

February 28, 2001

MEMORANDUM

TO: Prince George's County Planning Board

VIA: Steve Adams, Urban Design Supervisor

FROM: Laxmi Srinivas, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: Detailed Site Plan SP-87048/35  
Departure from Design Standards DDS-518  
Six Flags - Parking Lot Improvements

The Urban Design staff has reviewed the site development plans for the subject proposal and presents the following evaluation and findings leading to a recommendation of APPROVAL with conditions.

EVALUATION

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

- a. Special Exceptions SE 2635 and SE 3400 and subsequent revisions
- b. The requirements of the *Landscape Manual*
- c. Referrals.

FINDINGS

Based upon the evaluation and analysis of the subject application, the Urban Design staff recommends the following findings:

1. On November 15, 1972, the District Council approved the General Concept Plan for SE-2635 for Wild World (later Adventure World and now renamed Six Flags). The plan was revised in 1999 to update and clarify the existing Concept Plan by showing the existing structures and uses at Six Flags and to show the general location of seven future rides. The Planning Board recommended approval of the revised Concept Plan on April 22, 1999 (PGCPB Nos. 99-62 and 99-63). The revised Concept Plan was approved by the District Council on July 29, 1999 (Zoning Ordinance No. 11-1999).

2. The subject Detailed Site Plan is for the west overflow parking lot consisting of 2,232 parking spaces. The applicant is also filing a Departure from Design Standards for the required landscaping within the parking lot. Access to the west overflow parking lot is from a second access driveway off of Central Avenue and located to the west of the primary entrance.
3. The main entrance to the Six Flags amusement park is located at a traffic signal- controlled entrance on Central Avenue. This main entrance provides vehicular access to a large parking compound which is oriented toward the front ticket gate at the park. In 1999, the attendance figures at Six Flags greatly exceeded projections and expectations. Therefore, immediate action was required to remedy this situation.

The Conceptual Site Plan has always shown a second entrance access driveway off of Central Avenue and a large additional parking compound in the area of the subject west overflow parking compound. This area had been paved with gravel and had previously been used as an overflow parking area on extremely busy days. However, the access was from the existing primary parking compound and not from the second access driveway. The applicant worked with the Department of Public Works and Transportation and the State Highway Administration to improve the second access driveway to provide access to the overflow parking area. Once these improvements were made, no traffic backups were experienced on Central Avenue.

These improvements were constructed after review and approval by the Department of Environmental Resources, the Department of Public Works and Transportation and the State Highway Administration.

Due to time constraints and the emergency nature of the situation, a Detailed Site Plan application was not filed for the improvements at that time. Accordingly, the subject Detailed Site Plan is now being filed for the improvements.

In addition to the improvements to the second access driveway and the parking compound, the proposal also includes three 8 ft. by 10 ft. ticket booths located approximately 260 feet north of Central Avenue. The access driveway continues along the western and northern boundary of the parking compound and connects to an existing interior thoroughfare and provides additional access for emergency vehicles along Central Avenue.

The West Overflow Parking Lot is less convenient for patrons than the primary parking lot. A trolley system is proposed for movement of patrons from the west overflow parking lot to the ticket gate. The trolley roadway will run from the northeast side of the new parking compound through an existing berm and down to a turn-around near the front entrance to the park. The trolley driveway will also have a 10-foot-wide pedestrian sidewalk running contiguous to it. Also, pedestrians can walk through the parking compound if they chose.

The west overflow parking lot will contain 2,232 standard parking spaces. Handicapped parking spaces will be located close to the front gate in the main parking compound.

The *Landscape Manual* requires interior planting for parking lots. The applicant has not provided the required interior planting. A Departure from Design Standards has been filed for the interior landscaping requirements.

4. The subject Detailed Site Plan must comply with the following conditions of the approved Conceptual Site Plan for SE-2635/3400 (Zoning Ordinance No. 11-1999):

7. **The entrance to the site from Central Avenue shall be designed in a manner to minimize the impact on through traffic movement along Central Avenue.**

The second access driveway providing access to the west overflow parking lot has been designed to minimize impacts on traffic along Central Avenue. Whenever the overflow parking is to be used, services of off-duty state and/or county police officers will be used to direct and control traffic along Central Avenue. The entrance is also designed according to the requirements of the State Highway Administration to minimize traffic impacts.

8. **If attendance is significantly higher than projected and extensive use is made of the Overflow Parking area, additional parking shall be provided in accordance with this conceptual site plan.**

The subject overflow parking is being provided to comply with this requirement.

9. **All future on-site parking areas shall be screened from Central Avenue.**

The applicant will be constructing an attractively landscaped berm on either side of the fire emergency access along Central Avenue (along approximately 700 linear feet of property line) to screen the west overflow parking lot. The berms will be approximately 150 feet in width and approximately 14 to 18 feet in height. A combination of trees and shrubs will be used to landscape the berm. A condition of approval has been added to require the applicant to provide trees with a minimum of 2.5" to 3" caliper.

There are no landscaped berms proposed between the second access driveway and the main entrance. The grade at road level is approximately 127 feet and it slopes upwards towards the parking lot to approximately 132 feet and then gradually slopes down to the parking lot to approximately 130 feet. The lowest grade within the parking lot is 118 feet. Therefore, the parking lot is not visible from the street due to the sloped nature of the ground. The existing trees in the tree conservation areas along this area add to the screening of the parking lot. Therefore, additional screening is not provided in this area.

13. **The applicant shall provide information on the adequacy of on-site drainage, sewage and water for all new improvements along with the detailed site plan application for the new improvements.**

A conceptual stormwater management plan was approved by the Department of Environmental Resources for the new parking compound. The storm drainage for

the new parking compound is in place. The proposal will have no impacts on water and sewer.

- 14. Each detailed site plan shall provide information indicating the type of glare and light that can be expected to be generated by the proposed use(s), and that such lighting will have no adverse impact on adjoining properties.**

The proposed lighting for the parking lot will be focused on the parking areas and access road areas. Since the subject parking lot will be located more than 400 feet from the adjacent properties, the proposed lighting will not have an adverse impact on the adjacent properties. The proposed light poles will be 40 feet in height and distributed uniformly throughout the parking lot. The light poles will consist of a four or two-light heads mounted on a square steel pole. The light poles with four heads will be used in the interior of the parking lot and light poles with two heads will be used along the edge of the parking lot. A condition of approval has been added to ensure that the lighting will be directed downward so as to safely illuminate the use and not create undue glare and light.

- 15. The facility, where feasible, shall incorporate barrier-free design to provide accessibility for handicapped patrons.**

All handicapped parking spaces will be located in close proximity to the ticket gates to provide easy accessibility for handicapped patrons.

- 16. Traffic to and from the subject property shall be monitored for a reasonable time after each new attraction opens, to determine if Level-of-Service D is exceeded in the vicinity of the site entrance. If such a traffic level is exceeded, the applicant shall bear the cost of improving the design of the entranceway, by adding or widening lanes or making other modifications. All such modifications shall be reviewed and approved by the appropriate County or State authority.**

All the existing and proposed rides have been approved during the revision of the Concept Plan. Therefore, no additional traffic is anticipated at this time. The west overflow parking lot is not an attraction and will not in and of itself generate any new traffic.

- 23. Except as provided in Condition 6, a Detailed Site Plan application shall be required to be approved after a public hearing before the Planning Board. The procedure regarding notice of the hearing shall be as follows: A minimum of 30 days notice of such hearing shall be given to all parties of record. Permanent parties of record shall include the presidents of the Kettering Civic Association, Kettering Townhouse Condominium Association, Canterbury Citizens Association, Kingsford Citizens Association, Enterprise Estates Citizens Association, Woodmore Meadows Homeowners Association and the City of Bowie and any civic association formed for the Rolling Meadows Community, i.e., any development of the property forming the subject matter**

of A-9761. All other parties of record shall include those persons who register with the Clerk of the Council as described below.

Within 30 days of the final approval of this condition, the applicant shall mail, by certified mail, return receipt requested, a notice to all persons who testified before the Zoning Hearing Examiner in Case No. SE-2635 on April 26, 1984; May 1, 1984; May 10, 1984; and on May 15, 1984. This notice shall advise said persons of their responsibility to register, within 90 days of the final approval of the condition, with the Clerk of the Council in writing, if they wish to remain parties of record for a period of five more years from the date of final approval of the condition. The date of final approval shall be deemed to be the date on which the Council's resolution approving this condition is mailed to all current parties of record.

No later than 90 days prior to the expiration of each fifth year following these registrations, the applicant shall notify all those persons registered with the Clerk of the Council of the requirement to re-register for five more years. Such persons must re-register in writing prior to the expiration of said five-year period.

In any event, the presidents of the aforementioned citizens organizations and the City of Bowie shall remain permanent parties of record. It shall be the responsibility of the applicant to maintain an updated record of current presidents of the aforementioned citizens organizations and annually provide the Clerk of the Council with such information.

The subject Detailed Site Plan application has been filed for review by the Planning Board. The Notice of Hearing has been sent to all the parties of record.

24. **The parking compound for the special exception property (as revised pursuant to Sections 27-319(f) and 27-320 of the Zoning Ordinance) shall consist of all those spaces as shown on the conceptual site plan as of the effective date of this Ordinance and overflow parking as authorized in SE-2635. That parking which is currently constructed is sufficient for all rides, attractions and improvements shown on the approved conceptual site plan as of the effective date of this Ordinance, pursuant to Section 27-342(b)(2)(A) of the Zoning Ordinance.**

The subject overflow parking lot is shown on the Conceptual Site Plan and is in conformance with the Conceptual Site Plan.

25. **Both entrances shall allow inbound traffic from both directions on MD 214, and they shall operate freely, without gates.**

The second access driveway will allow traffic from both directions along MD 214 when it is in use. It will be gated for security reasons when not in use. The services of off-duty police officers will be utilized to direct and control traffic when the access is in use. The applicant has been required by previous conditions of approval

to obtain a validly issued permit from the State Highway Administration to maintain the secondary access driveway as a permanent entrance to the park.

**26. All toll collection facilities shall be located to avoid obstructing the orderly flow of traffic on Central Avenue.**

The toll collection booths will be located 260 feet north of Central Avenue to avoid obstructing the orderly flow of traffic on Central Avenue.

**28. Pedestrian walkways shall be provided within the parking compound.**

The applicant is providing a trolley system instead of pedestrian walkways within the parking compound for movement of pedestrians. The trolley system will circulate throughout the parking lot at frequent intervals. The trolley system is a reasonable alternative to pedestrian walkways that fulfills the spirit of this condition. Pedestrian sidewalks are provided adjacent to the trolley driveways.

**29. The applicant shall establish a citizens advisory committee to advise it about how to operate the special exception use in a manner compatible with the surrounding community.**

**The following shall apply to this committee:**

- (A) At a minimum, the committee's membership shall include members of the Kettering Civic Federation, the Kingsford Civic Association, the Enterprise Estates Civic Association, and the Kettering Townhouse Condominium Association, and representatives of the City of Bowie, the Planning Commission, and the County's Department of Environmental Resources.**
- (B) On a finding, by majority vote of the full committee, that any condition stated herein has been violated, the committee may petition the Director of Environmental Resources for modification of conditions, revocation, or other appropriate action.**

The Citizens Advisory Committee has been formed and meets annually. The applicant has submitted a letter (Gibbs to Srinivas, November 21, 2000) describing the procedure for compliance with this condition.

**30. All lights shall be focused on the parking areas and access road areas. Access road lighting shall be of low intensity and shall conform in height to existing entrance road lighting.**

As stated earlier, the proposed lighting for the parking lot shall be focused on the parking areas and access road areas. The intensity of the proposed lighting will conform to the existing road lighting. The 40 feet height for the light poles is consistent with standard heights of light poles for large parking lots and entrance roads.

**37. The applicant shall submit information on all future signs visible from surrounding properties prior to the hearing before the Zoning Hearing Examiner.**

With the exception of directional signage, no new signs are proposed for the west overflow parking compound.

5. A Detailed Site Plan SP-87048/30 was approved by the Planning Board on September 23, 1999 (PGCPB No. 99-152) for a second freestanding identification sign to serve the subject secondary access driveway. The sign would also be an additional identification sign along Central Avenue. Condition #2 of the Resolution approving this Detailed Site Plan states (in part):

■The second entrance shall be constructed pursuant to a validly issued permit by the State Highway Administration and maintained as a permanent entrance to the park.●

This condition is being carried forward.

Referral Comments

6. The Permit Review Section (Bakka to Srinivas, December 4, 2000) has stated that the proposal must comply with the conditions of the Revisions to the Special Exception ROSP 2635 and 3400. A landscape plan and landscape schedules must be provided for determining compliance with the requirements of the *Landscape Manual*. A condition of approval has been added to require the same.
7. The Department of Environmental Resources (Guzman to Srinivas, January 25, 2001) has stated that the proposal is consistent with stormwater management concept approval #998006090.
8. The State Highway Administration (McDonald to Srinivas, January 22, 2001) has no comments regarding the proposal.
9. The Environmental Planning Section (Metzger to Srinivas, January 22, 2001) has stated that the proposal is in conformance with an approved Type II Tree Conservation Plan (TCP/II/45/98) dated December 19, 2000. The limits of disturbance shown on the plan do not fully encompass all construction proposed on the plan. Therefore, a condition of approval has been recommended to revise the plan to contain all construction within the limits of disturbance. The proposed contours should be revised to tie into the existing contours. A condition of approval has been added to require the same.
10. The Community Planning Division (D'Ambrosi to Srinivas, January 5, 2001) has stated that the proposal is consistent with the requirements of the Master Plan.
11. The Subdivision Section (Chellis to Srinivas, January 23, 2001) has stated that the site plan incorrectly identifies this property as being part of Parcel B, NLP 183@51. The overall site plan should be revised to accurately reflect Parcel C, D and E approved by the Planning

Board on April 6, 2000, File 4-99062 (PGCPB No.00-44). The Preliminary Plat conditions address various issues like variation requests, bonding for improvements along Central Avenue for the secondary access driveway and tree conservation issues for the area in which the subject parking lot is located. The applicant resolved some of the issues relating to previous conditions of approval for the Preliminary Plat. The Subdivision Section's revised referral (Chellis to Srinivas, March 1, 2001) requests a condition of approval to revise the site plan to reflect the approved Preliminary Plat application 4-99062 when the final plats are recorded. The Preliminary Plat has not been finally approved by the Subdivision Section. A condition of approval has been added to require the same.

12. A referral was sent to the Fire Prevention and Investigation Department. We have not received any comments as of this date. The Department's comments will be available at the Hearing.

#### Departure from Design Standards

13. Section 27-564 of the Zoning Ordinance states that landscaping, screening, and buffering of all parking lots shall be provided pursuant to the provisions of the *Landscape Manual*.

The proposal is subject to Section 4.3.a (Landscape Strip Requirements) and Section 4.3.c (Interior Planting) of the *Landscape Manual*. The proposal complies with the requirements of Section 4.3.a but does not comply with the requirements of Section 4.3.c. Section 4.3.c requires a total of 280 shade trees to be provided within the parking lot.

The applicant does not propose to provide any interior landscaping within the parking compound. It has been the experience of the applicant and other amusement park operators that the installation of landscape islands slows the parking process and creates confusion for motorists. It is more efficient for the applicant to direct motorists across the parking compound to fill parking spaces in an orderly and methodical manner.

Section 1.3 (Alternative Compliance) of the *Landscape Manual* allows alternative compliance for project conditions where normal compliance is impractical or impossible. Section 1.3 also states that in a situation where normal compliance is not possible, and there is no feasible proposal for alternative compliance which is, in the judgement of the Planning Director, equal to or better than normal compliance, then the applicant must apply for an appropriate Departure from Design Standards in accordance with the provisions of Section 27-239.1 of the Zoning Ordinance.

In order to expedite the permit process for this case, the applicant requested denial of alternative compliance from the Planning Director and did not file a formal Alternative Compliance application. The Planning Director (see attached letter from the Planning Director dated October 27, 2000) disapproved the alternative compliance for the parking compound and determined that it was appropriate in this case to provide an expedited course through the normal alternative compliance prerequisite to acceptance of the DDS application.



The applicant has filed a Departure from Design Standards for the interior landscaping of the parking lot.

14. Section 27-587 of the Zoning Ordinance provides that departures from design standards may be permitted by the Planning Board in accordance with the provisions of Section 27-239.01 of the Zoning Ordinance.

Section 27-239.01(b) (9), Required Findings, of the Zoning Ordinance states that:

(A) *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;*

The applicant is not providing the required interior landscaping in order to facilitate filling of the parking spaces in the amusement park in an orderly and methodical manner. The parking lot will, however, be screened from Central Avenue by existing trees and a proposed berm along Central Avenue. The berm will be attractively landscaped to substitute for the required interior landscaping. Therefore the parking lot will be adequately landscaped, buffered and screened from Central Avenue and the adjacent properties. The purposes of this Subtitle, such as protecting and promoting the health, safety, morals, comfort, convenience, and welfare of the present and future inhabitants of the County, will be equally well or better served by the applicant's proposal because the subject use will be adequately screened from the adjacent properties to avoid detrimental impacts to the adjacent properties. Furthermore, facilitation of safe circulation within the parking lot will help ensure the safety of the patrons.

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

The applicant is providing a parking compound designed to meet the parking needs of a large amusement park and provide for efficient circulation of vehicles within the parking lot. Provision of landscaped islands within the parking compound will slow down the parking process for patrons. The applicant states that the ■minimum necessary• is in fact elimination of all the interior trees in order to create orderly and efficient movement of vehicles. Staff agrees that the departure is the minimum necessary, given the specific circumstances of the request. The applicant is providing an attractively landscaped berm along Central Avenue to substitute for the required interior landscaping.

(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;*

The requirements of an overflow parking lot for a large amusement park are unique. A large number of cars are required to be directed into the parking lot in a short period of time. The requirements of this lot are similar to the parking requirements of the Fedex Field, which was constructed with very few internal landscaped islands, but in this case no internal

landscaped islands are being provided. Provision of interior landscaped islands slows down the parking process and obstructs easy circulation of vehicles within the parking lot. The parking lot will be used by a large number of patrons every day for almost six months a year and any obstruction to the easy circulation of vehicles will have detrimental impacts on the operations of the amusement park. Therefore, the departure is necessary in order to alleviate circumstances which are unique to the site.

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

All the other design standards for parking lots will be met as required by the Zoning Ordinance. The applicant is providing an attractively landscaped berm along Central Avenue to substitute for the required interior landscaping. The parking lot is setback more than 200 feet from Central Avenue and more than 400 feet from the adjacent properties. Therefore, the landscape buffers required by the *Landscape Manual* to screen the property from adjacent properties and the public right-of-way are not required. The parking lot will be adequately screened, landscaped and buffered from Central Avenue and the adjacent properties by the substantial amounts of existing woods shown on the Tree Conservation Plan and the overall Landscape Plan for the amusement park. Therefore, the departure will not impair the visual, functional, or environmental quality or integrity of the site or of the surrounding neighborhood.

- (B) *For a departure from a standard contained in the Landscape Manual, the Planning Board shall find, in addition to the requirements in paragraph (9) (A) above, that there is no feasible proposal for alternative compliance, as defined in the Landscape Manual, which would exhibit equal or better design characteristics.*

As stated above, the Planning Director has determined (see attached letter from the Planning Director dated October 27, 2000) that the alternative compliance for the parking compound is disapproved and that there is no feasible proposal for alternative compliance, as defined in the *Landscape Manual*, which would exhibit equal or better design characteristics.

15. The State Highway Administration (McDonald to Srinivas, December 29, 2000) has no objections to the DDS application.
16. The Environmental Planning Section (Metzger to Srinivas, January 11, 2001) has stated that the DDS application is in conformance with the approved Type II Tree Conservation Plan TCPII/45/98.

## RECOMMENDATION

### Detailed Site Plan

Based upon the foregoing evaluation and analysis, the Urban Design staff recommends that the Planning Board adopt the findings of this report and APPROVE SP-87048/35 and TCPII/45/98 subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to certification of the Detailed Site Plan,

- a. the site/landscape plans shall be revised to show the height, length and width of the proposed landscaped berm along Central Avenue. The landscape schedules shall be revised to show trees with a minimum caliper of 2.5" to 3".
  - b. the Tree Conservation Plan TCPII/45/98 and the Detailed Site Plan shall be revised to contain all construction within the limits of disturbance. The proposed contours shall be revised to tie into the existing contours.
  - c. the applicant shall submit a valid permit from the State Highway Administration for constructing and maintaining the second access driveway as a permanent entrance to the amusement park.
  - d. the applicant shall add notes that state the techniques used to ensure that the proposed lighting will be directed downward so as to safely illuminate the use and not create undue glare and light.
2. Prior to recordation of the Final Plats, the site plan shall be revised to reflect the approved preliminary plat application 4-99062, Resolution No. 00-44.

Departure from Design Standards

Based upon the foregoing evaluation and analysis, the Urban Design staff recommends that the Planning Board adopt the findings of this report and APPROVE DDS 518.