

R E S O L U T I O N

WHEREAS, the Prince George’s County Planning Board has reviewed DSDS-657 requesting a departure for the size and number of proposed freestanding signs for the First Baptist Church of Glenarden, 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 July 16, 2009, the Prince George's County Planning Board finds:

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 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 the proposed first sign's size of 62 square feet, as this provision permits only one sign of 48 square feet in size. 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 are not 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, which provides enhanced visibility, additional signage is not required.

The purposes of the Zoning Ordinance will not be equally or better served by the applicant's proposal because the proposed additional sign is unnecessary given the size of the property and its unobstructed views from the street, and would if approved encourage a proliferation of unnecessary signage in the area.

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

The requested departure is not 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, as a 48-square-foot sign, which the Zoning Ordinance permits by right without a departure, will be adequate to identify the church by name due to the topography of the site and the unobstructed views from the street.

(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 characteristics of the site include its frontage along Watkins Park Drive, which at 0.4 miles is generally longer than that for other area properties, and allows for a mostly unobstructed view of the church from the roadway. Also, the church itself is of a large scale and has elaborate architecture. These attributes, which distinguish the subject property from surrounding ones, actually make it easier for observers to identify the church. As such, a well-placed sign that conforms with the Zoning Ordinance, including Section 27-617, will be adequate.

(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 would impair the visual, functional and environmental quality of the site and surrounding neighborhood because they would look unduly conspicuous in the generally residential area, and would encourage unnecessary signage on other nearby properties. The proposed second sign, which would have moving digital images, would likely distract motorists and compromise roadway safety. In contrast, a single sign that conforms with the Zoning Ordinance would provide adequate identification, including for emergency-service personnel, and would be consistent with other area properties.

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 disapproved the application for DSDS-657.

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 Vaughns, seconded by Commissioner Cavitt, with Commissioners Vaughns, Cavitt and Parker voting in favor of the motion, and with Commissioners Squire and Clark voting against the motion at its regular meeting held on Thursday, July 16, 2009, in Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

Adopted by the Prince George's County Planning Board this 30th day of July 2009.

Oscar S. Rodriguez
Executive Director

By Frances J. Guertin
Planning Board Administrator

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