



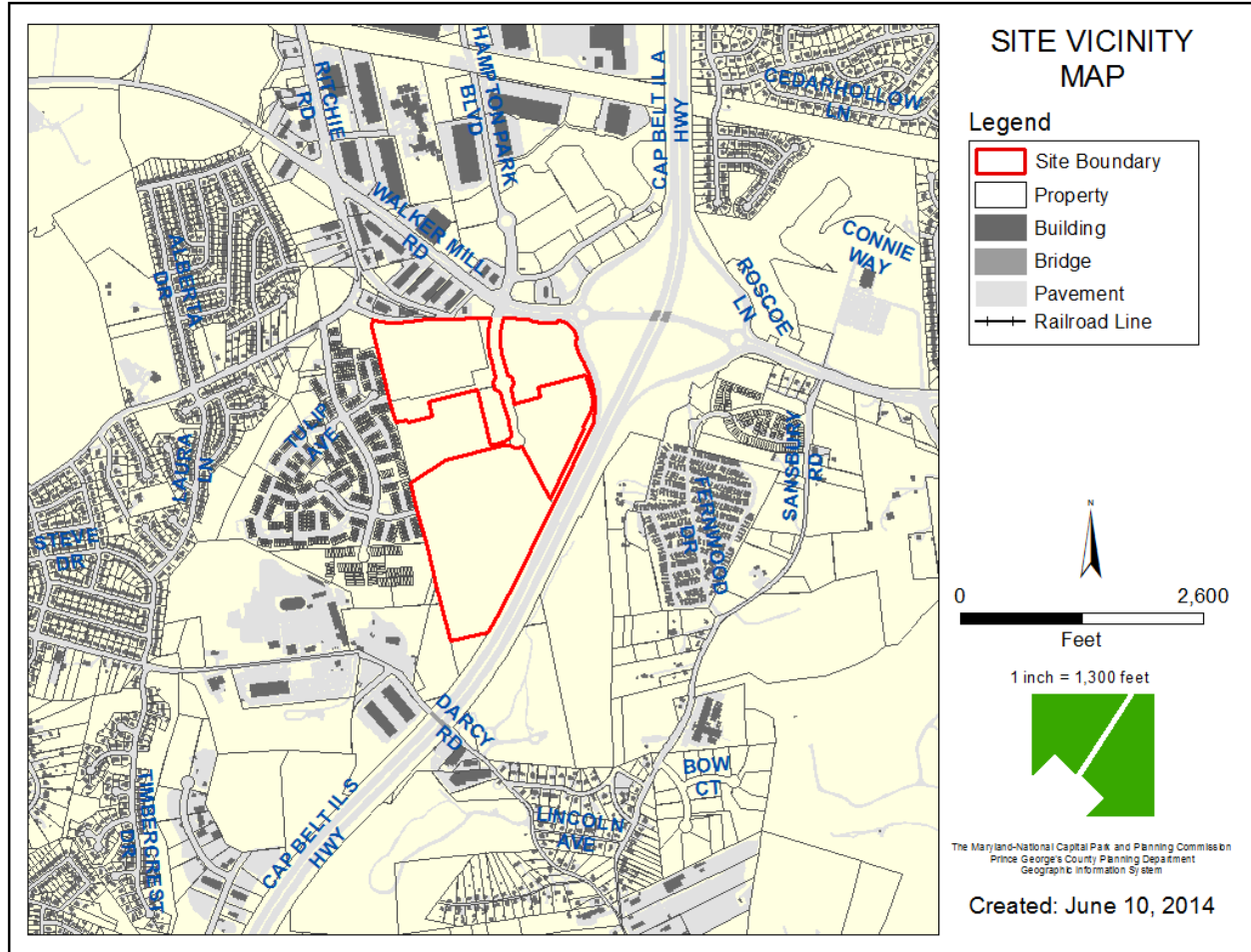
Note: Staff reports can be accessed at www.mncppc.org/pgco/planning/plan.htm.

Departure from Sign Design Standards DSDS-681

Application	General Data	
Project Name: Ritchie Station Marketplace Location: In the southwest quadrant of the interchange formed by Ritchie-Marlboro Road and the Capital Beltway (I-95/495). Applicant/Address: Ritchie Hill, LLC 10100 Business Parkway Lanham, MD 20706 Property Owner: Same as above	Planning Board Hearing Date:	09/25/14
	Staff Report Date:	09/08/14
	Date Accepted:	06/27/14
	Planning Board Action Limit:	N/A
	Plan Acreage:	89.63
	Zone:	C-S-C
	Gross Floor Area:	N/A
	Lots:	N/A
	Parcels:	5
	Planning Area:	75A
	Tier:	Developed
	Council District:	06
	Election District	15
	Municipality:	N/A
	200-Scale Base Map:	203SE08

Purpose of Application	Notice Dates	
Departure from sign design standards to replace three existing freestanding signs with new signs that exceed height and area requirements.	Informational Mailing	09/17/13
	Acceptance Mailing:	06/24/14
	Sign Posting Deadline:	08/26/14

Staff Recommendation		Staff Reviewer: Taslima Alam Phone Number: 301-952-4976 E-mail: Taslima.Alam@ppd.mncppc.org	
APPROVAL	APPROVAL WITH CONDITIONS	DISAPPROVAL	DISCUSSION
		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, Supervisor, Zoning Review Section, Development Review Division

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

SUBJECT: **Departure from Sign Design Standards Application No. DSDS-681**

REQUEST: **Departure to replace three existing freestanding signs with new signs that exceed height and area requirements.**

RECOMMENDATION: **DISAPPROVAL**

NOTE:

The Planning Board has scheduled this application for a public hearing on the agenda date of September 25, 2014. 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.

FINDINGS

- A. **Location and Field Inspection:** The subject 89.63-acre property is located in the southwest quadrant of the interchange formed by Ritchie-Marlboro Road and the Capital Beltway (I-95/495) in the Commercial Shopping Center (C-S-C) Zone. Ritchie Station Marketplace contains 124.68 acres including Parcels 9 and 16 and Outlot A. The overall center contains a variety of commercial uses, including automobile dealerships, BJ's Super store, various retail stores, and restaurants. Access to the site is solely from Ritchie-Marlboro Road via Ritchie Station Court.

The site has a brick retaining wall along the Ritchie-Marlboro Road frontage to the ramp to the Beltway. There is no retaining wall along the Beltway road frontage. The property has three existing freestanding signs and four existing wall-mounted identification signs announcing Ritchie Station Marketplace. As shown on the site plan, the existing freestanding signs are: Sign P1, which faces the Capital Beltway; Sign P2, which faces the roundabout intersection of Ritchie Marlboro Road and the ramps to/from the Beltway; and Sign P3, which faces the signalized intersection of Ritchie-Marlboro Road and Ritchie Station Court at the property's main entrance.

- B. **Development Data Summary:**

	EXISTING	PROPOSED
Zone	C-S-C	C-S-C
Use(s)	Integrated Shopping Center	Integrated Shopping Center
Acreage	89.63	89.63
Square Footage/GFA	1 million	1 million
Parcel	5	5

- C. **History:** The 1985 Approved Suitland-District Heights and Vicinity Master Plan and 1986 Adopted Sectional Map Amendment placed the property in the Planned Industrial/Employment Park (I-3) Zone and retained a small portion in the Rural Residential R-R Zone. Prince George's County Council Bills CB-65-2003 and CB-19-2005 allowed the I-3 and R-R-zoned site to be developed as a commercial shopping center pursuant to the criteria of the C-S-C Zone and Preliminary Plans of Subdivision 4-04184 and 4-05133. Preliminary Plan 4-04184 for the subject property was approved for up to 1,000,000 square feet of retail space, and approximately 320 square feet of gross leasable area of retail space has been developed thus far. In October 2006, the District Council affirmed the Planning Board's approval of Detailed Site Plan DSP-04080/01 for the 101-acre property. Condition 5 of that approval required that "Signage for the subject project shall be limited to signage approved herewith, as potentially modified by Departure from Design Standards, DSDS-634."

In June 2006, Departure from Sign Design Standards DSDS-634 was approved for a freestanding sign (P1) located on the Capital Beltway (I-95/495) road frontage which allowed for the sign to be a maximum height of 40 feet and 528 square feet in area (PGCB Resolution No. 06-156). In May 2008, the property was rezoned from the R-R, I-1 (Light Industrial), and I-3 Zones to the C-S-C Zone in Zoning Map Amendment A- 9989. There were several revisions to DSP-04080 that have been approved.

- D. **Master Plan Recommendation:** The 2010 Approved Subregion 4 Master Plan and Sectional Map Amendment classified the site for retail uses that are generally permitted in the C-S-C Zone. The master plan does not contain policies and strategies for sign standards and guidelines.

- E. **Request:** The application requests a departure from the height and area requirements of Section 27-614(b) and (c) of the Zoning Ordinance for three proposed freestanding pylon signs located in an integrated shopping center known as Ritchie Station Marketplace. The current application proposes to remove all three existing freestanding signs and replace them with larger signs, which will each require a departure for height and area. All of the signs are to be internally-illuminated. The following chart below specifies the size and needed departures for each proposed sign:

	Allowed*	Existing	Proposed	Departure Requested
Sign P1 (Beltway)**				
Height	25 feet	40 feet**	64.38 feet	39.38 feet in height
Area	200 sq. ft.	528 sq. ft.**	1,440 sq. ft.	1,240 square feet
No. of Tenant Panels	8***	12	25 + LED	
Sign P2 (Traffic Circle)				
Height	25 feet	25 feet	35.25 feet	10.25 feet in height
Area	200 sq. ft.	200 sq. ft.	480 sq. ft.	280 square feet
No. of Tenant Panels	N/A***	20	25	
Sign P3 (Main Entrance)				
Height	25 feet	25 feet	35.25 feet	10.25 feet in height
Area	200 sq. ft.	200 sq. ft.	480 sq. ft.	280 square feet
No. of Tenant Panels	N/A***	20	25	

*Per Section 27-614, regulations for freestanding signs.

**As approved with DSDS-634.

***The number of separate tenant panels is not controlled by the Zoning Ordinance, so this information is provided for discussion purposes. However, Condition 2 of the District Council decision for DSDS-634 reads: "On each face of the sign, there shall be no more than one business advertised on each of eight individual sign panels."

F. **Surrounding Uses:**

North— The site is bounded by Ritchie-Marlboro Road and a self-storage facility in the I-1 Zone.

East— Capital Beltway (I-95/495)

West— Townhouse development in the Townhouse (R-T) Zone.

South— Industrial uses and vacant land in the Heavy Industrial (I-2) Zone.

G. **Zoning Ordinance Sign Requirements:**

1. **Section 27-614** provides the following freestanding sign regulation that pertains to the subject application:

- (a) **Section 27-614(b)(1)** specifies that 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.
- (b) **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-square-foot for each four linear feet of street frontage, to a maximum of 200 square feet for each sign, if the building is not located in an integrated shopping center, other commercial center with three 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.

Comment: Ritchie Station Marketplace is an integrated shopping center. The applicant is requesting various departures from sign design standards. The table in Finding E above identifies the height and area of each proposed sign and the amount of departure required for each sign.

- 2. **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.**

The applicant's statement of justification dated August 22, 2014 states that the purpose of the requested departures is "to specifically promote the public health, safety and welfare of residents, workers and motorists by increasing and enhancing sign visibility and readability that is in a scale consistent with the intended advertising purposes and the size of the subject property and its location adjacent to I-495/I-95 and Ritchie-Marlboro Road. The new signs are sufficiently sized and located so motorists can view tenant names and advertising from a distance adequate enough to allow safe lane merges to the and the exit

ramps.” The applicant references the submitted technical materials that state that 31 inches is the optimal letter height for viewing at Capital Beltway (I-95/495) speeds, but that image recognition allows for this size to be reduced to 18 inches and still be effective.

Comment: It should be noted that the smallest panel size proposed on the P1 Beltway sign is approximately 33 inches high, which exceeds the minimum necessary for effective visibility per the applicant’s submitted reference material, “Sign Legibility: The Algebra of Traffic Safety.” Staff suggests that more than doubling the number of tenant panels on the sign, from an existing 12 to a proposed 25, is contrary to the intent of increasing a sign’s readability. Staff believes that increasing the size of the existing 12 panels would be the most effective way to achieve increased signage visibility. In doing so, staff believes that drivers on the Beltway will have more time to maneuver in traffic to reach the site.

3. **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:

(i) The purposes of this Subtitle will be equally well or better served by the applicant’s proposal.

Comment: In general, the purposes of Part 12 (Signs) of the Zoning Ordinance are to regulate unsightly and detrimental signs which could depreciate the value of property and discourage quality development, 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 large pylon signs do not meet Purposes 1, 3, and 6 of Section 27-589 above. The three proposed signs would be unsightly due to their large size and minimal design features with few place-making qualities. Additionally, the 300-square-foot, digital LED, flashing, electronic message panel on the main Beltway sign may distract the attention of drivers from the road to read the sign. As a result, it will slow down the natural flow of highway traffic, which may contribute to hazardous situations. The Urban Design Section further believes that the signs would be a proliferation of signs that will detract from the scenic qualities of the landscape. Each proposed larger sign will multiply the number of tenant panels being displayed, which is essentially increasing the number of signs, as each panel has a different color and design. Then, in addition to the increased number of individual panels, the Beltway sign is proposed to include a LED digital panel, which will be running a continuous loop of other signage information, changing approximately every five seconds. The total result will be a large chaotic sign that will detract from the attractiveness of the development.

(ii) The departure is the minimum necessary, given the specific circumstances of the request.

Comment: As mentioned previously in this report, the applicant is proposing to replace three existing signs with taller and bigger signs. Proposed Sign P1 is seven times bigger in area and 2.5 times higher than allowed by the Zoning Ordinance. Signs P2 and P3 are 2.5 times bigger in area and 1.5 times higher than allowed by the Zoning Ordinance. The applicant contends that the existing brick retaining wall along both the Capital Beltway and Ritchie-Marlboro Road blocks visibility into the site and therefore necessitates higher

and bigger signs. It is important to note that, since the original DSDS-634 approval in 2006, the size of the shopping center and its topography did not change. At that time, the existing sign was determined to be sufficient. Furthermore, during the site visit, it was noted by staff that all of the existing signs on the subject site are adequate in size, clearly visible, readable from the street, and are located well above the existing brick retaining wall. Thus, granting the requested departure for the subject site is not necessary given the specific circumstances of the property, which is effectively served by the existing signs.

- (iii) 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.**

Comment: The applicant's justification for being able to make this finding contends that the proposed signs have been designed to account for the high brick retaining wall that surrounds the site and the drastic change in topography. It should be noted that there is no retaining wall where Sign P1 is located, which is essentially at the same elevation as the adjacent Beltway pavement, and that existing Signs P2 and P3 are already fully visible above the retaining wall. Next, the applicant points to the readability factor along the high-speed Beltway, which does not justify why Sign P1 needs to have a 300-square-foot changeable digital panel and 25 large separate tenant panels. Speed is also not a concern for Signs P2 and P3, which are both located at controlled intersections where high speeds are generally not possible. Therefore, staff believes there are no unique or unusual circumstances in terms of size, location, or topography of the property or the nature of the existing use to warrant the additional sign area and height.

- (iv) The departure will not impair the visual, functional or environmental quality or integrity of the site or of the surrounding neighborhood.**

Comment: The departure will impair the visual, functional, and environmental integrity of the site and surrounding area. If approved, the proposed signs will not be in harmony with the existing developments in the immediate area and would not be compatible with the existing signs in the area. Staff finds that granting higher and bigger signs of this magnitude will impair the visual quality or integrity of the site and/or the surrounding neighborhood.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above analyses, staff recommends DISAPPROVAL of the requested departures, Departure from Sign Design Standards Application No. DSDS-681, Ritchie Station Marketplace.