THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

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PGCPB No. 15-140

File No. DSP-89010-03

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Prince George's County Planning Board is charged with the approval of Detailed Site Plans pursuant to Part 3, Division 9 of the Zoning Ordinance of the Prince George's County Code; and

WHEREAS, in consideration of evidence presented at a public hearing on December 17, 2015, regarding Detailed Site Plan DSP-89010-03 for Doubletree by Hilton (Largo), the Planning Board finds:

1. **Request:** The subject application is a request for approval of a detailed site plan (DSP) for a 75-foot-high freestanding sign of 195 square feet in size to advertise a hotel on Lot 46 of the Inglewood Business Park.

2. **Development Data Summary:**

	Existing	**Approved**
Zone	C-O/D-D-O	C-O/D-D-O
Use	Hotel with Meeting Rooms, Restaurant, Bar and Ballroom	Hotel with Meeting Rooms, Restaurant, Bar, and Ballroom
Gross Tract Area (acres)	8.12	8.12
Net Tract Area (acres)	7.18	7.18
Square Footage/GFA	98,596	98,596
Parking	**Required**	**Provided**
	307	308 186 existing 140 proposed
Loading	2	2 existing

3. **Location:** The subject property is located in Council District 6 and Planning Area 73. More specifically, the project is located in the southeast quadrant of the intersection of Landover Road (MD 202) and the Capital Beltway (I-95/495), approximately 920 feet southwest of the intersection of Landover Road (MD 202) and McCormick Drive.

4. **Surrounding Uses:** The site is bounded by the Capital Beltway (I-95/495) and the Landover Road (MD 202) access ramp to the west; a professional office building in the (Planned Industrial/Employment Park (I-3) Zone to the north; Basil Court to the east; and a hotel in the I-3 Zone to the south. The overall Inglewood Business Community is bounded by MD 202 to the north and east, the Capital Beltway to the west, and Arena Drive to the south.

5. **Previous Approvals**: The subject property was rezoned to the I-3 Zone through the 1978 *Approved Master Plan and Adopted Sectional Map Amendment for Largo-Lottsford, Planning Area 73* (County Council Resolution CR-75-1978). Conceptual Site Plan CSP-80034 was approved by the Prince George's County Planning Board on June 26, 1980 and designated hotel/office uses for the subject property. The property was then the subject of Preliminary Plan of Subdivision 4-86040, which was approved by the Planning Board on May 8, 1986. Record Plat NLP 130@20 was recorded for the subject property on November 18, 1986. Three DSPs were subsequently approved by the Planning Board: DSP-89010 on March 30, 1989, DSP-89010/01 on November 30, 1989, and DSP-89010/02 on April 9, 2009. The site received stormwater management concept plan approval (35546-2007-01) from the Prince George's County Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPW&T) on January 15, 2009. The 2013 *Approved Largo Town Center Sector Plan and Sectional Map Amendment* (Largo Town Center Sector Plan and SMA) rezoned the property from the I-3 Zone to the C-O and the Development District Overlay (D-D-O) Zones.

6. **Design Features:** The application involves an 8.12-acre lot, which is a portion of a larger 228.6-acre development known as the Inglewood Business Community. The site is improved with a 98,596-square-foot hotel, which includes meeting rooms, a restaurant, and a bar. Access is provided from Basil Court, a cul-de-sac that connects to McCormick Drive. The existing parking compound to the north and east of the existing hotel extends to the south and fully encircles the hotel. The proposed 75-foot-high pole-mounted sign is proposed approximately 60 feet from the frontage of the Capital Beltway (I-95/495). The sign is set back such that the base of the sign is not located within a wide Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) easement that runs along the frontage of the property. The area of the sign is 15 feet wide by 13 feet high for a total of 195 square feet, and is an internally-lit box sign, which is three feet wide.

7. **Prince George's County Zoning Ordinance:**

   a. The instant application is subject to the requirements of the C-O and D-D-O Zones. Because the D-D-O Zone specifically addresses signage, the Zoning Ordinance standards do not apply.

   b. **2013 Approved Largo Town Center Sector Plan and Sectional Map Amendment and the Development District Overlay (D-D-O) Zone**—The following development district standards warrant discussion:

      Free-Standing and Monumental Signs

      1. **A maximum of one freestanding or monument sign shall be permitted for each commercial shopping center, office park, or mixed-use development exceeding 100,000 square feet in size.**

      2. **A maximum of one freestanding or monument sign shall be permitted for each residential development exceeding 200 dwelling units.**

Neither of the above limitations on the quantity of signage allowed for the development district is consistent with the subject application. The subject site and use, a hotel, is not addressed by the above; therefore, the applicant has asked for permission to place a second freestanding sign on the property. One freestanding monumental sign exists on the property along the entrance to the development off of Basil Court. This sign was reviewed and approved in association with Sign Permit 6022-2015-SG. The Planning Board found that one freestanding sign should be allowed, in addition to the existing monumental sign at the front of the property, which was erected years ago and was refaced this past year.

3. **Freestanding and monument signs shall not exceed six feet in height, and the maximum area of any single freestanding or monument sign shall not exceed 50 square feet. Freestanding and monument signs shall be constructed of durable, high-quality materials such as, but not limited to, decorative masonry, wrought iron, or weatherized decorative metals.**

   The proposed application is for a sign of 75 feet in height (a deviation of 69 feet) and 195 square feet in size (a deviation of 145 square feet). The material is shown as the following:

Pole—A 42-inch diameter steel support painted white for 27 feet in height. The pole narrows to 36 inches, 30 inches, and finally to 14 inches at the top of the pole.

Sign Face—The face of the sign is an aluminum cabinet painted dark brown with the logo and text welded out and will appear white.

Lighting—Internal illumination with light-emitting diode (LED) lights.

6. **Signs shall be externally lit from the front with a full-spectrum light source. Internal and back lighting are permitted as an exception only for individual letters or numbers, such as for "channel letter" signage (panelized back lighting and box lighting fixtures are prohibited).**

   The applicant is asking for a modification of this standard to allow the box lighting fixture as proposed.

8. The applicant provides the following justification for the amendments:

"The subject property is currently developed with a 109,396 square foot hotel with meeting rooms, a restaurant, bar, and ballroom. The hotel, which just recently underwent a multi-million dollar renovation, operates under the Doubletree by Hilton flag. The hotel was originally constructed circa 1990, and over the last 25 years has operated as a number of different hotels.

"Given the improvements to the hotel and the significant capital investment that has been made by the new owner/applicant, it is absolutely imperative, to ensure the marketability and long-term viability of this 'new' high end hotel, that visibility from the Capital Beltway is provided. That is, currently, and despite its location fronting on the Capital Beltway, the traveling public on either the Beltway or MD 202 likely have no idea that this hotel exists on the subject property. The reason being is that the existing tree line along the Beltway completely screens the hotel. Indeed, the applicant has already removed the previous 30' high freestanding sign, as it could not be seen and was serving no purpose at all. The applicant, to make good on its investment and ensure the future success of this newly renovated hotel, is requesting approval to relocate the previously approved freestanding sign and increase the height of the sign to 75 feet and increase the size of the size to approximately 195 square feet. The applicant strongly believes that with the new location of the sign, as provided on the DSP filed in conjunction with the application, and the increased size and height of the sign that motorists will finally be made aware of the location and, more importantly, the existence of the Doubletree by Hilton. Indeed, the lack of visibility likely contributed to the lack of success other hotel operators have experienced, which also likely contributed to the decline in the appearance (both interior and exterior) of the building. The new owner should be commended for making such a significant capital investment into the new hotel and into the County, and to ensure the future success of this new hotel, the County should seek to further encourage economic development by granting the applicant's request to relocate and extend the height of its freestanding pylon sign.

"IV. Modification of the Development District Standards

"Modification of a development district standard is permitted through the process described in Section 27-548.25(c) of the Zoning Ordinance. That section provides generally that an applicant may request the Planning Board to apply different development standards from the Development District Standards implemented in the Sector Plan. The Planning Board, however, must find that the alternate Development District Standards requested will benefit the development and the Development District and will not substantially impair implementation of the Master Plan, Master Plan Amendment, or Sector Plan.

"The applicant, as indicated above, is respectfully requesting the Planning Board to approve a modification to the signage design criteria provided in Chapter 8 of the sector plan. As it relates to this site and application, the signage design criteria at issue are as follows:

"Free-Standing and Monument Signs

"3. Freestanding and monument signs shall not exceed six feet in height, and the maximum area of any single freestanding or monument sign shall not exceed 50 square feet. Freestanding and monument signs shall be constructed of durable, high-quality materials such as, but not limited to, decorative masonry, wrought iron, or weatherized decorative metals.

"6. Signs shall be externally lit from the front with a full-spectrum light source. Internal and back lighting are permitted as an exception only for individual letters or numbers, such as for 'channel letter' signage (panelized back lighting and box lighting fixtures are prohibited).

"The Applicant is requesting the application of a development standard that provides for the construction of an internally illuminate 75' high freestanding sign that is approximately 195 square feet (12' 8.75" x 15' 10") in size. It is worth noting that the site was previously approved for a 30' high sign pursuant to the requirements of the I-3 Zone, which, at the time, provided that the freestanding sign could be as high as the lowest point of the roof of any building within the employment park. Consequently, practically, the deviation requested is only an increase of 45', although, technically, the request results in a modification of 69'. It is true that the applicant could simply reface the existing 30' high sign, but unfortunately, the existing sign is utterly useless as it is not visible from any vantage point along the Capital Beltway or MD 202. As a result, it has recently been removed because it served no purpose at its current height and location. In order to effectively advertise the hotel, and ensure its future viability, the sign needs to be relocated and the height extended to what is proposed.

"The addition of a 75' high sign is needed due to existing conditions on the property and its location along the exit ramp of the Capital Beltway to MD 202. Traveling north, the hotel is not visible until a motorist passes the necessary exit for MD 202, and there is no opportunity to exit off the Beltway once the exit is passed. Indeed, a motorist would have no idea that the hotel existed until it was too late, and by then, there is no exit available to reverse course, as the next exit off of the Beltway is Exit 19 (US 50). This results in a significant loss of revenue for this newly improved hotel. If the sign, as proposed, is approved, a motorist would be made aware of the existence of the hotel well in advance of the necessary exit ramp to safely exit off of the Beltway.

"In addition, there currently exist other signs of equal or greater height within the vicinity of the proposed sign – two of which are in the *Approved Largo Town Center Sector Plan*. These existing sigs include the University of Maryland, University College sign, the Boulevard at Cap Center sign, and the Woodmore Towne Center sign. The existence of these signs within close proximity to the subject property otherwise supports the applicant's position that in order to effectively advertise a commercial/hospitality use a sign that is visible to the traveling public in this location is absolutely needed. Moreover, with the existence of these signs, there is already precedence that these types of signs do not *substantially* impair the implementation of the Sector Plan. Moreover, farther north along the Capital Beltway, the Planning Board approved the freestanding sign for the Ikea in College Park, and to the south, the Ritchie Station sign currently under construction. While it is true that these signs deserve a certain level of scrutiny when proposed along the Capital Beltway, it is also true that based on existing instances, signs – just like the one proposed in this application – have been approved by the Planning Board and have proven to not only be extremely effective in identifying and advertising businesses, but also do not result in unsightly or hazardous conditions.

"The proposed sign will, for the first time in the existence of this particular hotel, provide adequate and needed identification and advertisement. Moreover, the addition of the proposed sign will not result in the proliferation of signs that will detract from any scenic qualities. Again, the proposed location of the sign is intended to be visible for the traveling public on the Capital Beltway and MD 202, which are not scenic in nature, and it will allow patrons to safely exit off of the Beltway upon seeing the sign. Currently, by the time the hotel is visible to a motorist; they would have already passed the exit or would be required to execute an extremely unsafe maneuver to gain access to the exit ramp. Visibility of the sign to not only provide much needed advertisement to this 'new' hotel, but also ensures the safety of motorists by having a sign that is more than 50 square feet in size is critical to the future success of this newly renovated hotel. The latter limitation is far too onerous for signs that are needed along freeways (like the Capital Beltway) where speeds regularly far exceed the posted speed limits. Simply stated, the requested sign is consistent with other signs relative to the roadway that have been permitted previously in the area.

"Finally, the applicant contends that the Sign Design Criteria does not take into account the unique circumstances of this particular property and this particular use. Indeed, the Sign Design Criteria is primarily intended to regulate signs aimed at creating an internal urban environment for the Town Center. The subject property is on the outermost periphery of the Northwest Quadrant and is well beyond the half-mile radius of the TOD Core. Indeed, the existing free-standing pylon signs along the Beltway, but within this sector plan area, are also located within the Northwest Quadrant and do not (or has not) *substantially* impaired the Sector Plan. Allowing the proposed free-standing pylon sign, as proposed by the applicant, will not impair the visual integrity of the site or the surrounding properties."

The Planning Board agrees with the applicant that the need for advertising of the property is paramount to the success of the hotel and that the existing vegetation and the speed of vehicles travelling along the Capital Beltway limits views fot the building-mounted signage and justifies the height, size, proposed illumination of the sign. However, the Planning Board notes that there appears to be a gas line in the vicinity of the proposed base of the sign, and that the applicant should work with the appropriate utility companies to determine the exact location of the utilities prior to signature approval of the plans. If the base is determined to be detrimental to any of the affected utilities, the relocation of the utilities or the location of the sign may be adjusted accordingly. Therefore, a condition is included in this approval requiring the applicant to investigate this issue with the utility companies and provide evidence of their concurrence. The Planning Board finds that the alternative proposal will benefit the hotel and will not substantially impair the implementation of the sector plan.

9. **Detailed Site Plan DSP-89010 and its revisions:** Detailed Site Plan DSP-89010 was approved by the Planning Board on March 30, 1989 subject to one condition, which is not applicable to the review of the subject DSP. Detailed Site Plan DSP-89010/01 was approved by the Planning Board on November 30, 1989 to allow the temporary elimination of landscaping within the WSSC easement for construction of a water main. This plan was approved subject to one condition, which is not applicable to the review of the subject DSP.

Detailed Site Plan DSP-89010/02 was approved for the addition of a ballroom and parking, but was never built in accordance with the approved plan.

10. **Record Plat NLP 130@20:** Record Plat NLP 130@20 contains four notes, one of which warrants discussion:

    1. **Development of this property is strictly controlled by I-3 Concept SP-80034, approved on June 26, 1980.**

    This plat note no longer applies since the property has been rezoned.

11. **2010 Prince George's County Landscape Manual:** The proposal is not subject to the requirements of the 2010 *Prince George's County Landscape Manual.*

12. **Prince George's County Woodland Conservation and Tree Preservation Ordinance:** The proposal is not subject to the requirements of the Prince George's County Woodland Conservation and Tree Preservation Ordinance and will not affect the previously approved Type II tree conservation plan.

13. **Prince George's County Tree Canopy Coverage Ordinance:** The proposal is not subject to the requirements of the Tree Canopy Coverage Ordinance.

14. **Further Planning Board Findings and Comments from Other Entities:**

    The application is in conformance with the recommendations of the *Plan Prince George's 2035 Approved General Plan* (Plan Prince George's 2035) for intensive mixed uses within regional transit centers. The existing use and building are legal and therefore exempt from the Largo Town Center development district standards and from DSP review.

    The development site is located within the Largo Town Center Development District Overlay (D-D-O) Zone. The Plan Prince George's 2035 vision for regional transit districts is dense development with offices, apartments, retail, and other uses arranged vertically within buildings.

    The Doubletree by Hilton is an existing 98,576-square-foot hotel. It was constructed in 1990 and has since undergone several changes in name/brand. The latest rebranding of the hotel was accompanied by a major interior renovation of guest rooms and common areas. As part of that renovation, the applicant is seeking approval to replace the existing 30-foot-tall freestanding monumental sign with a 75-foot-tall freestanding sign. The applicant justifies this request because the hotel and the current sign are completely screened from the Capital Beltway (I-95/495) and Landover Road (MD 202) by trees and other tall vegetation. Given the recent substantial investment in this hotel property, the applicant wishes to maximize its visibility from both the Capital Beltway and MD 202. Maximum visibility of the renovated hotel property is also important to Prince George's County because of the hotel's long-term and future role as a significant economic asset and generator of hospitality industry-related service jobs.

The Largo Town Center Sector Plan and SMA reclassified the hotel site to the C-O Zone to permit mixed-use office and institutional development. The existing hotel use is a permitted use within the C-O/D-D-O Zone. The applicant is requesting an amendment to the Largo Town Center Sector Plan and SMA to permit the replacement of the existing 30-foot-tall freestanding monumental sign with a new 75-foot-tall freestanding sign. The Largo Town Center D-D-O Zone monumental sign standards did not anticipate the need to replace large-scale highway signs along the Capital Beltway, MD 202, and Central Avenue (MD 214). In addition, General Provision 2 on page 170 of the sector plan sets up an unintended conflict with the plan standards for monumental and freestanding signs on pages 173-174. Provision 2 contains a requirement that "All new signs shall be attached to the façade." It was the intent of the sector plan to permit and regulate freestanding signs. Therefore, retaining the requirement for all signs to be attached to buildings was an inadvertent oversight. In light of the above facts, the Planning Board acknowledges and concurs with the applicant's justification for seeking alternative development standards for the proposed new sign.

The Planning Board agrees that the site is such that it is isolated from the main roads and visibility is restricted. The Planning Board reviewed the visual analysis provided by staff and found that the site distance is impaired by vegetation as viewed from the Capital Beltway to the existing building-mounted signage, so that the traffic moving northbound must be in the exit lanes in order to exit the roadway prior to the signage becoming visible. If the exit is missed, the vehicle must depart from the main roadway and returning to the destination is indirect and convoluted. The Planning Board also found that the visual analysis provided evidence that the existing building-mounted signage is totally restricted to traffic traveling south on the Capital Beltway. Therefore, the Planning Board found that the height, lighting, and size of the sign is appropriate considering the lack of visibility of the existing signage.

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 Detailed Site Plan DSP-89010-03, subject to the following condition:

1. Prior to signature approval of the plans, the applicant shall submit evidence that none of the existing utilities will be impacted by the base of the sign, as proposed. If a utility does identify a conflict, the plans shall be adjusted accordingly.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appeal of the Planning Board's action must be filed with the District Council of Prince George's County within thirty (30) days following 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 Washington, seconded by Commissioner Bailey, with Commissioners Washington, Bailey, Geraldo and Hewlett voting in favor of the motion, and with Commissioner Shoaff temporarily absent at its regular meeting held on Thursday, December 17, 2015, in Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

Adopted by the Prince George's County Planning Board this 7th day of January 2016.

Patricia Colihan Barney
Executive Director

By Jessica Jones
Planning Board Administrator

PCB:JJ:SL:ydw

APPROVED AS TO LEGAL SUFFICIENCY.

M-NCPPC Legal Department

Date 12/29/15