

R E S O L U T I O N

WHEREAS, the Prince George's County Planning Board has reviewed DSDS-641 requesting a departure from the sign design standards in accordance with Subtitle 27 of the Prince George's County Code; and

WHEREAS, after consideration of the evidence presented at the public hearing on December 7, 2006, the Prince George's County Planning Board finds:

- A. **Location and Field Inspection:** The site is in Planning Area 75A, Council District 6. More specifically, it is located in the northwest quadrant of the intersection of I-495 and Ritchie Marlboro Road.
- B. **Development Data Summary:**

	EXISTING	PROPOSED
Zone	I-1	I-1
Use(s)	Vacant	Retail portion of a Flex Industrial Park
Acreage	12.85	12.85
Lots	Parcels 26, 27	Parcels 14-20, 24, 27 and D
Building Square Footage/GFA	N/A	57,464

Other Development Data

	REQUIRED	PROPOSED
Total parking spaces	421	559
Of which handicapped spaces	26	27
Loading spaces	8	8

Sign Design Standards Data

A. Freestanding Sign Height

Sign Type	Maximum Height Permitted	Height Requested	Departure Requested
Pylon	25 feet	75 feet	50 feet

B. Freestanding Sign Quantity

Maximum Quantity	Quantity Requested	Departure Requested
4	14	10

C. Freestanding Sign Area

Sign Type	Maximum Area Permitted (s.f.)	Area Requested (s.f.)	Departure Requested (s.f.)
Pylon	200	1,281	1,081
Entry Monument Sign (Retail Section)	200	310	110
Business Park Monument Sign 1	200	320	120
Business Park Monument Sign 2	200	310	110
Gateway Wall Sign	200	265	65

D. Building Sign Area

Building ID	Maximum Area Permitted (s.f.)	Area Requested (s.f.)	Departure Requested (s.f.)
Building 2	200	212	12
Building 3	208	300	192
Building 4a	203	535	332
Building 4b	200	470	270
Building 5	176	300	124
Building 6	126	300	174
Building 7	200	360	160

E. Freestanding Gas Station Price Sign Quantity

Maximum Quantity	Quantity Requested	Departure Requested
1	2	1

F. Freestanding Gas Station Price Sign Area

Sign ID	Maximum Area (s.f.)	Area Requested (s.f.)	Departure Requested (s.f.)
Price Sign 1	50	92	42
Price Sign 2	50	92	42

C. **History:** The site has also been the subject of Preliminary Plan of Subdivision 4-03113 and Type I Tree Conservation Plan TCPI/34/00, approved by the Planning Board on March 4, 2004, and formalized in PGCPB Resolution No. 04-49. The site is the subject of approved Stormwater Concept Plan 8004290-200-03, approved on April 11, 2005, and effective for three years or until April 19, 2008. The initial Detailed Site Plan DSP-05044 and Tree Conservation Plan TCP II/128/90-3 were approved on January 5, 2006. A decision of the District Council for reconsideration of SP 05044 Steeplechase 95 Business Park was ordered on July 11, 2006.

D. **Request:** The subject application requests a height departure for freestanding signs for an increase from 25 feet to 75 feet for a pylon sign; a quantity departure for freestanding signs for an increase from 4 signs to 14 signs; an area departure for freestanding signs for an increase—including the pylon sign (1,081 square feet), the retail section entry monument sign (110 square feet), the two business park entry monument signs (140 square feet) and the gateway sign (65 square feet)—totaling a combined area increase of 1,496 square feet; the area departure for

building signs, which include Building 2 (12 s.f.), Building 3 (192 s.f.), Building 4a (335 s.f.), Building 4b (270 s.f.), Building 5 (124 s.f.), Building 6 (174 s.f.), and Building 7 (160 s.f.), totaling a combined area increase of 1,267 square feet; a quantity departure for freestanding gas station price signs for an increase from 1 sign to 2 signs; and an area departure for freestanding gas station price signs for an increase of 42 square feet for each sign. The application was submitted in companion to a Detailed Site Plan Request for the construction of 32,350 square feet of retail space consisting of two banks, one service station and one multi-tenant building, as well as 25,114 square feet of restaurant space consisting of three fast-food restaurants and two sit-down restaurants in the retail portion of the Steeplechase 95 Flex Industrial Park in the I-1 Zone.

E. **Surrounding Uses:** The subject property is bounded to the north by a Pepco right-of-way with utility power lines, to the west by the 85,683-square-foot Special Education Center of the Prince George's County Board of Education, to the south by Ritchie Marlboro Road and various industrial/warehouse buildings, and to the east by the Capital Beltway interstate highways I-95/I-495.

F. **Required Findings:**

1. **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 which are a hazard to safe motor-vehicle operation.**
 - (5) **To eliminate structurally unsafe signs which 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.**
 - (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.**

a. **Section 27-613** provides regulations regarding building and canopy signs. The following section pertains to the subject application:

i. **Section 27-613(c)(1)** requires that the maximum permissible area of building and canopy signs is dependent upon the building or canopy width, the distance between the edge of the canopy and the street line toward which the sign faces, and whether the permissible sign area is divided between the building and the canopy.

Finding: Building signage exceeds the area requirements of Section 27-613(c)(1) by modest numbers. Departures are proposed for Buildings 2 through 7. The design concept is a hierarchy that essentially places the primary signage at the main entrance for each building and then smaller identification signs at points parallel with adjacent roadways where the buildings are visible. Signage is proposed along the rear of some buildings as a result of the retail park's proximity to the I-495 off-ramp and the significant "viewshed" from the exit ramp. The building design provides for an appearance in building material similar to its front.

b. **Section 27-614** provides the following freestanding sign regulations that pertain to the subject application:

i. **Section 27-614(a)(4)** requires that freestanding signs shall be located at least 10 feet behind the ultimate right-of-way line in all commercial and industrial zones (except the I-3 Zone).

Finding: The detailed site plan conforms.

ii. **Section 27-614(b)(1)** limits the maximum height of a sign to 25 feet from finished grade to top in commercial and industrial zones (except the C-O and I-3 Zone).

Finding: The applicant proposes a freestanding pylon sign that is 75 feet high, and has therefore requested a departure from sign design standards of 50 feet, as discussed below. The applicant provided a site analysis of what the view would be at the standard height of 25 feet, and at an increase to 50 feet. Visibility at 75 feet is such that it would provide a vehicle traveling at 60 miles per hour more of an opportunity to change lanes or make a decision to exit at the ramp. Therefore, staff supports the requested departure of 50 feet.

iii. **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 two linear feet of street frontage, to a maximum of 200 square feet for each sign, if the building is located in an integrated shopping center. The street frontage shall be measured on the property occupied by the center or complex associated with the sign.

Finding: The applicant proposes a departure for increases in the area of the freestanding signs visible from I-495, the business park entrance feature signs and the decorative wall. This signage and the structures on which the signage is placed help create identity and character for the park. It is also consistent with the purposes previously highlighted. Moreover, patrons, customers and users will be able to quickly identify businesses and establishments within the park. Significant development will occur across Ritchie Marlboro Road from Steeplechase, and some confusion may arise as a result. The signage program, inclusive of the requested departures, will help to reduce any possible confusion regarding the two developments and provide drivers direction to their desired locations.

- c. **Section 27-612 authorizes the Planning Board to approve departures from sign design standards under the procedures and requirements of Part 3, Division 5 of the Zoning Ordinance, specifically Section 27-239.01(a)(1):**

Section 27-239.01(b)(8)(A)—In order for the Planning Board to grant the departure, it shall make the following findings. The required findings are below, followed by a summary of the applicant’s position and staff comments. Pertinent “purposes” of the sign ordinance in Section 27-589 are referenced as appropriate.

1. **The purposes of this Subtitle will be equally well or better served by the applicant's proposal.**

Section 27-102 contains the general purposes of the Subtitle (Zoning Ordinance). The applicant addresses all 15 general purposes in the justification statement (attached), of which staff finds only four directly applicable to this requested departure. Also, Section 27-589 provides seven general purposes of the sign regulations, of which staff finds four applicable herein. The following are the pertinent purposes from both Sections 27-102 and 27-589:

- a. **Section 27-102(a)(1) – To protect and promote the health, safety, morals, comfort, convenience, and welfare of the present and future inhabitants of the County**

Section 27-589(a)(1) - To promote the health, safety, and welfare of the present and future inhabitants of the Regional District

Finding: The departures will encourage economic development activity that leads to employment and broadened tax base. A successful development—of which signage is an essential component—will assist in creating various employment opportunities within the industrial park and quality locations for businesses to locate. The employment opportunities will improve the social and economic stability of this part of the county, promote convenience, and therefore enhance the safety, welfare and quality of life of the present and future residents

of the nearby community and Prince George's County.

b. Section 27-102(a)(2)—To implement the General Plan and Area Master Plans

Section 27-589(a)(2)—To encourage and protect the appropriate use of land, buildings, and structures

Finding: The signage program will support the Subtitle and Section purposes implementing the applicable land use Plans, orderly growth and encouraging the appropriate use of land. Steeplechase is an I-1-zoned property that can achieve more of the objectives desired by the community and county resulting from the interchange improvement. The signage will help the property become more than merely industrial development. Steeplechase 95 Business Park's signage package is proposed with appealing design, inclusive of the business park's symbol, and retail tenant representation will help to connect the retail and industrial/office portions of the development. The triangular set up will create a structurally sound sign, and the use of high quality material will make the sign a pleasant appearance for the users of the business park and people driving along the Capital Beltway. The design emphasizes the importance and openness of the community for the foreign trade zone component and its retail amenities, and is inviting to others who will want to also locate businesses and venues in the county's Developed Tier.

c. Section 27-102(a)(4)—To guide the orderly growth and development of the County, while recognizing the needs of...business

Section 27-102(a)(6)—To promote the most beneficial relationship between uses of land and buildings while protecting landowners from adverse impacts of adjoining development

Sections 27-102(a)(4) and 27-102(a)(6) above are similar to or promote the following purposes contained in Sections 27-589:

d. Section 27-589(a)(6)—To prevent the proliferation of signs that could detract from the scenic qualities of the landscape or the attractiveness of development

Section 27-589(a)(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

Finding: The applicant seeks to create and provide a qualitative identity and image that is previously more likely to appear in areas of the county's Developed Tier. Steeplechase will attract quality businesses and create a solid image that can be appreciated by diverse users, tenants and patrons. The requested departures assist in the overall effort to provide safe, attractive signage. The

additional number of signs, height and area provide for adequate identification and advertisement in a manner compatible with the land use. None of the departures impair the visual, functional, or environmental quality or integrity of the surrounding neighborhood and nearby community. By contrast, the signage fits within the overall character and identity proposed by the applicant. Building landscape and viewsheds are created which do not detract from the overall development. The comprehensive signage package has been carefully developed to balance the need to identify the gateway to the newly developed foreign trade zone of Prince George's County, as well as provide an integrated retail component that maintains a compatible quality with the existing community.

2. The departure is the minimum necessary, given the specific circumstances of the request.

Finding: A pylon sign along I-495 needs to be visible at a safe distance from the off-ramp to the business park. The applicant provided a site analysis of what the view would be at the standard height of 25 feet and at an increase to 50 feet. Visibility at 75 feet is such that it would provide a vehicle traveling at 60 miles per hour more of an opportunity to change lanes or make a decision to exit at the ramp.

The Departure requests an increase in the number of "freestanding signs" from the allowable number of 4 to 14. The increase is primarily the result of (1) adding Ritchie Marlboro Road wall and the 10 architectural entry features for the 10 retail amenities. This allows the concept of creating prominent identification by providing signage as (a) part of a decorative wall along the new Ritchie Marlboro Road, (b) two Architectural Entrance Features with signage, and (c) monument signage (10) at entrances into the retail amenities. The architectural elements in all the signage unite to provide identity and character.

The proposed area square feet departure for freestanding signs visible from I-495, the business park entrance feature signs and the decorative wall is the minimum necessary to help create identity and character for the business park. It is also consistent with the purposes previously highlighted. Moreover, patrons, customers and users will be able to quickly identify businesses and establishments within the business park. Previous design alternatives were submitted for review and design alterations were provided to achieve a reasonable compromise for the final proposal

3. The departure is necessary in order to alleviate circumstances that are unique to the site or prevalent in areas of the county developed prior to November 29, 1949.

Applicant's Position: Signage identifying the location for its businesses and potential customers must do so in a manner that is safe by recognizing the speed of traffic and the time drivers have to react to this notice. A circumstance to the

site is a grade differential between the exit ramp and the retail area. The retail area becomes obscured visually from the highway as the exit ramp begins to incline toward the roundabout. The retail area site is at its lowest point, 10 feet below the ramp elevation. The applicant seeks to create and provide a qualitative identity and image that is previously more likely to appear in areas of the county's Developed Tier. Previous design alternatives were submitted for review and design alternatives were provided to achieve a reasonable compromise for the final proposal.

4. The departure will not impair the visual quality or integrity of the site or of the surrounding neighborhood.

Finding: These departures assist in the overall effort to provide safe, attractive signage. The additional number of signs, height and area provide for adequate identification and advertisement in a manner compatible with the land use. None of the departures impair the visual, functional, or environmental quality or integrity of the surrounding neighborhood and nearby community. By contrast, it fits in with the overall character and identity proposed by the applicant.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that pursuant to Subtitle 27 of the Prince George's County Code, the Prince George's County Planning Board of The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission adopted the findings contained herein and APPROVED the above-noted application, subject to the following conditions:

1. On either face of the pylon sign, there shall be no more than one business advertised on each of the nine individual sign panels.
2. On either face of the retail entry monument sign, there shall be no more than one business advertised on each of the eight individual sign panels.
3. On the face of the business park entry monument sign, there shall be no more than one business advertised on each of the six individual sign panels.
4. Prior to signature approval of the DSDS:
 - a. Identify placement and size of tenant logo or typeface proposed for the Typical Retail Tenant Sign (Type R) for the known tenants, and add the standards as a note to the site plan.
 - b. Provide the illuminated sign specifications for the WaWa gas price sign.
 - c. Provide a materials sample board for the proposed signs.

- i. Material samples shall be securely mounted on one or more lightweight boards not to exceed 8.5"x14" and shall include:
 - Color Chips
 - Manufacturers cut sheets
 - Photographs or samples for applied typeface and logos.

5. Any subsequent tenant signs shall meet the standards set forth herein.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appeal of the Planning Board's action must be filed with the District Council for Prince George's County, Maryland within thirty (30) days of the final notice of the Planning Board's decision.

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This is to certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the action taken by the Prince George's County Planning Board of The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission on the motion of Commissioner Squire, seconded by Commissioner Clark, with Commissioners Squire, Clark, Vaughns and Eley voting in favor of the motion, and with Commissioner Parker absent at its regular meeting held on Thursday, December 7, 2006, in Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

Adopted by the Prince George's County Planning Board this 15th day of February 2007.

Trudye Morgan Johnson
Executive Director

By Frances J. Guertin
Planning Board Administrator

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