



Note: Staff reports can be accessed at www.mncppc.org/pgco/planning/plan.htm.

Departure from Sign Design Standards

DSDS-657

Application	General Data	
<p>Project Name: First Baptist Church of Glenarden</p> <p>Location: Located on the east side of Watkins Park Drive, approximately 2,000 feet north of its intersection with Oak Grove Road</p> <p>Applicant/Address: First Baptist Church of Glenarden 3600 Brightseat Road Landover, MD 20785</p> <p>Owner/Address Same as above</p>	Date Accepted:	03/23/09
	Planning Board Action Limit:	N/A
	Plan Acreage:	83.24
	Zone:	R-E
	Dwelling Units:	N/A
	Gross Floor Area:	126,635 sq. ft.
	Planning Area:	74A
	Tier:	Developing
	Council District:	06
	Election District	07
	Municipality:	N/A
	200-Scale Base Map:	201SE11

Purpose of Application	Notice Dates	
Departure for the size (14 square feet) and number (2) of proposed freestanding signs.	Informational Mailing:	01/12/09
	Acceptance Mailing:	03/18/09
	Sign Posting Deadline:	06/16/09

Staff Recommendation		Staff Reviewer: Ivy R. Thompson	
APPROVAL	APPROVAL WITH CONDITIONS	DISAPPROVAL	DISCUSSION
	X		

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY PLANNING BOARD

STAFF REPORT

TECHNICAL STAFF REPORT:

TO: The Prince George's County Planning Board

VIA: Jimi Jones, Zoning Supervisor

FROM: Ivy Thompson, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: **Departure from Sign Design Standards DSDS-657
First Baptist Church of Glenarden**

REQUEST: **Departure from the number of signs permitted and the size of the proposed signs.**

RECOMMENDATION: APPROVAL

NOTE:

The Planning Board has scheduled this application for a public hearing on the agenda date indicated at the top of the cover sheet. The Planning Board also encourages all interested persons to request to become a person of record in this application. Requests to become a person of record should be made in writing and addressed to the Development Review Division at the address indicated above. Please call 301-952-3530 for additional information.

FINDINGS:

A. **Location and Field Inspection:** Located in the Developing Tier, the subject site is located on the east side of Watkins Park Drive, approximately 2,000 feet north of its intersection with Oak Grove Road. The property is a large rectangular-shaped area improved with a church that features a 162± foot steeple/spire, a 205,000-square-foot sanctuary with seating for up to 4,000 people, 44 classrooms for Bible studies, and six multipurpose rooms and requisite parking. The subject site has approximately .39 mile of frontage on Watkins Park Drive (MD 193). Access is from Watkins Park drive. There are no existing signs located on the site.

B. **Development Data Summary:**

	EXISTING	PROPOSED
Zone(s)	R-E	R-E
Use(s)	Church	Church
Acreage	83.24	83.24
Parcel	1	1
Square Footage/GFA	126,635	126,635

C. **History:** The original submittal for a departure was for departures for both the number of signs and the size (97 square feet) of the proposed signs. The subject property was previously reviewed as Preliminary Plan 4-02047 and is the subject of Final Plat REP 196 @ 54 recorded April 10, 2003.

D. **Master Plan Recommendation:** The 2006 *Approved Master Plan for Bowie and Vicinity and Sectional Map Amendment for Planning Areas 71A, 71B, 74A, 74B* maintained the property in the Residential-Estate (R-E) Zone. The proposed departure from sign design standards supports the Developing Tier goals of maintaining low- to moderate-density land uses. It responds to the sector plan’s recommendation for residential, low development. The sector plan does not specifically address signage issues. The departure from design standards for two freestanding signs is more of an urban design issue.

E. **Request:** This departure from sign design standards application was filed for an increase in the square footage for the size (62 square feet, an increase of 14 square feet) of the proposed signs and the number of signs permitted (two instead of one) as required by the Zoning Ordinance. The applicant is proposing the installation of two 62-square-foot freestanding signs for identifying the church. One of the signs is to be located at the north entrance to the property off of Watkins Park Drive and the other sign is to be placed at the south entrance to the property. The proposed signs are eight feet in height, composed of two elements; the upper element is a 19-square-foot sign identifying the name of the church; and the lower element is a 28.5-square-foot digital public information sign.

F. **Surrounding Uses:** The property is surrounded by the following uses:

North—Adjacent to the subject property is the Kettering Subdivision zoned R-80 (One-Family Detached Residential), which is developed with single-family dwelling units.

South—Adjacent to the subject site is Church owned property zoned Residential Estate (R-E).

East—Adjacent to the subject property is the Sierra Meadows Subdivision, zoned R-E, which is developed with single-family dwelling units.

West—Across Watkins Park Drive is M-NCPPC parkland and Prince George’s County School Board property zoned R-E, and Residential Open Space (R-O-S) that is improved with the Perrywood/Kettering Community Park School Center.

- G. **Sign Requirements:** The Zoning Ordinance permits the applicant to install one 48-square-foot sign with a maximum height of eight feet at the base – either freestanding or attached to a building:

Sec. 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.**
- (2) **Maximum height - 8 feet above finished grade at base of sign.**
- (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).**
- (4) **Type allowed - freestanding or attached to a building.**
- (5) **Maximum number - 1 per street the property fronts on (must face street frontage).**

The applicant requires departures from subsections (1) and (5). A departure of 14 square feet is required from subsection (1) to permit a sign larger than the 48 square feet allowed per the Zoning Ordinance. A departure of one additional sign is required from subsection (5) to permit the second freestanding sign on this property. The request meets all other sign design standards of the Zoning Ordinance.

- H. **Required Findings:** Section 27-239.01(b)(8)(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 purposes of this Subtitle will be equally well or better served by the applicant’s proposal.**

The general purposes of the Zoning Ordinance are summarized in the first general purpose: “To protect and promote the health, safety, morals, comfort, convenience, and welfare of the present and future inhabitants of the County.” To do so, the Zoning Ordinance promotes orderly growth and the most beneficial relationship between the uses of land and buildings. These purposes are further refined by the purposes of the Sign Regulations (Part 12, Section 27-589 of the Zoning Ordinance):

- (a) **The purposes of regulating signs are:**
- (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 that are a hazard to safe motor vehicle operation;**
 - (5) **To eliminate structurally unsafe signs that 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; and**
 - (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 proposed signs and requested departure is in harmony with these purposes. The church is sited on an 83.2-acre property that has nearly 0.4 mile of road frontage on Watkins Park Drive (MD 193). Due to the uncommonly large size of the property and the extensive road frontage on Watkins Park Drive, out of necessity, additional signage is required. Of key importance is the motorists’ ability to identify and read a single standard sign within the viewshed presented by the property’s extensive road frontage. Another element of these greater proportions relates to the access to the property. Instead of having the traditional access drive or drives that are at the most several hundred feet apart as is normally found in smaller neighborhood churches, the two access points to the subject church are separated by a one-quarter mile (1,350± linear feet) of road frontage along Watkins Park Drive.

In keeping with their goals of presenting an attractive presence to the street and the surrounding community as a whole, the applicant submits that the proposed signs are proportionally sized, and designed to tastefully blend in with the architecture and scale of the church, and its attractively landscaped entrances and road frontage. Another important element of the signs is that they are intended to clearly identify the property and reduce possible confusion for police, fire, other emergency services, and motorists traveling on Watkins Park Drive.

The purposes of the Zoning Ordinance and Part 12 will continue to be met. The proposed additional sign will not contribute to a sign proliferation in the area in that the lengthy frontage of this site ensures that no additional signs will be placed near the proposed sign. The purposes of the Zoning Ordinance will be equally or better served by the applicant's proposal.

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

The proposed signs are an identification of the church name. The requested departure is the minimum necessary to ensure that the proposed signs will be of sufficient size to be easily and safely read by vehicles traveling on the adjacent Watkins Park Drive.

(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 unique qualities of the site include: the nearly 0.4 mile length of the site's road frontage on Watkins Park Drive; the scale and architecture of the church sanctuary itself; the extent and quality of the site's landscaping; and the need to clearly identify entrances to the site for emergency services, as well as to passing motorists and visitors. Other unique aspects include the fact that there is a lack of visibility of the church building as you travel south along MD193 (Watkins Park Drive), which narrows as it decreases from a four lane to a two-lane roadway, occurring almost directly at the site's north entrance, coupled with the screening effect caused by the dense stand of mature trees located at the northwest corner of the site, and the requirement that the proposed sign be located outside of the ten-foot-public utility easement that pushes the sign more than 110 feet from the southbound lane, all result in the limited visibility of the proposed north entrance sign. The applicant also sites a change in the grade or elevation of the site's road frontage combined with the change in grade/elevation as it traverses the site's 0.4 miles of frontage, the screening effect caused by the high-point in the road surface that occurs approximately 350 feet north of the south entrance to the site, the extra wide dimensions of the roads right-of-way traversing the site and the requirement that the proposed sign is located outside of the public utility easement (PUE) limits the visibility of the each of the proposed site entrances from the other. Additional circumstances include the fact that the sign regulations for churches promulgated in the Zoning Ordinance were designed for smaller neighborhood sized churches, the subject church's regional scale and dimensions, and the fact that a true hardship would result to the church if only a single sign were allowed.

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

The requested departures will allow for the clear identification of an existing church property from Watkins Park Drive. Although the number of the signs proposed exceed the standards allowed in the Zoning Ordinance, they actually compliment the streetscape setting. The approval of these identification and message board signs will visually complete the setting of this worship center. The signs are designed to tastefully complement the architecture of the building and the supporting landscaping.

I. **Referral Comments:**

Permit Review Section—The area of the departure has been calculated incorrectly. The entire sign area excluding the base of the sign must be calculated. The area noted does not include the total area of the sign and dimensions. The maximum permitted sign area is 48 square feet. All other departure requests are correct. This issue is addressed via the 14 foot departure request for the size of the sign.

Special Projects Section—The request for departures from sign design standards for two freestanding signs should not negatively impact the school.

Transportation Planning Section—The proposed sign is outside of the right-of-way. Therefore, there are no comments offered.

Urban Design Section—Staff notes that while digital copy signs are not specifically prohibited by Section 27-593(a)(3) of the Zoning Ordinance, which prohibits the use of pennants, pinwheels, and similar circus-or carnival-type attractors visible from a street or residential property (i.e. things that move). We would suggest that the movement integral to a digital sign is akin to the prohibited pennants, pinwheels, and similar circus-or-carnival-type attractors because they can potentially distract and disturb motorists on the adjacent roadways, creating an unsafe situation and could negatively impact adjacent residential land use.

The signs requested are slightly larger (by 14 square feet) than that allowed by the Zoning Ordinance. The signs are proposed to be eight feet tall, freestanding signs composed of two elements; the upper element being a 19-square-foot sign identifying the name of the church; and the lower element being a 28.5-square-foot digital public information sign. Conditions of approval were added to address the flashing illumination of the digital signs. The proposed signs will not distract from the residential quality of the neighborhood. The proposed signs are proportionally sized and designed to tastefully blend in with the architecture and scale of the church and its attractively landscaped entrances and road frontage. Another important element of the signs is that they are placed at the north and south entrances such that each sign clearly identifies the property from each direction and reduces possible confusion for police, fire, other emergency services, and motorists traveling on Watkins Park Drive.

CONCLUSION:

The recommended signs represent a balance between the need to provide adequate identification and the responsibility 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 Prince George's County. Therefore, staff recommends that the Planning Board APPROVE DSDS-657 for the installation of two signs measuring approximately 62 square feet each, which is an increase of 14 square feet per sign, subject to the following condition:

1. The proposed signs shall not use any flashing illumination as a part of the digital messaging of the sign.