

March 29, 2000

**TECHNICAL STAFF REPORT:**

TO: The Prince George's County Planning Board  
The Prince George's County District Council

VIA: Arie Stouten, Zoning Supervisor

FROM: Catherine H. Wallace

SUBJECT: **Special Exception Application No. 4366**  
**(Alternative Compliance Application No. AC-00007)**

REQUEST: Consolidated Storage

RECOMMENDATION: **DENIAL**

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NOTE:

This application is on the agenda for the Planning Board to decide whether or not to schedule a public hearing. If the Planning Board decides to hear the application, it will be placed on a future agenda.

Any person may request the Planning Board to schedule a public hearing. The request may be made in writing prior to the agenda date or in person on the agenda date. All requests must specify the reasons for the public hearing. All parties will be notified of the Planning Board's decision.

You are encouraged to become a person of record in this application. The request must be made in writing and sent to the Office of the Zoning Hearing Examiner at the address indicated above. Questions about becoming a person of record should be directed to the Hearing Examiner at 301-952-3644. All other questions should be directed to the Development Review Division at 301-952-3280.

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## **FINDINGS:**

- A. Location and Field Inspection: The subject site is located on the west side of Malcolm Road, between Alexandria Ferry Road and Clinton Street.
- B. History: The site was reclassified from the C-1 Zone to the C-M Zone by the 1993 Sectional Map Amendment (SMA) for Subregion V.
- C. Master Plan Recommendation: The 1993 Approved Master Plan for Subregion V recommends commercial uses for the subject property.
- D. Request: The applicant requests approval for a consolidated storage building, six stories in height, housing 1,000 storage units in 126,720 square feet of floor area. A 636-square-foot office and manager's residence is also proposed within the building. A storage area to the rear of the building is proposed for the storage of boats and trailers.
- E. Neighborhood and Surrounding Uses: The neighborhood is defined by the following boundaries:

North - Old Alexandria Ferry Road

South - Woodyard Road

West - Branch Avenue

As noted by the applicant, the neighborhood is suburban in character. It is developed with a mixture of residential (single-family detached, townhouses and multifamily) dwellings, service commercial uses, retail, office, lodging and storage uses. Andrews Air Force Base is located a half block away. The site is not located within the Air Installation Compatibility Use Zone (AICUZ).

- F. Specific Special Exception Requirements:

### **Section 27-344.01. Consolidated Storage**

- (a) **Consolidated storage may be permitted, subject to the following:**

- (1) **The application shall be accompanied by:**

- (A) **An impact statement explaining:**

- (i) **The nature and scope of the operation.**
- (ii) **The type and amount of traffic expected to be generated.**

- (B) **A description (graphic and narrative) of the proposed architectural facade of the building.**

The applicant has provided the required impact statement and facade description. The proposed facility will be a six-story single building with self-storage units accessed via a series of corridors connected to a central elevator lobby. Security codes are required for access to the building, and the site will also be monitored by security cameras. A resident manager will also be on the property.

The exterior facade of the building is proposed to be comprised of dark gray, split-face masonry with red and blue glazed architectural masonry accent stripes. A series of large blue glazed panels will be placed on a white accent band which encircles the top of the building. The building facades will also be punctuated by an occasional row of glass panels intended to allow natural light to enter the interior hallways.

The applicant's traffic consultant submitted projected traffic data for daily AM and PM peak hours and for Saturday trips and compared them to four other uses commonly found in the C-M Zone: A gas station/convenience store operation, a fast-food restaurant with drive-thru window, a drive-in bank, and a high-turnover sit down restaurant.

- (2) The subject property shall have frontage on, and direct vehicular access to, an existing street with sufficient capacity to accommodate the type and amount of traffic expected to be generated by the use.**

The property has 185 feet of frontage on and direct access to Malcolm Road, which has sufficient capacity to accommodate the anticipated traffic, per the memorandum from the Transportation Planning Division.

- (3) The use shall be appropriate, given the nature of development in the neighborhood.**

As pointed out in the memorandum from the Community Planning Division, the non-residential portions of the subject neighborhood are generally miscellaneous retail and service-commercial uses. In the immediate environs of the subject site, the single-family residences on the east side of Malcolm Road directly face three auto repair businesses, two motels, one consolidated storage facility and two office buildings. The proposed consolidated storage building is appropriate, given the nature of development in the neighborhood.

- (4) The District Council shall find that:**

- (A) There is a need for the public in the surrounding area.**

The proposed self-storage facility is located in an area where several other similar facilities are located or have applications currently pending. (See attached sketch map.) The applicant provided an initial market evaluation which was subsequently followed by a market analysis prepared by Geigerich and Associates. A summary of the Geigerich study is contained in the letter from Geigerich & Associates, Inc. to the Sienna Development Corporation, March 27, 2000, attached to this report. These studies were reviewed by

Joseph Valenza, of the M-NCPPC Research Section who concluded that the surrounding area does not need an additional self-storage facility. Mr. Valenza provides the following evaluation:

■ I have reviewed the market study for the Malcolm Road Center, SE-4366. I disagree with the applicant's conclusion regarding support for the proposed self-storage facility. The applicant calculates that there will be 4.69 square feet of self-storage space per capita in the market area if the proposed facility is built. The applicant presents three arguments why a self-storage square foot ratio exceeding both the regional and national ratios is reasonable for this area. The first is based on data from the Laurel market area. The second argument deals with proximity to major military installations and the third with sales from outside the market area.

■ Laurel Market Area

■ The applicant developed a ratio of 7.28 square feet of self-storage space per capita from information about the Laurel area. This ratio was used in another Special Exception application (SE-4367) and a summary is presented in this application. The applicant's ratio could not be used in evaluating this proposal, nor could it be used in the other proposal, because it is based on incorrect data and flawed assumptions.

■ The applicant bases the ratio on a population figure of 67,361 in the Laurel market. Our population estimate for the Laurel market identified by the applicant is 78,754. A second problem is the boundaries the applicant draws for the Laurel market area. The applicant draws the north, east and west market boundaries at the County line, and the Beltway as the southern boundary. This trade area is too small. Most of the seven self-storage facilities in this market area are within two to three miles of the Prince George's County/Montgomery County line to the west and within a mile of the Patuxent River, the boundary between Prince George's County and Anne Arundel and Howard Counties to the north and east. Additionally, many of these self-storage facilities are within a few city blocks of Route 1 and Route 1 crosses the river, so the river shouldn't be a boundary. The typical market for self-storage facilities is estimated to extend five miles from the site. The low population figure and the restricted market suggest the ratio developed by the applicant for the Laurel area is inaccurate.

■ The applicant also identifies five established self-storage facilities in the Laurel area. The applicant claims these facilities are fully leased. Managers of the five facilities indicated they are not fully occupied and three of them have occupancy rates below the industry average of about 85 percent.

Laurel Area Self-Storage Facilities		
Name	Address	Occupancy
Public Storage	14950 Bowie Road	83%

Laurel Area Self-Storage Facilities		
Public Storage	8550 Catalpa Street	90%
U-Store	13303 Baltimore Avenue	96%
Beltway Movers	13211 Virginia Manor Road	75%
Shurgard	8707 Cherry Lane	80%

#### ■Military Installations

■The second argument constructed by the applicant to justify the higher self-storage space per capita ratio in the market area is based on ratios in some metropolitan areas with military installations. The applicant first identified metropolitan areas with self-storage space per capita ratios greater than five square feet. The applicant then determined that two-thirds of these areas have at least one military installation. The applicant concludes from this that areas with military installations have a higher than average need for self-storage facilities.

■The valid exercise would have been to start with metropolitan areas that include military installations instead of starting with metropolitan areas with space per capita ratios greater than five square feet. The applicant is looking at findings from metropolitan areas with high space per capita ratios and comparing those to this particular market area. The one element identified by the applicant that those metropolitan areas and this market area have in common is a major military installation. This doesn't justify the conclusion that areas with proximity to military installations have a higher than average need for self-storage facilities. There may be metropolitan areas and/or market areas with military installations that have a lower than average self-storage space per capita ratios. Also, the unique role of Andrews Air Force Base as home of Air Force One and the point of arrival and departure for foreign dignitaries on official visits means its mission is different from other military installations. This could involve personnel different from those found on a more typical military base. This personnel may have different housing arrangements and therefore less need for storage space outside the house than those at other military installations.

#### ■Sales From Outside the Market

■The third argument constructed by the applicant to justify the higher self-storage space per capita ratio in the market area is based on sales from outside the market area. According to the applicant, ■In the case of the mini storage market, with occupancies high, we can expect an inflow of sales from outside the market area. • The applicant bases the amount of inflow on estimates of gas station sales from outside the market area. This is questionable for two reasons. A stop at a gas station is typically part of an existing trip. The gas station is very rarely a destination, so gas stations on heavily traveled roads will have a larger share of sales

from outside their market area, or maybe a better way to phrase this is a larger market area, than those stations on more local roads. This is not likely with self-storage facilities. Commuters who use the gas stations that are on the roads they travel to and from work are unlikely to select self-storage facilities specifically because they are on these same roads.

■Furthermore, the occupancy rates at the self-storage facilities cited by the applicant are not high. The Public Storage on Malcolm Road is about 95 percent occupied. According to an on site manager, Shurgard Storage on Branch Avenue is only 73 percent occupied, not 93 percent as reported by the applicant. The occupancy rate for these two facilities is 86 percent, around the national average.

#### ■Conclusion

■In addition to the above, the applicant does not include the approved 42,100 square foot Clinton Mini Storage on Bellefonte Place in the inventory of competing space. When this space is added to the storage space identified by the applicant, the ratio of square feet of self-storage space per capita reaches 4.25 in the market area. When the applicant's proposal is included, the ratio in the market area becomes 5.3. This is above both the regional ratio of 2.52 square feet of self-storage space per capita and the national ratio of 3.95.

■The applicant has not justified the need for the proposed miniwarehouse. The supply of space is undercounted and the arguments for a higher space per capita ratio in the market area are not valid.●

**(5) The exterior and architectural facade of the building shall be compatible with the prevailing architecture and appearance of other development in the surrounding neighborhood;**

As noted above, the proposed building is to be a six-story structure, with the facade of the building to be comprised of dark gray, split-face masonry with red and blue glazed architectural masonry accent stripes. A series of large blue glazed panels will be placed on a white accent band which encircles the top of the building. The building facades will also be punctuated by an occasional row of glass panels intended to allow natural light to enter the interior hallways.

South of the subject site, the surrounding uses are generally housed in brick buildings, and range in height from one to four stories. North of the subject site, there is a greater variety of building materials, which include a painted block building (Mr. Tire) and buildings which have a brick or wood front facade and metal buildings to the rear. This latter group tends to be oriented more towards Alexandria Ferry Road and away from the residential portion of the neighborhood across Malcolm Road.

The proposed architecture was reviewed by James Jordan of the Development Review Division, Urban Design Section. Mr. Jordan finds the proposed architecture generally

compatible with the surrounding development; however, he questions the contradictory statements in the applicant's statement of justification and the architectural elevations. (See March 23, 2000 memorandum from James Jordan.) Staff has no objection to a 100 percent block masonry structure with finished split-faced block as the dominant exterior material, but this description must be clarified. Mr. Jordan raises an issue with regard to the proposed color scheme and the use of shiny materials to accent those colors. He notes that using glazed materials for the red and bright blue color accents will cause the structure to stand out more than is warranted.

A related issue is the design of the top blue and white accent band. A glance at the elevations will show rather dramatically that this accent band is composed of shiny panels which resemble, to a remarkable degree, a row of roll-up doors. Staff has observed a similar storage facility in the field which similarly identifies its use by suggesting a row of roll-up doors five or six stories from ground level. Due to site location and orientation and the presence of intervening structures, the top floors of this building, and only the top floors, will be very visible from Branch Avenue. This design scheme will give an impression of a row of individual entrances to storage units, directly onto Branch Avenue. This facade design is contrary to the spirit of the regulations prohibiting the visibility of individual entrances from a public street or adjoining land in any residential or commercial zone.

Should this application be approved, staff recommends that the design of this accent band be revised to show six rectangular blocks instead of twelve square blocks, or a similar alternative to the row of squares. It is also recommended that the shiny glazed panels be replaced by a material with a less shiny surface.

- (6) Beginning June 23, 1988, no entrances to individual consolidated storage units shall be visible from a street or from adjoining land in any Residential or Commercial Zone (or land proposed to be used for residential or commercial purposes on an approved Basic Plan for a Comprehensive Design Zone, or any approved Conceptual or Detailed Site Plan);**

The proposed facility conforms to this requirement; however, the facade treatment should be altered to bring the design of the building into conformance with the intent of this requirement. (See discussion in Section 5 above.)

- (7) Entrances to individual consolidated storage units shall be either oriented toward the interior of the development or completely screened from view by a solid wall, with landscaping along the outside thereof;**

All entrances to individual units will be accessible from within the building only.

- (8) Consolidated storage for which special exceptions were approved prior to the date reflected in paragraph 6, above, need not meet the provisions set forth in paragraphs 6 and 7, above.

Not applicable.

- (b) In addition to what is required by Section 27-296(c)(1)(B), the site plan shall show the topography of the subject lot and abutting lots (for a depth of at least fifty (50) feet).

The site plan is in conformance with this requirement.

- G. Parking Regulations: The revised plan dated (February 8, 2000) meets the requirements for parking space numbers, dimensions and access.

- H. Landscape Manual Requirements: The applicant's revised landscape plan was submitted alternative compliance with Section 4.7 of the *Landscape Manual*, buffering incompatible uses along the adjoining motel site. All other requirements of the *Landscape Manual* have been met. The Planning Director recommends approval of the request (AC-00007) based upon the following:

The property is zoned C-M and is currently vacant. The site is proposed to be used as consolidated storage with interior units for a total of 126,720 square feet. The applicant is requesting Alternative Compliance from Section 4.7, Buffering Incompatible Uses, along the southern property line. The adjoining site is zoned C-M and is occupied by a motel.

REQUIRED: Section 4.7, Buffering Incompatible Uses, along the southern property line.

Length of bufferyard:	593 feet
Building setback:	30 feet
Landscape yard:	20 feet
Plant materials @ 80 Pus/100 LF:	475 plant units

PROVIDED:

Building setback:	34 feet
Landscape yard:	10-20 feet
Plant materials:	571 plant units

JUSTIFICATION OF RECOMMENDATION:

A recorded ingress/egress easement is located within the first 11 feet of the required 20-foot-wide landscape yard. The right-of-way functions as a common commercial driveway providing vehicular access to the subject property as well as adjoining properties. This situation precludes the site from fully meeting the provision of Section 4.7 of the *Landscape Manual*. The applicant has proposed to provide 96 more plant units than are required. All other property lines are developed and considered compatible uses. The Alternative Compliance Committee is of the opinion that this alternative is equal to or better than the normal requirements set forth in Section 4.7 of the *Landscape Manual*.



- I. Zone Standards: The revised plan meets the requirements of the C-M Zone.
- J. Sign Regulations: The site plan shows a freestanding sign which complies with the location requirements of Section 27-614. In addition, the sign must also meet the height and area requirements of the Zoning Ordinance.
- K. Required Findings:

**Section 27-317(a) of the Zoning Ordinance provides that a special exception may be approved if:**

**(1) The proposed use and site plan are in harmony with the purposes of this Subtitle.**

The purposes of the Zoning Ordinance are listed in Section 27-102 and can be summed up in the first purpose which reads, ■To protect and promote the health, safety, morals, comfort, convenience and welfare of the present and future inhabitants of the County.● The District Council placed this special exception within a group of special exceptions for which a need must be shown, prior to consideration of approval. Staff finds that, with the other existing and already pending applications for this use in this market area, there will not be a need for this additional facility. An overabundance of this type of use within a given area does not promote the comfort, convenience and welfare of its inhabitants. Therefore the proposed use does not meet this criterion.

**(2) The proposed use is in conformance with all the applicable requirements and regulations of this Subtitle.**

The proposed use is not in conformance with Section 27-344.01(a)(4). There are also some building design issues which place it at odds with the intent of Section 27-344.01(a)(6). It does however, meet the other applicable requirements.

**(3) The proposed use will not substantially impair the integrity of any validly approved Master Plan or Functional Master Plan, or in the absence of a Master Plan or Functional Map Plan, the General Plan.**

The site is located within a planning area addressed by the Subregion V Master Plan and SMA approved in 1993. The plan addresses this area as follows: ■(T)he areas north and south of Coventry Way along Old Branch Avenue, MD 5 and Old Alexandria Ferry Road are generally recommended for miscellaneous retail and service commercial uses in the C-M Zone.● The requested use is in conformance with the type of development recommended in the plan.

**(4) The proposed use will not adversely affect the health, safety or welfare of residents or workers in the area.**

The proposed use will not have any direct adverse impacts to surrounding residents or workers in the area. The proposed use is not expected to generate a significant amount of traffic and the revised plan has addressed access issues raised earlier in the process. However, in the long run, the

overbuilding of this type of use at this location could lead to failed businesses and vacant buildings, which are detrimental to the welfare of others in the area.

**(5) The proposed use will not be detrimental to the use or development of adjacent properties or the general neighborhood.**

The addition of a consolidated storage facility at this location will be in excess of the need for this use in this area. This will have a detrimental effect on surrounding uses, if the consolidated storage industry overbuilds in this location. One likely result is high vacancy rates and business failures, which will have a negative impact on surrounding commercial uses as well as residential areas.

**(6) The proposed site plan is in conformance with an approved Tree Conservation Plan.**

The proposed site plan conforms to an approved Tree Conservation Plan.

**CONCLUSION:**

With some revisions to the architectural design of the proposed building, the proposed use meets most of the criteria for approval of a special exception. However, this area is well served by consolidated storage facilities, and the applicant has failed to show a need for this use. Therefore, the approval of this facility at this location does not meet the specific criteria for consolidated storage facilities or the general requirements for a special exception. Therefore, staff recommends DENIAL of SE-4366 and AC-00007.