
Zoning Committee of the Planning Commission (ZOCO)

Meeting Summary

February 28, 2019

Planning Commissioners in attendance:

Daniel Weir (Chair, ZOCO)

Nancy Iacomini

Kathleen McSweeney

James Lantelme

Jane Siegel

Staff in attendance:

Nick Rogers, Principal Planner, CPHD

Tim Murphy, Associate Planner, CPHD

Jennifer Smith, Comprehensive Planning Team Supervisor, CPHD

Cliff Hogan, Associate Planner, CPHD

Parking Modifications in R-C District.

Tim Murphy presented staff's work on a study to align the R-C: Multiple-family Dwelling and Commercial District standards with the off-street residential parking guidelines for Metro corridors that were approved by the County Board in 2017. Mr. Murphy discussed the County Manager's direction to staff to examine a zoning ordinance amendment that would enable the County Board to consider the application of the new guidelines to site plan development in R-C districts.

Mr. Murphy presented a brief historical overview of the R-C district's addition to the Zoning Ordinance in 1979, which was closely linked with the development of the Ballston Sector Plan. The presentation displayed maps showing where R-C zoned properties were located, and their correlation to locations on the General Land Use Plan designated as High-Medium Residential Mixed Use. Mr. Murphy discussed staff's recommendation to remove the language in §7.3.4.E.1 which prohibited the County Board from approving parking reductions of less than one parking space per dwelling unit, which was recommended as part of the implementation process for the off-street residential parking guidelines in 2017.

Questions and Comments:

- Why was the restriction on parking reductions below one space per dwelling unit originally adopted?
 - Mr. Murphy surmised, after researching this question as part of the study, that this provision was carried over from similar language found, at the time, in the RA4.8 district standards. He noted that the provision was removed from RA4.8 in 1982 through a zoning text amendment, and that documentation for the inclusion and removal of the provision was not included in staff reports that accompanied these amendments.
- Which other mixed-use districts were adopted in and around the time of the R-C district's adoption?
 - Ms. Smith indicated that C-O-A and C-O-1.5 were each adopted in and around this time.

- Was the study presented to the Transportation Commission?
 - Mr. Murphy indicated it had not, but that Stephen Crim, Transportation Program Manager with the Department of Environmental Services, had circulated the study's recommendations to the stakeholders involved in the development of the off-street residential parking guidelines, including members of the Residential Parking Working Group.
- What was the impetus of the study?
 - Mr. Murphy mentioned the recommendation resulting from the development of the off-street residential parking guidelines, supplemented by staff's knowledge of interest in Ballston-area development projects which would seek parking reductions in accordance with the guidelines.

Maximum Sign Height for Large Media Screens.

Nick Rogers presented staff's work on a study to allow increased sign height for large media screens at urban regional shopping centers. Mr. Rogers discussed this study coming staff's attention in September 2018, when the County Board deferred consideration of a site plan amendment for a 49-foot tall large media screen at Ballston Quarter. He presented an overview of the zoning regulations applicable to large media screens, as well as a similar overview of the special zoning provisions for signs at urban regional shopping centers.

Mr. Rogers noted that large media screens were an appropriate sign type that could contribute to the placemaking and economic vitality envisioned for urban regional shopping centers in the 2015 Arlington County Retail Plan. He said that such signs could be used to better identify third story tenants in a manner that would remain sensitive to nearby residences. Mr. Rogers discussed staff's recommendation for allowing large media screens to be installed at up to 55 feet in height, so long as minimum requirements listed in the Zoning Ordinance were met for the arrangement of windows and doors along the façade of the urban regional shopping center which would have the large media screen.

Questions and Comments:

- Was the impetus for the amendment was the methodology for how sign height is calculated in the Zoning Ordinance?
 - Mr. Rogers reviewed the sign height methodology, and confirmed that staff considered alternatives to this methodology but decided against amending this section of the Zoning Ordinance given the specificity of the Board's direction to staff and the uniqueness of the sign height factors for a specific sign type at a specific land use.
- The Commission discussed other locations with similar signs or digital art in Rosslyn.
- How is the intensity of light emitted from signs regulated?

- Section 13.12 of the Zoning Ordinance specifies standards for sign luminance, which generally permit very low light levels in residential districts and increased brightness in commercial and mixed-use districts.
- Commissioners discussed their reservations with what could be perceived as divergent application of the urban regional shopping center standards between Ballston Quarter and Pentagon City Fashion Centre. The recessed plaza at Ballston Quarter was a unique feature to that site, which could be seen as creating two different height standards between the two centers.
- Commissioners further discussed the regulatory intent of these sign provisions and their role in the experience of pedestrians walking by or near the urban regional shopping center, versus visitors to Ballston Quarter's sunken plaza.
- Commissioners discussed their comfort level with giving Pentagon City Fashion Centre the ability to have a 55-foot tall large media screen?
 - Mr. Rogers noted that the increased sign height could only be implemented if Pentagon City Fashion Centre opted into the special sign provisions in §13.8, which would likely require significant changes to the center's facades to meet the minimum fenestration requirements for permitting signs at the 55-foot height. He stated that the 55 foot height was already in the Zoning Ordinance and intended for these types of centers. Mr. Rogers believed that Pentagon City Fashion Centre had not opted into these special sign provisions.

Public Comments:

Mr. Evan Pritchard attended the meeting, and provided commentary on whether he believed certain features in Rosslyn would be considered signs per the definition in the Zoning Ordinance, or if they would be categorized as digital art or other types of architectural features not subject to the sign standards.