

Attachment A - Staff Analysis

STAFF PERSON: Andy Reitelbach
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS: February 7, 2024
PROJECT: SE202300045 Modifications to Parking Lot Grade Requirements at Monticello Visitor Center
PROPERTY OWNER: Thomas Jefferson Foundation
LOCATION: 1050 Monticello Loop (Monticello Visitor Center)
PARCEL ID: 07800-00-00-02200 and 07800-00-00-02300
MAGISTERIAL DISTRICT: Scottsville

Staff Report for Special Exception SE202300045 to permit an increase in the maximum grade of parking lots (§ 18-4.12.15(c)) and an increase in the maximum grade of vehicular access aisles not adjacent to parking spaces (§ 18-4.12.17(a)). This request is associated with the proposed reconfiguration of the visitor center and parking lots at Monticello, which is currently under review as site plan SDP202300049.

SPECIAL EXCEPTION REQUEST:

The applicant has requested special exceptions to § 18-4.12.15(c) and § 18-4.12.17(a) of the Zoning Ordinance. County Code § 18-4.12.15(c) requires the maximum grade of parking spaces to not exceed five percent (5%) in any direction and County Code § 18-4.12.17(a) requires the grade for vehicle access aisles not adjacent to parking spaces to not exceed a grade of ten percent (10%). The applicant requests modifications of these requirements to permit the grade in specific areas of the new parking lots and access aisles to exceed these maximums.

The Monticello Visitor Center and associated parking lots are located on Parcel IDs 78-22 and 78-23, which are both zoned Monticello Historic District (MHD) (see Attachment B – Location Map).

The applicant's narrative, providing a detailed request and justification for these special exceptions, along with relevant exhibits and a concept plan, is included as Attachment C.

PLANNING HISTORY:

SDP202300049 is currently under review for a reconfiguration of the visitor center and parking lots at Monticello, on Parcel IDs 78-22 and 78-23, in preparation for the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 2026. These proposed special exceptions are associated with this site plan.

ZMA2004-00005 first established the Monticello Historic District. Along with that rezoning, alterations to slope requirements were approved to allow the parking areas and the vehicular access aisles to exceed the maximum slope requirements specified in the ordinance. However, that approval applied only to improvements proposed at that time. The slopes in excess of the ordinance proposed with the current proposal are not subject to that approval and require a separate action.

RELEVANT CODE SECTIONS:

The relevant regulations are provided in § 18-4.12.15(c) and § 18-4.12.17(a) of the County Code, which identify the maximum grades permitted in both parking areas and vehicular access

aisles not adjacent to parking spaces, respectively. Section 18-4.12.2(c) permits the design requirements in § 4.12.15 and § 4.12.17 to be modified or waived.

STAFF ANALYSIS:

County Code § 18-33.9(A) states that the factors, standards, criteria, and findings, however denominated, in the applicable sections of the Zoning Ordinance are to be considered. County Code § 18-4.12.2(c), in turn, provides that the subject parking design requirements may be modified or waived in an individual case if the Board of Supervisors finds (i) that the public health, safety or welfare would be equally or better served by the modification or waiver and (ii) that the modification or waiver would not otherwise be contrary to the purpose and intent of the Zoning Ordinance. County Code § 18-4.12.17(a) further provides that the Board may increase the maximum grade of the subject vehicle access aisles upon a finding (i) that no reasonable design alternative would reduce or alleviate the need and (ii) that the increase in grade would be in the best interest of public health, safety, and welfare.

County Code § 18-4.12.2(c)(2) further provides that the Board may modify or waive these design requirements only after consultation with the County Engineer, who must advise whether the proposed waiver or modification would equally or better serve the public health, safety, or welfare.

§ 18-4.12.15(c) and § 18-4.12.17(a)

County Engineering has reviewed the requests to modify these requirements and has expressed no objections to the requests. The County Engineer has advised the Zoning Administrator that the waivers or modifications for the proposed increases in the grade would at least equally serve the public health, safety, or welfare. In addition, the County Engineer has determined that no reasonable design alternative would reduce or alleviate the need for a vehicle access aisle grade exceeding 10 percent.

Because this proposal is to reconfigure the parking lots of the Monticello Visitor Center, the applicant must tie the new areas in with the existing lots, which have already been granted grading modifications. Exceeding the permitted maximum grade stated in the ordinance would not be a detriment to public health, safety, or welfare. Safe and convenient access to parking areas and travel aisles would be maintained, the increase in maximum grade has been limited to certain locations, and grade increases beyond the ordinance have been minimized to no more than a 3%-5% increase. Nowhere does the proposed grade exceed 16%, which is the maximum allowed for a private road. Allowing the grade increases maintains consistency throughout all parking areas and avoids significant grading, while also protecting the Burial Ground for Enslaved People, which is largely surrounded by the parking areas.

In addition, the grading changes have been accompanied by design features that help to promote greater public safety. In Waiver Area C, a by-pass lane with a median has been provided for through-traffic to separate visitor vehicles from the bus parking lot. In Waiver Area D, the location of the steeper grade has been designed for one-way traffic to improve circulation and reduce potential conflict points. Pathways for pedestrians have also been incorporated, especially in the ADA parking lot near Waiver Area D, to separate pedestrians from vehicular traffic, promoting safer access from the parking lots to the visitor center.

At the site planning stage, the County Engineer may require additional safety measures to be provided in certain areas, such as signage indicating steep grades or guardrails along the shoulders of the travelways.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of SE202300045 Modifications to Parking Lot Requirements at Monticello, to permit an increase in the maximum grade of parking spaces and vehicular access aisles, with the following condition:

- 1) The grade of parking spaces and vehicle access aisles must be in accord with the conceptual plans titled "Repositioning of the Visitor Center at Monticello – Parking and Drive Aisle Slopes Waiver Request," dated December 11, 2023, and prepared by Timmons Group.