

Wegmans –Special Exception for Sign Modification Request-Staff Analysis

The Applicant has submitted a request for a special exception to increase the maximum wall signage for the Wegmans Store, which is part of the 5th Street Station Project and is zoned PD-SC. Planned Development Districts in general are intended to promote flexibility through better design principles and promote economical and efficient use of the land. Under Section [8.2\(b\)](#) of the Zoning Ordinance, the Applicant can request a modification of Section 4.15 (the Sign Ordinance).

Under current PD-SC sign regulations, Wegmans is allowed a maximum of 400 square feet for wall signage. The proposed sign package includes 396 square feet for 2 Wegman's signs, a pharmacy sign and Wine and Beer sign. This request is to modify Section [4.15.11](#) of the Zoning Ordinance related to the maximum wall signage to allow for an additional 146 square feet for 2 signs for Pub and Market Café signs located in the corner of the building. The Applicant has provided further information in [Attachment A](#).

Staff's recommendation for approval is based in part on several unique characteristics of the project. The 5th Street Station shopping center is located between Avon Street, 5th Street and Interstate 64. It is served directly by a new connector road, named 5th Street Station Parkway, which will connect Avon and 5th Streets. While Wegman's is partially visible from the Interstate, it has limited to no visibility from either 5th Street or Avon Street. The primary shopping center entrance is located on 5th Street along a City Entrance Corridor within the City of Charlottesville. As such, the permitted freestanding signage at this entrance is limited. Under County sign regulations, a freestanding sign of 64 square feet (including two bonus anchor tenant panels) would be permitted based on this shopping center size. Therefore, the identification of Wegman's in freestanding signage at the shopping center entrance is significantly limited from the primary entrance. A second unique characteristic is this shopping center location along Interstate 64. Wall signage that is visible from the I64 has been approved by the Architectural Review Board. Because Wegmans has a regional customer base (with customers traveling up to 90 miles per Wegmans information), the building location and signage visibility was important to their decision to locate here. A third characteristic relates to the size and composition of the Wegmans store. At 120,000 square feet, the Wegmans store is larger than most retail stores. The Wegmans Store also includes the Pub and Market Café. Although the Pub has its own separate entrance and parking area, it is not considered a separate establishment under County Ordinance definitions and it must share the same sign allowance. If it were an independent restaurant such as a Starbucks or McDonalds, it would qualify for separate signage. Although, the County does not consider this a separate establishment, the significant size of the entire building was recognized by staff to be a unique characteristic.

Review Criteria

Any modification to the maximum wall signage area must meet the findings listed in 8.2 of the Planned Development Ordinance as well as meet the purpose and intent of the Sign Ordinance under Section 4.15. These are the current regulations for the review of a special exception relating to signage. Staff may recommend the ordinance be amended to provide more relevant and specific criteria for certain special exceptions, such as for signage.

Section 8.2(b)(3) of the Zoning Ordinance

Modifications for Planned Developments may be granted only if it is found:

- (i) to be consistent with the intent and purposes of the planned development district under the particular circumstances, and satisfies all other applicable requirements of section 8;***

In Section 8 of the Zoning Ordinance, the intent of Planned Development Districts is to provide for variety and flexibility in design necessary to achieve the goals and objectives set forth in the comprehensive plan. The various goals are intended to promote: economical and efficient land use through unified development; improved levels of amenities; appropriate and harmonious physical development; creative design; and a better environment than generally realized through conventional district regulations. Given the unique characteristics of this site, the proposed increase in signage is not expected to negatively affect the purpose of planned developments.

(ii) to be consistent with planned development design principles;

The purpose of planned developments is to promote variety and flexibility in design allowing for a unified site design. The 5th Street Station Application Plan groups the retail establishments in one area of the 80 acre site. In addition, the site is required, through proffers, to meet a higher architectural standard and level of coordination than many existing retail developments. The proposed increase in sign square footage can be considered consistent with the design principles due to the size of the building relative to the requested increase. [See Attachment B.](#)

(iii) that the waiver or modification would not adversely affect the public health safety and welfare; and

The signage is appropriately scaled and well integrated with the architecture of the building. The signage actually works with the architecture to successfully break up the perceived scale of the building while providing necessary wayfinding for key elements of the store. The waiver request serves to assist the public by providing the wayfinding that is necessary for both the Wegmans Food Market store and the Pub restaurant. The increase in square footage will not adversely affect health safety or welfare.

(iv) in the case of a requested modification, that the public purposes of the original regulation would be satisfied to at least an equivalent degree by the modification.

The purpose and intent of the Sign Ordinance is described in Section 4.15.1 of the Zoning Ordinance:

Section 4 of the Zoning Ordinance

The purpose and intent of the Sign Ordinance is to protect the unregulated erection and display of sign that may be detrimental to public health safety and welfare by:

1 & 2: Preserving free speech, while promoting general health, safety and welfare, including the creation of an attractive and harmonious environment

The additional signage is in proportion to the scale and size of the building and does not detract from the harmonious environment. In addition, due to the size of the shopping center and topography of the site, the proposed signage may serve as further wayfinding for customers.

3: Protect the public investment in the creation, maintenance, safety and appearance of its streets, highways, and other areas open to the public

Granting the special exception will not detract from the County's investments in its streets, highways, and other public areas because it is in proportion to and in scale with the building. There are no identified adverse impacts on County's investments by granting the proposed signage.

4: Improve vehicular and pedestrian safety by avoiding saturation and confusion in the field of vision and by directing and controlling vehicular traffic and pedestrians

The proposed additional signage does not lead to saturation and confusion in the field of vision given the size of the building. The proposed additional signage will serve to direct and control vehicular and pedestrian traffic and will serve as wayfinding.

5: Protect and enhance the county's attractiveness to tourists and other visitors as sources of economic development

Signage will help tourists and other first-time visitors who are not familiar with the center's location, especially since the center itself is not visible from either Avon Street or 5th Street. Wegmans store is the anchor of this center and is a source of economic development.

6: Protect property values

The proposed additional signage will potentially protect the property value of Wegmans by enabling the store to have an appropriately proportional amount of signage given the unique nature of the center, the size of the building, and the variety of uses within the building. The Applicant states that the shopping center is predicted to increase property values because of the amenities it will provide to the area. The proposed additional signage will not have any identifiable adverse impact on adjacent property values.

Summary

Staff can support the increase in maximum square sign square footage at this location given the unique nature of this particular site and size of the building. Staff finds that it does not adversely impact any of the findings as outlined in the planned development or intent of signs as outlined in the Zoning Ordinance.