

September 25, 2000

MEMORANDUM

TO: Prince George's County Planning Board

VIA: Steve Adams, Urban Design Supervisor

FROM: Elizabeth Whitmore, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: Walker Mill Business Park
Lots 6 and 7, Block B
SP-00026

The Urban Design staff has reviewed the Detailed Site Plan, SP-00026, for Walker Mill Business Park. Based on that review and the findings of this report, the Development Review Division recommends APPROVAL with conditions.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

This Detailed Site Plan was reviewed and evaluated for compliance with the following criteria:

- a. Compliance with the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance in the I-1 Zone, including the requirements of the *Landscape Manual*.
- b. Compliance with Preliminary Plat of Subdivision 4-87194.
- c. The requirements of the Prince George's County Woodland Conservation Ordinance.
- d. Referrals.

FINDINGS

Based on analysis of the subject application, the Urban Design staff proposes the following findings:

1. Location: The subject property is located on the south side of Rochell Avenue, northwest of the intersection of Walker Mill Road and Rochell Avenue, at the bulb of the cul-de-sac on Rochell Avenue in the Walker Mill Business Park, most of which is in Capitol Heights. To the north and southeast of the subject site are lots 9, and 8, respectively, that are zoned I-1 and are within the boundaries of the Walker Mill Business Park.

To the south and west of the subject property are three (3) parcels (Parcels 25, 26 and 324) that are Zoned I-1 and are vacant. These parcels are not within the Walker Mill Business Park.

2. The Proposed Development: The subject application, SP-00026, is a request for a contractor's storage facility. The plans as submitted indicate that the development proposal is solely for an outdoor storage yard and does not provide for any office trailers, paved or gravel parking, nor bulk storage bays that will house building materials and construction equipment. The subject property, Lots 6 and 7, Block B, has frontage on, and is accessed from, Rochell Avenue. No additional development is proposed at this time.
3. Background: The (1985) Approved Master Plan for Suitland-District Heights and Vicinity shows this tract as part of an extensive employment area extending from Rollins Avenue to Walker Mill Road within the Town of Capitol Heights. The Suitland-District Heights and Vicinity Sectional Map Amendment (1986) shows the property zoned I-1. In a memorandum (Osei to Whitmore) dated August 4, 2000 master plan issues pertaining to the subject application and the proposed development are raised. See Findings No. 4 for a detailed discussion of the noted issues.
4. The Approved Preliminary Plat: Preliminary Plat 4-87194 for Walker Mill Business Park was approved by the Planning Board on January 7, 1988 (PGCPB Res. No. 88-6). The overall lotting pattern, circulation pattern and access points shown on the site plan are in general conformance with the approved Preliminary Plat 4-87194. There were six conditions of approval on the preliminary plat, one of which pertains to requirements for Detailed Site Plan review. The preliminary plat condition which requires Detailed Site Plan review reads as follows:

3. Detailed Site Plans for individual lots shall be approved by the Planning Board prior to building permits. These site plan reviews shall address, but not be limited to, the items listed in the Area Planning Division's (N/SE) memorandum dated September 16, 1987.

Comment: Embodied within the noted memorandum from the Area Planning Division, dated September 16, 1987, are proposed requirements for architectural compatibility, and provisions for screening of the industrial properties for the purposes of maintaining the residential character of the surrounding properties. Upon approval of the master plan which set forth guidelines for development of the subject property, CR-147-1985, the District Council adopted language identical to that of the Area Planning memorandum in question that was specifically for the purposes of providing criteria for review of any proposed development within Walker Mill Business Park. The specific development criteria is as follows:

- (1) All projects within this property shall be subject to site plan review by the Prince George's County Planning Board. The site plan shall contain a landscape plan.

(2) The Planning Board shall review the development to assure its compliance with the following design guidelines:

(1) An effective buffer created by substantial berms and landscaping shall be provided along Walker Mill Road, Rollins Avenue, and Addison Road and along abutting areas which are planned or developed for residential purposes in order to maintain the residential character of surrounding properties.

(2) The internal organization of the site shall address the following:

1. minimizing the views of parking, loading, storage and service areas.

2. providing architectural elements consistent in materials and treatment on all sides, and with all mechanical equipment enclosed or screened. Screening and enclosures shall be treated as integral elements of building design.

1. signs shall not be placed above the roof or parapet line. No moving or flashing signs, or signs projecting significantly from a building, shall be permitted. Low ground-mounted and landscape signs in keeping with the scale of the buildings and the site shall be encouraged in lieu of building-mounted signs.

The proposed plan does include a landscape plan which will provide some screening of the loading and storage areas. No buildings or structures, mechanical equipment, or signs are proposed as part of this application. Staff has had recent meetings with surrounding community organizations specifically with respect to compatibility and effectiveness of screening elements, quality of development, and appearance of the

lots within the subdivision. Although the subject plan appears to be in conformance with all requirements of the approved Preliminary Plat and CR-147-1985, staff is concerned that recent issues raised by the said parties are not addressed in the current development proposal.

1. Section 4.4 of the *Landscape Manual* provides that screening can be accomplished through the implementation of any one of several recommended options, which are as follows:

- * 6 foot-high sight-tight fence or wall
- * 6 foot-high berm
- * 6 foot evergreen screen (trees or shrubs, minimum six (6) feet high at planting, minimum nine (9) feet on center, double staggered row).

Staff believes that the recommended elements for screening provided in Section 4.4 of the *Landscape Manual* are minimum standards, and as evidence of this Section 4.4 also provides the following statement:

■Screening in addition to that specified below may also be required if, because of slopes or other specific conditions on the site, the normally required screening measures do not achieve the necessary level of concealment..

Furthermore, Section 27-469(c)(1) of the Zoning Ordinance provides the following:

■Outdoor storage shall not be visible from the street..

Section 4.2 of the *Landscape Manual* requires a 10-foot-wide Commercial and Industrial Landscape Strip for properties in commercial and industrial zones along areas adjacent to all public rights-of-way. The applicant has proposed a 10-foot-wide landscape strip, comprised of nine (9) shade trees and shrubs, along the property's frontage at the right-of-way of Rochell Avenue. A six-foot-high board-on-board sight-tight fence is proposed behind, and adjacent to, the landscape strip, and

a six-foot-high chain link fence is proposed along the remaining property lines.

Although the proposed plan appears to satisfy the minimum requirements of Sections 4.2 and 4.4 of the Landscape Manual, and Section 27-469(c)(1) of the Zoning Ordinance, staff does not believe that the proposed screening elements are adequate in terms of quantity or type, given the proposed use, and furthermore that the proposed elements will provide a sufficiently attractive screen from the adjacent right-of-way.

1. The proposed landscaping at the property's frontage is inadequate in terms of type and quantity. The proposed shade trees, planted approximately 35 feet on center, will not provide any immediate screening and even upon maturity will only provide seasonal screening which will not be continuous across the entire property frontage. The proposed shrubs offer no element of screening, and only act as supplemental plantings to the shade trees for the purposes of variety in the landscape strip. Staff believes that the width of the required Commercial and Industrial Landscape Strip should be increased to a minimum of 12 feet to accommodate the type and quantity of plant units necessary to provide an effective and appropriate landscape screen, and that a staggered double-row of large stock evergreen trees should be planted in the landscape strip with shrubs to add variety to the strip.

Given the nature of the proposed use, contractors storage yard, a variety of equipment and materials can potentially be stored on the subject property. These stored elements will undoubtedly range in size/bulk and height, increasing the possibility of becoming visible from the right-of-way. The surrounding community has requested that proposed storage yards in the subject subdivision be required to provide and demonstrate immediate 100 percent, year around, opaque screening of all storage areas from visibility at all adjacent rights-of-way upon Detailed Site Plan approval. Therefore,

it is recommended that the required landscape strip adjacent to the right-of-way be a minimum of 12 feet-wide, and be planted with a row of large stock evergreen trees and supplemental shrubs.

2. As previously stated, the subject plan proposes a combination of a six-foot-high sight-tight board-on-board and a six-foot-high chain-link fence. This method of screening the respective storage yard has, to this juncture, been the typical approach to provision of an opaque visual element for the lots in the subdivision. Although a minimally acceptable treatment for most screening purposes, staff is concerned with the stability and permanence of wood board-on-board fencing with respect to wear and deterioration due to weather, and the appearance of the fencing over time along the lot frontages. The proposed fence should be solid, weather resistant, and low maintenance, with an architectural character that is appropriate for the proposed development. Of equal importance, are the concerns of the community that, at a minimum, the lot frontages throughout the subdivision should provide an appearance of an upscale development. Therefore, it is recommended that the applicant provide a six-foot-high, sight-tight, solid wood fence along the property frontage adjacent to the right-of-way for screening.
3. Walker Mill Business Park is a subdivision of 43 buildable lots. Of the 43 lots, three lots have received Detailed Site Plan approval and five were developed and in operation prior to the requirement of Detailed Site Plan review for the subdivision. Four of the remaining lots are currently under review, including the subject application. Staff has observed an array of frontage treatments within the business park, that include chain link, stockade, and board-on-board fencing. Typically, the lots are submitted for review on an individual basis. Generally, the proposed lots have not shared any common frontage, thus coordination between the treatments of screening at the right-of-way frontages has not occurred with any uniformity. Currently, two of the four lots submitted for development share a common property line and right-of-way frontage. Staff believes that as more development proposals within the subdivision are submitted the likelihood of common property lines and right-of-way frontages increases, availing the opportunity for a comprehensive design approach for the required screening treatment at the street right-of-way. Given the concerns stated by the community with respect to the need for a

comprehensive design approach for the entire subdivision that will require uniform treatment of all of the lot frontages and provide an upscale business park appearance, staff believes that the aforementioned conditions will provide development in the subdivision that addresses the interests of all parties and meets the requirements of all regulatory documents.

5. Development criteria for SP-00026 are as follows:

Zone	I-1
Gross Area	6.28 acres

6. Conformance to the Woodland Conservation Ordinance:
The subject plan was referred to the Environmental Planning Section and in a memorandum dated August 4, 2000 (Metzger to Whitmore), the following comments were provided:

■The applicant seeks to establish a contractor's storage yard on 6.28 acre site in the I-1 Zone. The proposed request would result in absolutely no removal and destruction of woodlands. The site is partially wooded and characterized with terrain sloping towards the west which drains into Beaverdam Creek tributaries. The predominant soils type on the site is Aura, which generally exhibits slight limitations to development due to slopes and Gravel Pits infill, whose components are generally unknown.

■This site is subject to the provisions of the county Woodland Conservation Ordinance because it is more than 40,000 square feet in size, and contains more than 10,000 square feet of woodland and does not have a previously approved Tree Conservation Plan. Technically, the proposed activity is exempt from the County Woodland Conservation and Tree Preservation Ordinance based on Exemption Letter # E-32-2000, dated 11/5/99.

■There are no other apparent environmental impacts associated with the proposal at this time. Studies indicate that there is no presence of methane gas in the immediate area.●

The subject application does not propose any encroachment into existing woodlands, and a letter

of exemption dated June 9, 2000 has been obtained by the applicant. The subject application is in conformance with the approved conditions of Preliminary Plan 4-87194, and no significant environmental impact is associated with the development proposal.

7. Conformance with the Requirements of the Zoning Ordinance in the I-1 Zone, including the Requirements of the Prince George's Landscape Manual: The Detailed Site Plan is in conformance with the regulations governing development in the I-1 Zone.

Section 4.2, Commercial and Industrial Landscape Strip Requirements, of the Landscape Manual applies to the subject site. The landscape plans are in full conformance with the requirements of the *Landscape Manual*.

8. The Subdivision Section in a memorandum dated August 4, 2000 (Del Balzo to Whitmore) had the following comments to offer:

■...The site plan purports to include Parcel 285, a deed parcel, in the application, the parcel shown appears to be made up of two parcels: Parcel 285 and Parcel 444. There is no mention of parcel 444 on the site plan. Both the 1982 and the current tax map shows the property included on the site plan as two separate parcels. The site plan must be revised to identify both parcels and deed information regarding both parcels must be submitted for review. If the parcels are in the same configuration as they were in 1981, they will be exempt from the requirements to subdivide per Section 24-107(c)(7) of the Subdivision Regulations as long as development does not exceed 5,000 square feet of gross floor area. If they are not in the same configuration, a subdivision plat will be required.●

The applicant has provided the Subdivision Section with the necessary documentation indicating that resubdivision is not necessary.

9. The Detailed Site Plan was referred to all applicable agencies and divisions; no significant issues were identified.
10. The subject property has an approved Stormwater Management Concept Plan (CSD #008005760), which was approved on May 8, 2000.
11. The subject application was referred to the City of District Heights and the Town of Capitol Heights. No response was received from either jurisdiction as of the date of the writing of this staff report.
12. With the addition of the proposed conditions, the Detailed Site Plan represents a reasonable alternative for satisfying the site design guidelines, without requiring unreasonable costs and without detracting substantially from the utility of the proposed development for its intended use.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the foregoing evaluation, analysis, and findings of this report, the Urban Design staff recommends that the Planning Board adopt the findings of this report and APPROVE Detailed Site Plan SP-00026 for Walker Mill Business Park, Lots 6 and 7, Block B, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to certificate approval, the following modifications or revisions shall be made to the Detailed Site Plan, or the following information shall be provided:
 - a. Provide a continuous six-foot-high sight-tight wood fence with swinging or sliding gates (solid wood fence in accordance with details shown on Attachment ■A.●) along property lines which have frontage on any vehicular right-of-way within the subdivision.
 - b. Provide 12 feet of commercial/industrial landscaped strip along property lines which have frontage on any vehicular right-of-way. Plant materials provided within the landscaped strip shall be evergreen trees planted 10 feet on center, or other acceptable planting arrangement utilizing the same quantity of trees which is approved by the Planning Board or the Urban Design staff as designee of the Planning Board. White pine trees shall constitute no more than 20 percent of the trees in this landscaped strip.
 - c. Provide cross-sections through the subject site to demonstrate that no area of outdoor storage will be visible from any adjacent right-of-way.