

STAFF PERSON:
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

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Special Exception to Modify Freestanding Sign Regulation for Old Trail

Proposal

The applicant requests a special exception to modify the sign regulations of County Code § 18-4.15.10 to increase the maximum sign area and sign height for two freestanding signs proposed at the entrance to Old Trail at Route 250. The proposal is as indicated below and in the Applicant's request provided as Attachment B.

Sign Type	Number of Signs Allowed	Sign Area (Maximum)	Sign Height (Maximum)	Sign Setback (Minimum)
Freestanding	1 per street frontage, or 2 per entrance, per lot with 100 or more feet of continuous street frontage plus 1 per lot if the lot is greater than 4 acres and has more than 1 approved entrance on its frontage	32 square feet, aggregated, plus bonus tenant panels as provided in section 4.15.16(b); if more than 1 sign at an entrance, no single sign shall exceed 16 square feet <u>64 square feet per sign</u>	12 feet <u>15 feet</u>	5 feet
Subdivision	2 per entrance per subdivision	24 square feet per entrance; if more than 1 sign, no single sign shall exceed 12 square feet	6 feet	5 feet

The Neighborhood Model Development (NMD) sign regulations allow freestanding signs for commercial uses and subdivision signs for the residential component of the NMD. Old Trail proposes a vertical sign concept that uses monument theme panels that exceed the maximum sign area allowed under the NMD sign regulations. Current sign regulations require that the theme panels be counted towards maximum sign area (currently 32 square feet (sf)). The applicant's proposal limits the area of the sign devoted to text to 32 square feet, and allows an increase in square footage to accommodate two theme panels of 16 square feet each, on each end of the signs. The total sign structure of each sign would not exceed 77 square feet.

If this special exception is approved, the applicant will not use either the bonus tenant panels or the subdivision signs (at Rt 250) allowed by ordinance.

Old Trail also proposes an increase in maximum sign height from 12 feet to 15 feet for the proposed freestanding signs. The maximum sign height for freestanding signs varies among zoning districts. RA and R1, R2, and R4 zoning districts allow a maximum height of 10 feet. R10, R15, PRD, DCD, NMD, and Commercial zoning districts allow a maximum sign height of 12 feet for a freestanding sign. Planned Development Shopping Center, Planned Development Mixed Commercial and the Industrial zoning districts allow a maximum sign height of 16 feet. The applicant believes the sign ordinance does not recognize the commercial characteristics of NMD developments and that they have sign needs similar to the PDMC and PDSC zoning districts. They have also proposed a unique vertical sign concept which relies upon the proposed additional 3 foot sign height.

Review Criteria

Under County Code § [18-8.2\(b\)](#), the Applicant can request a modification of Section 4.15 (the Sign Ordinance). Any modification must meet the findings listed in County Code § 18-8.2 of the

Planned Development Ordinance as well as meet the purpose and intent of the Sign Ordinance under Section 4.15.

County Code § 18-8.2(b)(3)

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. Staff's recommendation for approval is based in part on the particular circumstances of this project:

- Commercial and residential development components with the commercial core located central to the planned development, more than half a mile off Route 250.
- Tree backdrop and preservation area along Route 250 prevents business wall signage, etc. from being visible from 250.
- The development is served directly by Old Trail Drive which connects Route 250 and Jarman's Gap Road.
- The signage plan includes unique design monument theme panels using vertical design to which the ARB has no objection.

(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 proposed monument theme panels are part of a sign design concept unique to Old Trail. In addition, through proffers and a code of development, the site is required to meet a higher architectural standard and level of coordination than other zoning districts.

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

The signage is appropriately scaled and the vertical design is well integrated into the wooded buffer along Route 250. The proposed signage serves to assist the public by providing the wayfinding in an appropriate and effective manner. The increase in square footage and height 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.

Staff believes that this is a creative and unique alternative to the NMD sign regulations. The regulation is met to an equal degree. The proposed signage results in only two free standing signs, where four would be permitted by ordinance, a reduction in two signs. (Refer to Attachment B)

The purpose and intent of the Sign Ordinance is described in County Code § 18-4.15.1:

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 increase in size and height for the two free standing signs does not detract from the harmonious environment.

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. 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. This proposal will result in two freestanding signs at the entrance to Old Trail on Route 250 rather than up to the four freestanding signs the ordinance allows. The proposed additional sign area will serve to direct and control vehicular and pedestrian traffic and will serve as appropriate and effective 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 location of businesses within Old Trail, especially since the center is only partially visible from Route 250. The signs are proposed on an Entrance Corridor (EC) and are subject to ARB review. The ARB reviewed the signs at their September 19, 2016 meeting and did not object to applicant's proposal. The ARB will review final sign design to make sure the colors, materials, and other design elements are consistent with the character of the Entrance Corridor. The ARB has specifically noted they would prefer a more rural design than urban.

6: *Protect property values*

The proposed additional signage will not have any identifiable adverse impact on adjacent property values.

Summary

Staff supports the increase in sign area and height at this location given the nature of the site, unique vertical design of the signs, and because this would eliminate two freestanding signs that would be otherwise permitted. Staff finds that the proposal does not adversely impact any of the review criteria in the planned development regulations or the purpose and intent of the sign regulations as stated in the Zoning Ordinance.

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Board adopt the attached Resolution (Attachment F) to approve the special exception to modify the freestanding sign regulations of County Code § 18-4.15.10 to increase freestanding sign area and increase sign height with the following conditions:

1. No more than two signs shall be located at the intersection of Old Trail Drive and Route 250.
2. Each sign may be three-sided, composed of two sign copy panels and one panel containing no sign copy.
3. Sign copy panels shall be no more than 32 square feet each and the total sign structure, including base and monument theme panels, shall not exceed 82.5 square feet for each sign.
4. Sign height shall not exceed 15 feet.