

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Prince George's County Planning Board has reviewed DSDS-681, Ritchie Station Marketplace, requesting a departure from sign design standards to replace three existing freestanding signs with new signs that exceed height and area requirements 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 September 25, 2014, the Prince George's County Planning Board finds:

- A. Location and Field Inspection:** The subject 89.63-acre property is located in the southwest quadrant of the interchange formed by Ritchie-Marlboro Road and the Capital Beltway (I-95/495) in the Commercial Shopping Center (C-S-C) Zone. Ritchie Station Marketplace contains 124.68 acres including Parcels 9 and 16 and Outlot A. The overall center contains a variety of commercial uses, including automobile dealerships, BJ's Super store, various retail stores, and restaurants. Access to the site is solely from Ritchie-Marlboro Road via Ritchie Station Court.

The site has a brick retaining wall along the Ritchie-Marlboro Road frontage to the ramp to the Beltway. There is no retaining wall along the Beltway road frontage. The property has three existing freestanding signs and four existing wall-mounted identification signs announcing Ritchie Station Marketplace. As shown on the site plan, the existing freestanding signs are: Sign P1, which faces the Capital Beltway; Sign P2, which faces the roundabout intersection of Ritchie Marlboro Road and the ramps to/from the Beltway; and Sign P3, which faces the signalized intersection of Ritchie-Marlboro Road and Ritchie Station Court at the property's main entrance.

- B. Development Data Summary:**

	EXISTING	APPROVED
Zone	C-S-C	C-S-C
Use(s)	Integrated Shopping Center	Integrated Shopping Center
Acreage	89.63	89.63
Square Footage/GFA	1 million	1 million
Parcel	5	5

- C. History:** The 1985 Approved Suitland-District Heights and Vicinity Master Plan and 1986 Adopted Sectional Map Amendment placed the property in the Planned Industrial/ Employment Park (I-3) Zone and retained a small portion in the Rural Residential R-R Zone. Prince George's County Council Bills CB-65-2003 and CB-19-2005 allowed the I-3 and R-R-zoned site to be developed as a commercial shopping center pursuant to the criteria of the C-S-C Zone and Preliminary Plans of Subdivision 4-04184 and 4-05133. Preliminary Plan 4-04184 for the subject property was approved for up to 1,000,000 square feet of retail space,

and approximately 320 square feet of gross leasable area of retail space has been developed thus far. In October 2006, the District Council affirmed the Planning Board's approval of Detailed Site Plan DSP-04080/01 for the 101-acre property. Condition 5 of that approval required that "Signage for the subject project shall be limited to signage approved herewith, as potentially modified by Departure from Design Standards, DSDS-634."

In June 2006, Departure from Sign Design Standards DSDS-634 was approved for a freestanding sign (P1) located on the Capital Beltway (I-95/495) road frontage which allowed for the sign to be a maximum height of 40 feet and 528 square feet in area (PGCB Resolution No. 06-156). In May 2008, the property was rezoned from the R-R, I-1 (Light Industrial), and I-3 Zones to the C-S-C Zone in Zoning Map Amendment A- 9989. There were several revisions to DSP-04080 that have been approved.

- D. **Master Plan Recommendation:** The 2010 Approved Subregion 4 Master Plan and Sectional Map Amendment classified the site for retail uses that are generally permitted in the C-S-C Zone. The master plan does not contain policies and strategies for sign standards and guidelines.
- E. **Request:** The application requests a departure from the height and area requirements of Section 27-614(b) and (c) of the Zoning Ordinance for three proposed freestanding pylon signs located in an integrated shopping center known as Ritchie Station Marketplace. The current application proposes to remove all three existing freestanding signs and replace them with larger signs, which will each require a departure for height and area. All of the signs are to be internally-illuminated. The following chart below specifies the size and needed departures for each proposed sign:

	Allowed*	Existing	Approved	Departure Requested
Sign P1 (Beltway)**				
Height	25 feet	40 feet**	64.38 feet	39.38 feet in height
Area	200 sq. ft.	528 sq. ft.**	1,440 sq. ft.	1,240 square feet
No. of Tenant Panels	8***	12	25 + LED	
Sign P2 (Traffic Circle)				
Height	25 feet	25 feet	35.25 feet	10.25 feet in height
Area	200 sq. ft.	200 sq. ft.	480 sq. ft.	280 square feet
No. of Tenant Panels	N/A***	20	25	
Sign P3 (Main Entrance)				
Height	25 feet	25 feet	35.25 feet	10.25 feet in height
Area	200 sq. ft.	200 sq. ft.	480 sq. ft.	280 square feet
No. of Tenant Panels	N/A***	20	25	

*Per Section 27-614, regulations for freestanding signs.

**As approved with DSDS-634.

***The number of separate tenant panels is not controlled by the Zoning Ordinance, so this information is provided for discussion purposes. However, Condition 2 of the District Council decision for DSDS-634 reads: "On each face of the sign, there shall be no more than one business advertised on each of eight individual sign panels."

F. Surrounding Uses:

- North— The site is bounded by Ritchie-Marlboro Road and a self-storage facility in the I-1 Zone.
- East— Capital Beltway (I-95/495)
- West— Townhouse development in the Townhouse (R-T) Zone.
- South— Industrial uses and vacant land in the Heavy Industrial (I-2) Zone.

G. Zoning Ordinance Sign Requirements:

1. **Section 27-614** provides the following freestanding sign regulation that pertains to the subject application:
 - (a) **Section 27-614(b)(1)** specifies that the maximum height of a freestanding sign in the C-S-C Zone shall be 25 feet as measured from the finished grade at the base of the sign to the top of the sign.
 - (b) **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 four linear feet of street frontage, to a maximum of 200 square feet for each sign, if the building is not located in an integrated shopping center, other commercial center with three 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 center or complex associated with the sign.

Ritchie Station Marketplace is an integrated shopping center. The applicant is requesting various departures from sign design standards. The table in Finding E above identifies the height and area of each proposed sign and the amount of departure required for each sign.

2. **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 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 applicant's statement of justification dated August 22, 2014 states that the purpose of the requested departures is "to specifically promote the public health, safety and welfare of residents, workers and motorists by increasing and enhancing sign visibility and readability that is in a scale consistent with the intended advertising purposes and the size of the subject property and its location adjacent to I-495/I-95 and Ritchie-Marlboro Road. The new signs are sufficiently sized and located so motorists can view tenant names and advertising from a distance adequate enough to allow safe lane merges to the and the exit ramps." The applicant references the submitted technical materials that state that 31 inches is the optimal letter height for viewing at Capital Beltway (I-95/495) speeds, but that image recognition allows for this size to be reduced to 18 inches and still be effective.

It should be noted that the smallest panel size proposed on the P1 Beltway sign is approximately 33 inches high, which exceeds the minimum necessary for effective visibility per the applicant's submitted reference material, "Sign Legibility: The Algebra of Traffic Safety." The Planning Board believes that increasing the size of the signs would be the most effective way to achieve increased signage visibility and readability. In doing so, the Planning Board believes that drivers on the Beltway will have more time to maneuver in traffic to reach the site.

3. **Section 27-239.01(b)(7)** 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 purpose of part 12 is to regulate unsightly and detrimental signs which discourage quality development. Increasing the height of existing signs and expanding the area to allow additional tenant signage as proposed does not discourage quality development and would not be detrimental or unsightly, and instead additional quality development would be encouraged.

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

The requested departure meets the minimum necessary requirement, the specific circumstances of the request include a very large footprint of 1,000,000 square feet of retail and the property is located adjacent to the Capital Beltway. These circumstances are unique in the County and when comparative signs are considered as submitted by the applicant, the proposal appears to be the minimum necessary to accommodate such a large retail center.

- (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 size of the retail center and its proximity to the Capital Beltway are unique and warrant the additional proposed signage.

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

The site is quite large and there are no comparably-sized signs nearby. Therefore the proliferation of signage is not a problem in the immediate vicinity. All signs are existing, so an increase in height and area to accommodate additional tenants will not impair the visual quality or integrity of the site. The Planning Board found that there was no evidence presented to show that digital signs present a safety hazard compared with static signs. The Planning Board further finds that increasing the sign height and area will enhance the safety of drivers by increasing visibility from the Beltway.

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.

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.

* * * * *

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 Geraldo, seconded by Commissioner Shoaff, with Commissioners Geraldo, Shoaff and Hewlett voting in favor of the motion, and with Commissioners Bailey and Washington absent at its regular meeting held on Thursday, September 25, 2014, in Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

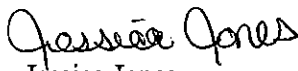
Adopted by the Prince George's County Planning Board this 9th day of October 2014.

Patricia Colihan Barney
Executive Director

APPROVED AS TO LEGAL SUFFICIENCY

M-NCPPC Legal Department

Date 10/8/14

By 
Jessica Jones
Planning Board Administrator

PCB:JJ:TA:arj