



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

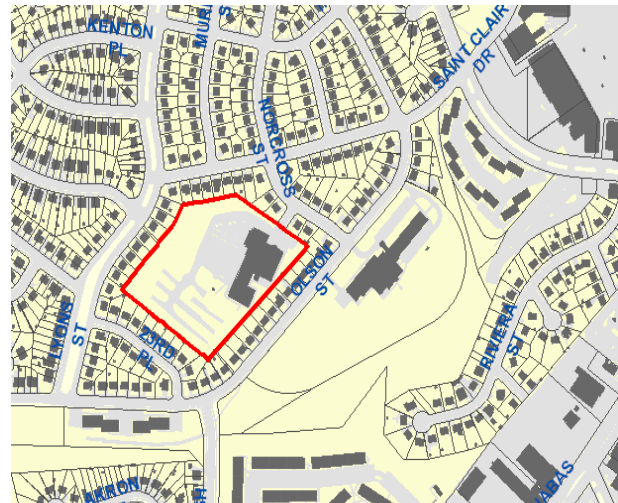
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Departure from Sign Design Standards River of Life Church

DSDS-713

REQUEST	STAFF RECOMMENDATION
Departure to allow one additional sign; 60.17 square feet facing Norcross Street, mounted on side of building.	APPROVAL with conditions

Location: On the southwest side of Norcross Street, at the corner of Olson Street and Norcross Street.	
Gross Acreage:	8.98
Zone:	R-55
Gross Floor Area:	N/A
Lots:	1
Parcels:	0
Planning Area:	76A
Council District:	07
Election District:	06
Municipality:	N/A
200-Scale Base Map:	206SE03
Applicant/Address: River of Life Church 4207 Norcross Street Temple Hills, MD 20748	
Staff Reviewer: DeAndrae Spradley Phone Number: 301-952-4976 Email: DeAndrae.Spradley@ppd.mncppc.org	



Planning Board Date:	7/01/2021
Planning Board Action Limit:	N/A
Staff Report Date:	06/16/2021
Date Accepted:	05/11/2021
Informational Mailing:	03/19/2021
Acceptance Mailing:	05/03/2021
Sign Posting Deadline:	06/22/2021

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THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY PLANNING BOARD

STAFF REPORT

SUBJECT: Departure from Sign Design Standards DSDS-713
River of Life Church

The Zoning Section has reviewed the Departure from Sign Design Standards for the property and presents the following evaluation and findings leading to a recommendation of APPROVAL with conditions, as described in the Recommendation section of this report.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

This Departure from Sign Design Standards was reviewed and evaluated for compliance with the following criteria:

- a. The requirements of the Prince George's County Zoning Ordinance for wall signs;
- b. The requirements of prior approvals; and
- c. Referral comments.

FINDINGS

1. **Request:** The River of Life Church is requesting approval of a Departure from Sign Design Standards to allow for a second light-emitting diode (LED) building sign that is 60.17 square feet. This sign is to be installed on the building face that fronts Norcross Street.
2. **Development Data Summary:** The following chart summarizes the approved development for the overall River of Life Church, and there are no changes to the development requested in this case.

	EXISTING
Zone	R-55
Use(s)	Institutional
Total Acreage	8.98
Number of Lots	1
Parcels	0
Outlots	0

3. **Location:** The property is located on Tax Map 88 in Grid B-3 and is known as 4207 Norcross Street, Temple Hills, Maryland, 20748. The property is 8.98 acres with One-Family Detached Residential (R-55) Zoning. The existing two-story brick building, consisting of 45,674 square feet with 172 parking spaces on the property, includes the River of Life Church, the Imagine Public Charter School, and a day care facility. All three of the existing uses are institutional uses, as defined in the Prince George's County Zoning Ordinance.
4. **Neighborhood:** Significant natural features or major roads usually define neighborhoods. The following roadways define the boundary of the neighborhood:

North— Iverson Street;
South— Olson Street;
East— Branch Avenue, a scenic and historic highway; and
West— 23rd Parkway.

Surrounding Uses and Roadways: The following uses and roadways immediately surround the property:

North— Single-family detached residential dwellings in the R-55 Zone, One-Family Semidetached and Two-Family Detached, Residential (R-35) Zone.

South— Single-family detached residential dwellings in the R-55 Zone and multifamily residential dwellings in the Multifamily Low Density Residential Zone.

East— Single-family detached residential dwellings in the R-55 Zone.

West— Single-family detached residential dwellings in the R-55 and R-35 Zones.

5. **Previous Approvals:**

In 1957, the property was originally developed as Sandymount Elementary School. The public school system conveyed the building and grounds to the Prince George's County Government in 1984.

Detailed Site Plan DSP-85040 was originally approved by the Prince George's County Planning Board on June 27, 1985 for a 170-student private school for Full Gospel A.M.E. Church. DSP-87157 was approved by the Planning Board on December 7, 1987 for about 16,000 square feet of an addition to the building for the church use. The first revision to DSP-87157 was approved by the Planning Director in 1990 for a garage addition and the removal of three parking spaces. The second revision to DSP-87157 was approved by the Planning Director in 1992, in conjunction with Alternative Compliance AC-91115, for an addition of 4,876 square feet of classroom space to the building.

In 2010, a Use and Occupancy Permit, 15542-2010, was issued for a public charter school, Imagine Lincoln Public Charter School, on the property. In 2015, a Use and Occupancy Permit, 11440-2015, was issued for the public charter school on the property again because of a change in the property owner. The most recent permit for the property was 31820-2016-CU, issued on July 27, 2016, for a 682-seat church, a 200-student school, and a day care with 30 children.

The property has an approved Stormwater Management Concept Plan, 41399-2016-00, that was approved on August 18, 2016.

On May 31, 2017, the Planning Board approved DSP-1610 for the existing development of the River of Life Church, the Imagine Public Charter School, and the day care facility on the property.

6. **Master Plan Recommendation:** The subject property is located in Planning Area 76A and is within the limits of the 2000 Approved Master Plan and Sectional Map Amendment for the Heights and Vicinity (Planning Area 76A). The additional signage has no effect on this finding of conformance. There are no standards contained in the master plan regarding signage, therefore the applicant's request for a second LED building sign is subject to the requirements of Subtitle 27 of the Prince George's County Code.
7. **Zoning Ordinance Requirements for Institution Signs:** Wall signs for institutional uses are governed by Section 27-617 of the Prince George's County Zoning Ordinance. Section 27-617 permits one sign along the property frontage along a street and there is a maximum size requirement of 48 square feet per sign. The property owner is requesting a second 60-square-foot LED sign on the wall that fronts Norcross Street. This sign exceeds the sign requirement for one sign along the property frontage along Norcross Street, and the exceeds the size requirement of 48 square feet by 12 feet. The LED sign video panels are manufactured in standard 37 inch by 37 inch LED panels; therefore, that would require the removal of $1\frac{1}{3}$ of a panel to comply with the maximum sign size requirement of 48 square feet. The property owner is requesting the DSDS for the following reasons:
 - To promote the River of Life Church, the Imagine Charter School, and a day care facility with the second LED wall sign;
 - To request the departure from the maximum sign requirement of 48 square feet for institutional uses, since the removal of $1\frac{1}{3}$ of an LED wall sign panel would require customization, and it is impractical to the property owner to comply with the sign regulations; and
 - Since there is only one entrance to the property on Norcross Street, the existing wall signage does not promote the other two institutional uses (the Imagine Charter School and day care facility) that are located on the property; therefore, the departure is needed so that all uses on the property could promote to their patrons and visitors.

Conformance with Section 27-617(a) regarding location, height, area, and quantity requirements for freestanding signs is analyzed further below.

Section 27-617. - Institutional - Other than Temporary.

- (a) **In any zone (except Comprehensive Design and Mixed Use Zones) where a church; library; school; hospital; fire station; community center; day care center for children; service, fraternal, or civic organizations; or other similar institution is allowed, a sign may be erected. Institutional signs shall meet the following design standards:**

(1) Maximum area for each sign - 48 square feet.

Per the statement of justification, the requested sign video board consists of six individual LED panels that are 37 inches by 37 inches each. The panels are arrayed two high and three wide. When all six LED panels are combined, the area is greater than the allowed square footage by 12 square feet. To meet the 48-square-foot sign requirement, $1\frac{1}{3}$ LED panels would have to be removed by the sign manufacturer. Removal of $\frac{1}{3}$ of an LED panel is not a possibility, and a video board with uneven numbers is considered impractical for a full display. The property owner is requesting a DSDS from this section to allow a second LED building sign of 60.17 square feet to be added to the building face that fronts Norcross Street.

(2) Maximum height - 8 feet above finished grade at base of sign.

Per the sign sheets included with this case, the LED sign requested by the property owner will be mounted 7 feet above the surface, and this complies with the requirements of this section.

(3) Minimum setback - 15 feet from adjoining land in any Residential Zone (or land proposed to be used for residential purposes in a Comprehensive Design, Mixed Use, or Planned Community Zone).

Per the DSP, the requested LED sign will be mounted on the building 104 feet away from the adjoining land in any residential zone, and this complies with the requirements of this section.

(4) Type allowed - freestanding or attached to a building.

There is an existing 60.5-square-foot sign with channel letters attached to the entrance of the building along the Norcross Street frontage.

(5) Maximum number - 1 per street the property fronts on (must face street frontage).

As previously indicated, there is an existing 60.5-square-foot sign with channel letters on the building along the Norcross Street frontage. The property owner is requesting a DSDS from this section to allow a second LED building sign of 60.17 square feet to be added to the building face that fronts Norcross Street.

Section 27-239.01(b)(7)(A) of the Zoning Ordinance provides that, in order for the Planning Board to grant the departure, it shall make the following findings:

- (i) The purpose of this Subtitle will be equally well or better served by the applicant's proposal.**

Section 27-589(a) 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;

The existing church sign is composed of metal letters on the entrance canopy. The proposed LED sign will provide additional signage for the other building tenants. It will be wall-mounted, and the LED display board will strictly conform to the illumination standards set forth in Section 27-592 of the Zoning Ordinance. In general, the purposes of the sign regulations are to promote the health, safety, and welfare of residents, workers, and motorists by increasing and enhancing sign visibility and readability, to regulate unsightly and detrimental signs that could depreciate the value of the property, to prevent the proliferation of signs that could detract from the attractiveness of development, and to control the scale, consistent with the intended advertising purposes.

(2) To encourage and protect the appropriate use of land, buildings, and structures;

The LED sign requested by the property owner is intended to advertise, encourage, and protect the River of Life Church, the Imagine Charter School, and the day care facility that are currently operating on the property. These three operations are institutional land uses, which are appropriate uses of the land.

(3) To regulate unsightly and detrimental signs which could depreciate the value of property and discourage quality development in the Regional District;

The LED sign requested by the property owner is 60.17 square feet and this additional sign does not create an unsightly and detrimental appearance to the neighboring community. The LED sign includes modern technology that enhances the property and does not depreciate the value of property or discourage quality development in the regional district.

(4) To regulate signs which are a hazard to safe motor-vehicle operation;

The proposed sign will conform to locational requirements. Further, while the sign will be illuminated, it will conform with the illumination requirements of Section 27-592. The increased size is due to standard panel sizes and will complement the existing entrance sign. The LED sign requested by the property owner is sufficiently sized and located so that pedestrians and motorists could easily identify the existing River of Life Church, the Imagine Public Charter School, and a day care facility located on the property. The requested LED sign does not impede the visibility of drivers entering or exiting the property.

(5) To eliminate structurally unsafe signs which endanger a building, structure, or the public;

To ensure that the LED sign requested by the property owner does not endanger the existing building, the LED sign will be installed, in conformance to the building code. The new sign will be structurally sound; therefore, this provision is not applicable.

(6) To prevent the proliferation of signs that could detract from the scenic qualities of the landscape or the attractiveness of development; and

The placement of the requested LED sign on the building face fronting Norcross Street provides adequate identification for the uses operating on the property and a second sign does not create an over proliferation of signs in the area.

(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 could erect a freestanding sign that would have a greater impact on the character of the surrounding neighborhood. The sign requested by the property owner is sufficiently sized and located so pedestrians and motorists could easily identify the existing River of Life Church, the Imagine Public Charter School, and a day care facility located on the property. The requested LED sign promotes the use of enduring, high-quality materials that will benefit present and future patrons of the property.

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

The property is comprised of three uses, the River of Life Church, the Imagine Public Charter School, and a day care facility. There is only one entrance to the property on Norcross Street, and the existing wall signage does not promote the other two institutional uses (Imagine Charter School and the day care facility) that are located on the property; therefore, the departure is needed so that all uses on the property could promote to their patrons and visitors. The three uses operating on the property and the single entrance on Norcross Street create unique specific circumstances. In addition, the video board of the requested LED sign consists of six individual LED panels that are 37 inches by 37 inches each, and when all six LED panels are combined, the area is greater than the allowed square footage by 12 square feet. To meet the 48-square-foot sign requirement, $1\frac{1}{3}$ LED panels would have to be removed, and the removal of $\frac{1}{3}$ of an LED panel is not a possibility by the sign manufacturer, and a video board of uneven numbers is not practical for a full display. The requested additional LED sign is necessary to ensure sufficient visibility and identification of the River of Life Church, the Imagine Public Charter School, and a day care facility, while respecting the overall appearance of the site and surrounding uses. Given the specific circumstances of the property owner's request for the additional LED sign, the departure is the minimum necessary.

- (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.**

With the exception of about 50 feet for the right-of-way on Norcross Street, the property is landlocked on all four sides of the property by single-family residential dwelling units. This unique condition has existed since the mid-1950s when the neighboring community was developed and built. By being surrounded by single-family residential dwelling units on all four sides, the visibility for the River of Life Church, the Imagine Public Charter School, and a day care facility, institutional uses operating on the property become limited; therefore, the additional sign is needed to increase the visibility of the three separate uses to patrons and visitors.

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

The placement of the LED sign along the building that fronts Norcross Street will not impair the visual or functional integrity of the surrounding neighborhood. The placement of the requested 60.17-square-foot LED sign does not drastically impair the visual, functional, or environmental quality or integrity of the 193 linear feet of building frontage along Norcross Street. Due to the closeness of the single-family residential dwelling units to the property, staff recommends a condition of approval to limit the hours the LED sign may operate. The use of LED video displays for building signage promotes the environmental quality and integrity of the surrounding neighborhood and the visibility of the River of Life Church, the Imagine Charter School, and a day care facility.

8. **Referrals:** No referral agencies provided any comment or concern that would alter the recommendation of approval for this case. The relevant comments submitted for this case were included in this report. The following referral memorandum was received, is included as backup to this report, and is adopted by reference herein:

- Transportation Planning Section, dated June 2, 2021 (Masog to Spradley).

RECOMMENDATION

Based upon the foregoing evaluation and analysis, Zoning staff recommends that the Planning Board adopt the findings of this report and APPROVE the Departure from Sign Design Standards DSDS-713 for River of Life Church, with the following condition:

1. The sign shall not operate between 10:00 PM and dawn.