



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

Departure Sign Design Standards

DSDS-672

Application	General Data	
Project Name: Calverton Shopping Center Location: Northeast corner of the intersection of Beltsville Drive and Powder Mill Road Applicant/Address: 11785 Beltsville Drive, Suite 1600 Beltsville, Maryland 20705 Property Owner: 11785 Beltsville Drive, Suite 1600 Beltsville, Maryland 20705	Planning Board Hearing Date:	11/17/11
	Staff Report Date:	11/02/11
	Date Accepted:	08/11/11
	Planning Board Action Limit:	N/A
	Plan Acreage:	8.445
	Zone:	C-S-C
	Gross Floor Area:	193,550 sq. ft.
	Lots:	N/A
	Parcels:	1
	Planning Area:	61
	Tier:	Developing
	Council District:	01
	Election District:	01
	Municipality:	N/A
200-Scale Base Map:	215NE04	

Purpose of Application	Notice Dates	
Departures for location, height and area for a freestanding sign.	Informational Mailing	06/02/11
	Acceptance Mailing:	08/01/11
	Sign Posting Deadline:	10/18/11

Staff Recommendation		Staff Reviewer: Tom Lockard Phone Number: 301-952-3410 E-mail: Thomas.lockard@ppd.mncppc.org	
APPROVAL	APPROVAL WITH CONDITIONS	DISAPPROVAL	DISCUSSION
	X		

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY PLANNING BOARD

TECHNICAL STAFF REPORT

TO: The Prince George's County Planning Board

VIA: Jimi Jones, Zoning Supervisor

FROM: Tom Lockard, Planner Coordinator, Development Review Division, Zoning Section

SUBJECT: **Departure from Sign Design Standards, DSDS-672
Calverton Shopping Center**

REQUEST: **Departures from Sections 27-614(a)(4), 27-614(b)(1) and 27-614(c)(3)(A) of the
Zoning Ordinance for the location, height and area of a freestanding sign.**

RECOMMENDATION: **Approval With Conditions**

NOTE:

The Planning Board has scheduled this application for a public hearing on the agenda date of November 17, 2011. The Planning Board also encourages all interested persons to request to become a person of record for this application.

Requests to become a person of record should be made in writing and addressed to The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Development Review Division, 14741 Governor Oden Bowie Drive, Upper Marlboro, MD 20772. Please call 301-952-3530 for additional information.

FINDINGS

- A. **Location and Field Inspection:** The property is known as Parcel J of Block EE of the Calverton subdivision and consists of approximately 8.45 acres in the C-S-C Zone. The site is located at the northeast corner of the intersection of Beltsville Drive and Powder Mill Road, with frontage on and access to both roadways. The site is developed with the Calverton Shopping Center, an inline center with 18 tenants and a pad site occupied by a fast-food restaurant. The center was built perpendicular to the two roads, making some of the smaller tenants along Beltsville Drive invisible to the travelers along the more heavily-traveled Powder Mill Road.

A 34.4-foot-high freestanding sign advertising a single tenant (Giant Food) is located at the entrance to the shopping center along Powder Mill Road. It is a large two-faced panel at the top of twin support poles with no cladding material or landscaping at the base. It is typical of the type of sign popular in the early 1970s, but now has an extremely anachronistic appearance. Because of the widening of the right-of-way through the years, the existing freestanding sign no longer meets the 10-foot setback from Powder Mill Road, being only 1.9 feet from the right-of-way. The existing sign is 236 square feet in area, 36 feet greater than the 200-square-foot maximum permitted by code. The sign is 34.4 feet in height, which exceeds the 25-foot maximum height for a freestanding sign by 9.4 feet.

- B. **Development Data Summary:**

	EXISTING	PROPOSED
Zone(s)	C-S-C	C-S-C
Use(s)	Shopping Center Fast-food Restaurant	Shopping Center Fast-food Restaurant
Acreage	8.45	8.45
Parcel	1	1
Square Footage/GFA	193,550	193,550

- C. **History:** The subject property was developed with the Calverton Shopping Center in 1970. Aerial photos from that year show what appears to be the subject sign in the existing location. Staff could not find a sign waiver (the precursor to a DSDS) for the increase in sign area and height, however, the sign does have the requisite four-digit sign identification tag issued by the County.

The site was retained in the C-S-C Zone by the 2010 *Approved Subregion 1 Master Plan and Sectional Map Amendment*.

- D. **Master Plan Recommendation:** The 2010 *Approved Subregion 1 Master Plan and Sectional Map Amendment* classifies the property in the Commercial Shopping Center (C-S-C) Zone. The plan recommends a retail commercial use for the site.

In their referral dated September 12, 2011, the Community Planning Division makes the following observations:

“The Community Planning Division recognizes that the Subregion 1 Master Plan does not include specific design guidelines for signage along Powder Mill Road. However, the master plan emphasizes the importance of high-quality design to enhance the appearance of existing shopping centers; advocates for an improved neighborhood and pedestrian environment along Powder Mill Road at the I-95 interchange; and notes that design guidelines are needed for the Calverton area’s commercial strips. The replacement of the existing sign presents an opportunity to improve the visual appeal and competitiveness of the Calverton Shopping Center and can serve as an example for future upgrades to other Subregion 1 commercial centers. To this effect, the new design, landscaping, size, and materials of the sign should showcase the shopping center and comply with Part 12, Sec. 27-614.”

- E. **Request:** The applicant has requested departures from Sections 27-614(a)(4), 27-614(b)(1) and 27-614(c)(3)(A) of the Zoning Ordinance for the location, height and area of a freestanding sign in order to replace the existing single-tenant sign with a larger multi-tenant sign in an attempt to bring greater visibility to the tenants along Beltsville Drive. Giant Food, the owner of the existing sign, would replace their single panel with a smaller panel depicting their new corporate logo and would allow additional tenants to co-locate on their sign structure on a ten-panel directory sign. It should be noted that the applicant has recently erected an 18-panel directory sign (approximately 250 feet from the existing freestanding sign) on the side of the building facing Powder Mill Road. Although its dimensions are not known, it appears to be in excess of 200 square feet in area. The resulting departures are summarized in the following table:

Design Standard	Permitted	Existing	Proposed	Departure
Sign Area	200 square feet	236 square feet	357 square feet	157 square feet
Height	25 feet	34.4 feet	30 feet	5 feet
Setback	10 feet	1.1 feet	1.1 feet	8.9 feet

F. **Surrounding Uses:**

Northwest—Across Beltsville Drive are office buildings in the C-O Zone

Northeast—A gas station and hotel in the C-S-C Zone

Southeast—Across Powder Mill Road is a hotel and office buildings in the C-S-C and C-O Zones

Southwest—Undeveloped land and the Riderwood Village retirement community in the O-S Zone

G. **Sign Requirements:**

- 1. **Section 27-614(a)(1)** of the Zoning Ordinance requires that in all Commercial and Industrial Zones (except the I-3 and U-L-I Zones), freestanding signs shall only be located on property where the main building associated with the sign is located at least forty (40) feet behind the front street line. This shall not apply to integrated shopping centers, other commercial centers with three (3) or more businesses served by common and immediate off-street parking and loading facilities, industrial centers, or office building complexes.

Comment: The subject property is an integrated shopping center, thus this section does not apply.

2. **Section 27-614(a)(4)** of the Zoning Ordinance requires freestanding signs in all Commercial and Industrial Zones (except the I-3 Zone), to be located at least (10) feet behind the street line.

Comment: The existing sign support structures, which the applicant wishes to retain for their proposed sign, are located 1.1 feet from the right-of-way.

3. **Section 27-614(b)(1)** of the Zoning Ordinance states that the maximum height for a freestanding sign in the C-M and I-1 Zones is 25 feet when measured from the finished grade at the base of the sign to the top of the sign.

Comment: The existing freestanding sign is 34.4 feet in height, and is therefore not in compliance with Section 27-614(b)(1) of the Zoning Ordinance. The applicant is proposing to shorten the sign to 30 feet in height.

4. **Section 27-614(c)(3)(B)** of the Zoning Ordinance states that in all Commercial Zones (except the C-O Zone) and all Industrial Zones (except the I-3 Zone), the area of the sign shall be not more than one (1) square foot for each four (4) lineal feet of street frontage, to a maximum of two hundred (200) square feet for each sign, if the business is not located in an integrated shopping center, other commercial center with three (3) or more businesses served by common and immediate off-street parking and loading facilities, industrial center, or office building complex. The street frontage shall be measured on the property occupied by the use associated with the sign.

Comment: Based on the property's linear feet of street frontage, the maximum sign area allowed for the proposed freestanding sign is 200 square feet. The applicant proposes a sign area that consists of approximately 357 square feet. Therefore, the proposed freestanding sign is not in compliance with Section 27-614(c)(3)(B) of the Zoning Ordinance.

5. **Section 27-589(a)** 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 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.**

Comment: The applicant is proposing to update the existing freestanding sign on the property in order to reflect the change in the corporate logo for Giant Food. While the Giant logo panel will be decreasing in size from 236 square feet to 192 square feet, the addition of the tenant directory sign would add an additional 165 square feet of sign area. Adding the directory panels would push the sign area beyond the 200-square-foot maximum, but would serve the purpose for adequate identification and advertisement for the uses on Beltsville Drive which are otherwise invisible to drivers on Powder Mill Road. The height of the existing freestanding sign would be decreased from 34.4 to 30 feet. Reducing the height to the 25-foot maximum would be preferable; however, it would be difficult to accommodate any meaningful number or size of directory panels. The proposed sign would be retained in the same location as its predecessor, which has not seemed to interfere with adequate sight lines or otherwise pose a hazard to motorists in the 40 years it has been there, however, does give the sign a somewhat imposing look. The base of the sign will be covered and surrounded by landscaping, a vast improvement over the dated and unsightly existing sign.

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.**

Comment: In general, the purposes of the Sign Ordinance are to regulate unsightly and hazardous signs, to provide adequate identification and advertisement, to promote the general welfare of the residents of the county, and to foster the appropriate use of land, buildings and structures. Although the required 10-foot setback is not being met, the applicant's goal is to use the existing sign structures to allow for a new sign without impinging on the required parking that would be lost if the sign were relocated. While this arrangement could be found acceptable, it remains uncertain that the existing supports will be found suitable from an engineering standpoint. Therefore, we would recommend that, prior to issuance of a sign permit, the applicant provide detailed drawings showing the type of support proposed for the sign. If the existing supports are not to be utilized, the sign should be located to meet the ten-foot setback from Powder Mill Road to reduce the somewhat imposing look that would be created. The height and area, while still exceeding the 25-foot and 200-square-foot maximums, respectively, allows for the placement of panels of a size and quantity to ensure that less visible tenants are given adequate identification. As discussed further in the next finding, however, this conclusion is conditional.

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

Comment: As proposed, we can only find the departure is the minimum necessary, given the specific circumstances of the request, with a proviso. The large directory sign on the side of the building performs the function for which the applicant seeks these departures. In other words, either the building-mounted sign or the proposed freestanding sign should provide adequate identification and advertisement for tenants. If the applicant wishes to have directory panels on the freestanding sign, staff will support the proposal only if the directory sign on the building is

removed. To allow two such directory signs in such close proximity would be a proliferation of superfluous signage which detracts from the attractiveness of the shopping center. In addition, if the existing support structures are not to be utilized, there is no reason the sign should not be located to meet the ten-foot setback.

(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.

Comment: The freestanding sign has existed on this property for four decades, and is a relic from a by-gone era. It is still functional, but unsightly. The building-mounted directory sign is not as effective as it could be if it were combined with the freestanding sign. There is more to be gained through the approval of this departure, subject to conditions, than there is to allowing the existing signs to remain.

The fact that so many tenants in this center are not visible from Powder Mill Road necessitates a directory sign if they are to be viable. However, in order to have a directory that is visible and adequately identifies the uses, the sign area and height must be larger than permitted by the County code. 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.

Comment: A freestanding sign is necessary to further provide adequate identification and advertisement for the use. There are existing commercial uses along Powder Mill Road and Beltsville Drive, many of which have freestanding signs. A freestanding sign has existing on the site for many years, and the changes proposed by the applicant will improve the visual quality of the sign through the introduction of a base and landscaping.

The proposed sign will be compatible with other existing freestanding signs within the general area, and the overall design of the sign will be compatible with the commercial use of the property. The sign will not attract undue attention, but will provide for adequate identification and advertisement, and will be compatible with the overall streetscape. The site is surrounded by public rights-of-way along the three sides, and abuts other commercial uses along the fourth. There are no nearby residential subdivisions that would be visually impacted by the freestanding sign. For the reasons stated above, the departure will not impair the visual, functional, or environmental quality or integrity of the site or of the surrounding neighborhood.

I. Referral Comments:

Transportation Planning Section—In a memorandum dated August 11, 2011, the Transportation Planning Section offered no comments other than to note the sign is not proposed within any right-of-way.

The Special Projects Section—In a memorandum dated August 15, 2011, the Special Projects Section stated that they have reviewed the subject application and they have no comments concerning the departure request.

Urban Design Section—In a memorandum dated September 12, 2011, the Urban Design Section provided the following comments concerning the departure request.

The property is subject to the following sections of the Prince George's County Zoning Ordinance: Part 3, Division 5, Appeals and Variances, Part 6, Commercial Zones, and Part 12, Signs. The proposed Departure from Sign Design Standards (DSDS), which includes only the

new free-standing sign, does not subject the project to the requirements of the 2010 *Prince George's County Landscape Manual*.

URBAN DESIGN REVIEW

1. The submitted plan does not indicate the material or color of the base of the proposed pylon sign. The submitted Statement of Justification indicates that it will be finished in exterior insulation finishing system (EIFS) to represent stucco or other masonry type of material. The Urban Design Section would suggest that an attractive, durable material, such as brick or split face block, should be utilized and so labeled on the plan.
2. The submitted plan indicates proposed plantings around the base of the proposed pylon sign which will enhance the aesthetics of the sign. However, photographic evidence indicates that the sign base area is within the middle of an existing paved area, which does not match what is shown on the plan. The plan should be revised to clarify the existing and proposed pavement edge around the sign. Additionally, if the proposed plantings are going where there is existing pavement, notes should be added to the plan indicating the removal of the full paving section and the enhancement of the soil through the use of fertilizer or soil amendments.
3. Though the proposed free-standing sign is an improvement over the existing sign in terms of height and aesthetics, the Urban Design Section questions why the proposed sign cannot be designed fully in compliance with the Zoning Ordinance requirements. The Urban Design Section suggests that the sign could be redesigned to comply, which would render this application unnecessary.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above analysis, staff recommends APPROVAL of departure from sign design standards application, DSDS-672, Calverton Shopping Center, subject to the following conditions:

1. The material chosen for the base of the proposed free-standing sign should be changed to a durable and attractive material, such as brick or split-face block, and should be so labeled on the plan.
2. The plan should be revised to clarify the existing and proposed pavement edge around the sign. If the proposed plantings are going where there is existing pavement, notes should be added to the plan indicating the removal of the full paving section and the enhancement of the soil through the use of fertilizer or soil amendments.
3. Prior to issuance of a sign permit, the building-mounted directory sign shall be removed.
4. Prior to issuance of a sign permit, the applicant shall submit detailed engineering drawings clearly showing the support structure for the sign. If the existing twin pylons are not used for the new sign, the sign shall be located to meet the ten-foot setback from the streetline for Powder Mill Road.