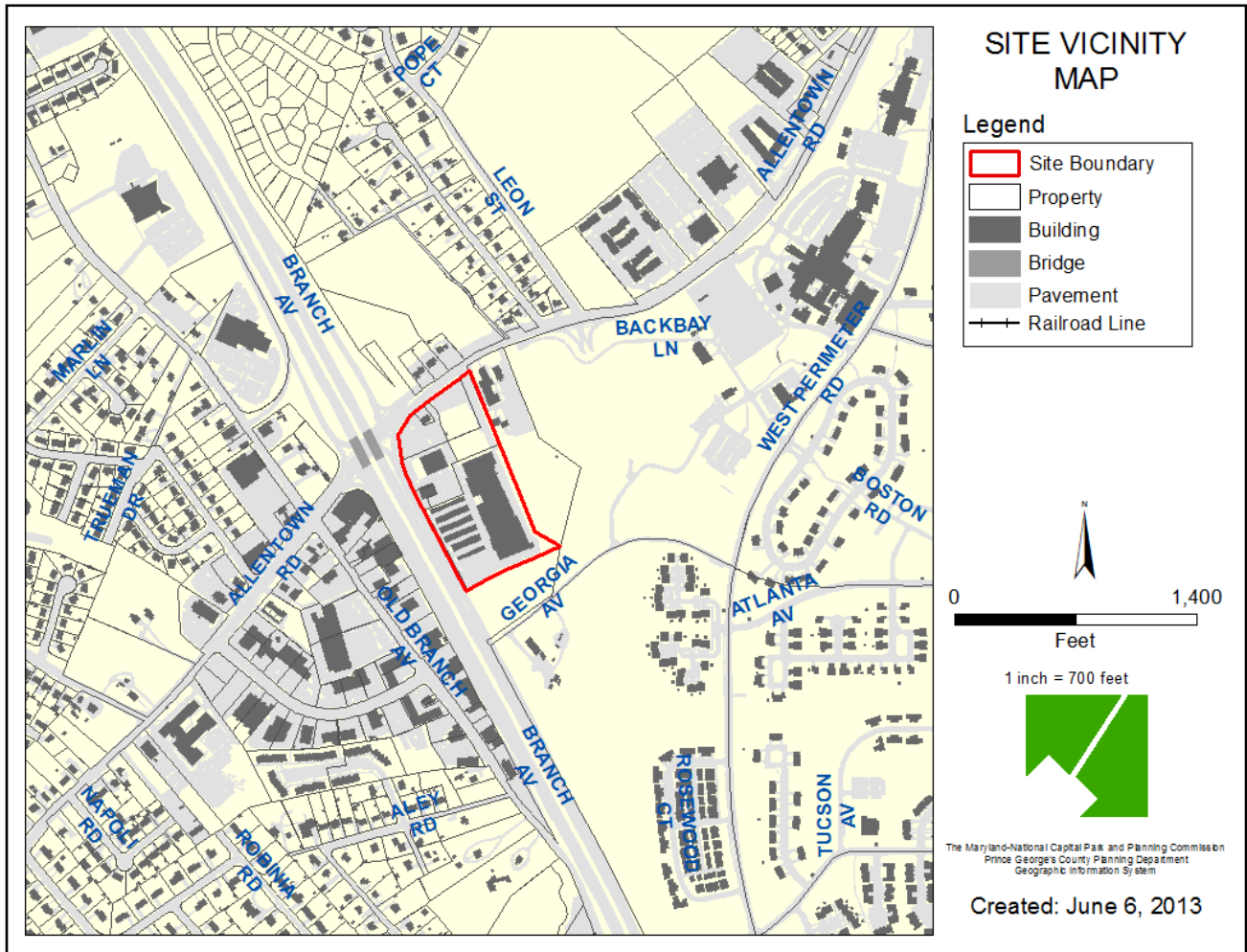
*Note: Staff reports can be accessed at [www.mncppc.org/pgco/planning/plan.htm](http://www.mncppc.org/pgco/planning/plan.htm).*

## Departure from Sign Design Standards DSDS-671

Application	General Data	
<b>Project Name:</b> CubeSmart aka U-Store-It  <b>Location:</b> Southeast corner of the intersection of Branch Avenue (MD 5) and Allentown Road (MD 337).  <b>Applicant/Address:</b> CubeSmart aka U-Store-It 6150 Allentown Road Suitland, MD 20746  <b>Property Owner:</b> YSI, LLC. P.O. Box 320099 Alexandria, VA 22320	Planning Board Hearing Date:	06/27/13
	Staff Report Date:	06/05/13
	Date Accepted:	02/14/13
	Planning Board Action Limit:	N/A
	Plan Acreage:	7.29
	Zone:	C-S-C
	Gross Floor Area:	148,298 sq. ft.
	Lots:	N/A
	Parcels:	1
	Planning Area:	76B
	Tier:	Developed
	Council District:	09
	Election District	09
	Municipality:	N/A
	200-Scale Base Map:	208SE06

Purpose of Application	Notice Dates	
A departure of 25 feet from the maximum height of a freestanding sign.	Informational Mailing	11/05/10
	Acceptance Mailing:	10/26/12
	Sign Posting Deadline:	05/27/13

<b>Staff Recommendation</b>		<b>Staff Reviewer:</b> Taslima Alam <b>Phone Number:</b> 301-952-4976 <b>E-mail:</b> Taslima.Alam@ppd.mncppc.org	
<b>APPROVAL</b>	<b>APPROVAL WITH CONDITIONS</b>	<b>DISAPPROVAL</b>	<b>DISCUSSION</b>
X			



THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL  
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY PLANNING BOARD

**TECHNICAL STAFF REPORT:**

TO: The Prince George's County Planning Board

VIA: Jimi Jones, Zoning Supervisor, Development Review Division

FROM: Taslima Alam, Senior Planner, Zoning Section, Development Review Division

SUBJECT: **Departure from Sign Design Standards Application No. DSDS-671**

REQUEST: **Departure of 25 feet from the maximum height for a freestanding sign.**

RECOMMENDATION: **APPROVAL with conditions**

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NOTE:

The Planning Board has scheduled this application for a public hearing on the agenda date of June 27, 2013. The Planning Board also encourages all interested persons to request to become a person of record for this application.

Requests to become a person of record should be made in writing and addressed to The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Development Review Division, 14741 Governor Oden Bowie Drive, Upper Marlboro, MD 20772. Please call 301-952-3530 for additional information.

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## FINDINGS:

- A. **Location and Field Inspection:** The subject property is located at 6150 Allentown Road, at the southeast quadrant of the intersection of Allentown Road (MD 337) and Branch Avenue (MD 5) in an established integrated shopping center. The site is comprised of approximately 7.69 acres of land within the Branch-Allentown Plaza shopping center on Parcel E. It is screened with a six-foot-high, white, vinyl fence from three sides. The northern side of the property line is only partially fenced. It appears that some of the landscaping approved by the previously approved Detailed Site Plan (DSP-99045) has not been installed on-site. The property is developed with six storage buildings. The site has frontage along Branch Avenue, but access to the site is provided through other commercial properties fronting Allentown Road.

B. **Development Data Summary:**

	EXISTING	PROPOSED
Zone	C-S-C	C-S-C
Use(s)	Self-storage facility	Self-storage facility
Acreage	7.69	7.69
Square Footage/GFA	328,660	328,660
Parcel	1	1

- C. **History:** The subject 13.2-acre parcel of land known as Branch-Allentown Plaza (Parcels E through K) is the subject of Preliminary Plan of Subdivision 4-99037, which was originally adopted by the Prince George's County Planning Board on September 9, 1999 (PGCPB Resolution No. 99-148) with conditions. On March 16, 2000, Detailed Site Plan DSP-99045 was approved for 148, 238 square feet of gross floor area for a consolidated storage unit facility and 1,860 square feet of office space on Parcel E. An application for Alternative Compliance (AC-0004) from Section 4.7 (Buffering Incompatible Uses) of the *Prince George's County Landscape Manual* along the eastern property line adjoining the residential zone, consisting of a historic church and cemetery (76B-17), was approved on March 3, 2000. On May 9, 2002, Detailed Site Plan DSP-99045/01 was approved for the purpose of adjusting the location of the exterior accessed storage buildings. On May 27, 2004, Detailed Site Plan DSP-99045/02 was approved to add a new freestanding pylon sign on the site, which has not been erected.
- D. **Master Plan Recommendation:** The 2006 *Approved Master Plan and Sectional Map Amendment for the Henson Creek-South Potomac Planning Area* retained the subject property in the Commercial Shopping Center (C-S-C) Zone.
- E. **Request:** The application requests a departure from the height requirements of a freestanding pylon sign for an existing storage facility along the Branch Avenue (MD 5) frontage. The applicant proposes to increase its visibility along the elevated section of Branch Avenue by substantially raising the height of its freestanding sign to 50 feet. The maximum height permitted for freestanding signs in all commercial zones (except C-O) is 25 feet. A departure of 25 feet for a total 50-foot-high freestanding sign is requested along the Branch Avenue frontage.
- F. **Surrounding Uses:**

North— Adjacent to site are various commercial developments (i.e. Dunkin Donuts, Chinese restaurant, a liquor store, and the Social Security Administration) in the C-S-C Zone.

- East— Historic property, Bells Methodist Church and Cemetery (76B-17) in the Rural Residential (R-R) Zone.
- West— Branch Avenue (MD 5) right-of-way.
- South— Bounded by a Maryland State Highway Administration stormwater management facility.

**G. Section 27-614, Freestanding Signs:**

**Height**—The maximum height of a freestanding sign in the C-S-C Zone shall be 25 feet as measured from the finished grade at the base of the sign to the top of the sign.

The applicant is proposing a new 50-foot-high freestanding pylon sign for an existing self-storage building known as CubeSmart (aka U-Store-It). Under the regulations, the maximum height of a freestanding sign in the C-S-C Zone shall be 25 feet as measured from the finished grade at the base of the sign to the top of the sign. The applicant is requesting a departure of 25 feet for a total of 50-foot-high sign from the finished grade at the base of the sign to the top of the sign.

Several exhibits have been provided isolating the U-Store-It area from the reminder of the shopping center. The site plans should be clearly noted that the departure from sign design standards is for the entire property.

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 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.**

Section 27-239.01(b)(7) 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 Part 12 (Signs) of the Zoning 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, to prevent the proliferation of signs that could detract from the scenic qualities of the landscape or attractiveness of development, and to foster the appropriate use of land, buildings, and structures. Staff believes that the proposed 50-foot-tall pylon sign does not meet Purposes 4 and 6 as listed in Section 27-589 above. The proposed sign will be visible from Branch Avenue (MD 5), which is a state highway. Patrons driving on this highway will not have an opportunity to exit for the storage center upon seeing the proposed sign. The confusion this situation would create may result in vehicular accidents in contravention of Purpose 4 above. In addition, the proposed signage would contribute to the proliferation of signs that could distract from the scenic qualities of the landscape and/or the attractiveness of development. Signs are expected when a given roadway is at the same elevation as the site the sign is posted on. Allowing a sign with double the height would be contrary to sign Purpose 6 of the Zoning Ordinance.

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

The applicant is proposing a 50-foot-tall freestanding sign. Staff believes this extraordinarily tall sign is not necessary to allow drivers headed north on Branch Avenue to adequately notice the exit for the CubeSmart self-storage facility. A freestanding sign of this magnitude would be wholly inconsistent with existing signage along the Branch Avenue corridor. Staff had a number of telephone discussions with the applicant recommending reducing the height of the sign to 35 feet, a similar sign height that was granted by the Planning Board in 2003 for DSDS-571 for Clinton Square Shopping Center, which is approximately 1.2 miles south of the subject site. In that case, a departure of ten feet for sign height of 35 feet was found to be adequate to provide higher visibility. Staff therefore believes that it is reasonable to recommend a minimum ten-foot departure for the proposed sign to allow a total 35-foot-tall freestanding sign to adequately notice, ensure clear legibility, and sufficient visibility for patrons traveling northbound on Branch Avenue. Thus, the granted sign will be consistent with other signs relative to the roadway that have been permitted through previous DSDS approval in the area and would be the minimum necessary for the subject site.

**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 departure is necessary to alleviate circumstances that are unique to the site. The circumstances are that Branch Avenue, a major artery that the site fronts on, is 25 feet above the grade of the site. A sign at the maximum permitted height of 25 feet above grade would approximately level with the roadway and will not be as visible from any distance along Branch Avenue. As a result, increasing the height of the freestanding sign to a minimum of ten feet for a total 35-foot sign is justifiable and believed to be necessary by staff.

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

With reasonable limitations in place, the departures will not impair the visual, functional, or environmental quality or integrity of the site or the surrounding neighborhood. Limiting the total height of the proposed sign to a maximum of 35 feet high will permit the existing shopping center to be adequately advertised in a compatible manner and will be similar to the departures approved

for Clinton Square Shopping Center. If a 50-foot-high sign is approved as requested by the applicant, it will impair the visual quality or integrity of the site or of the surrounding neighborhood.

## CONCLUSION

With the above analysis and findings, staff recommends APPROVAL of a maximum 35-foot-high freestanding sign rather than the 50-foot-high sign requested by the applicant for DSDS-671, with condition.

1. The site plans shall be clearly noted that the departure from sign design standards is for the entire property.