County of Loudoun

Department of Planning

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 20, 2009

TO: Stephen Garner, Project Manager, Land Use Review

FROM: Kelly Williams, Planner, Community Planning

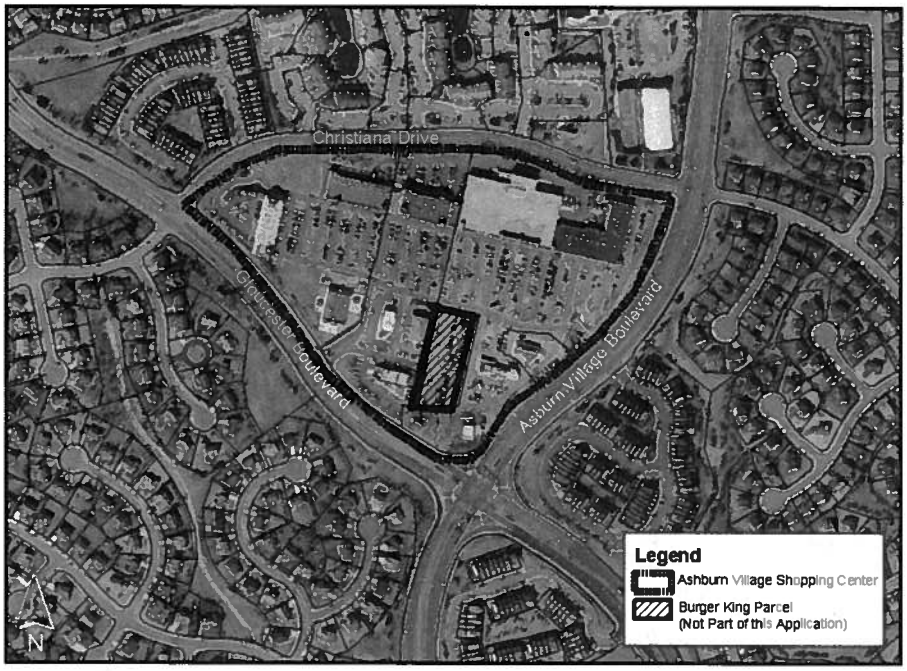
SUBJECT: ZMOD 2008-0010, Ashburn Village Shopping Center Sign Plan

BACKGROUND

Saul Holdings Limited Partnership the applicant, is requesting a Zoning Ordinance Modification (ZMOD) to permit a Comprehensive Sign Plan for the Ashburn Village Shopping Center, pursuant to the provisions of the Revised 1993 Zoning Ordinance. The proposal is to specifically modify Section 5-1204(D) of the Revised 1993 Loudoun Zoning Ordinance in order to "implement a Comprehensive Sign Plan as a means of coordinating needed signage for marketing, development and operation of Ashburn Village Shopping Center". The proposal includes illustrative drawings of a variety of permanent and temporary signs proposed for the development and proposed locations. A Sign Matrix is provided that compares the existing sign ordinance with the proposed regulations of the Comprehensive Sign Plan.

The subject site is located at the northwest corner of Ashburn Village Boulevard and Gloucester Parkway approximately a mile south of Route 7 and is bounded to the north by Christiana Drive. The site is zoned PD-H4 (Planned Development -Residential), is approximately 27 acres and has already been fully developed with the exception of one pad site. According to the application materials, the pad site currently occupied by Burger King, which is located centrally within the development, is not included in the Comprehensive Sign Plan package.

Vicinty Map



COMPLIANCE WITH THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The site is located within the Ashburn Community in the Suburban Policy Area and is governed under the policies outlined in the Revised General Plan. The Plan designates this area for residential uses (*Revised General Plan, Planned Land Use Map*). The retail policies of the Countywide Retail Plan (Retail Plan) also apply.

ANALYSIS

The application states that the purpose of the application is to "implement a Comprehensive Sign Plan as a means of coordinating needed signage for marketing, development and operation of Ashburn Village Shopping Center". Given the proposed mix of uses and the inclusion of the parcels within the larger master planned Ashburn Village Development, the proposed Comprehensive Sign Plan for Ashburn Village Shopping Center was reviewed using both the design guidelines provided in the Revised General Plan for Residential Communities and the Retail Plan. It should be noted that with the exception of one pad site, this is an existing shopping center that is entirely built out. A field visit to the site revealed that existing signage is in place.

Signs

Collectively, the location, quality, and clarity of signs define the general perception of a development, individual business or commercial center and its surrounding community. If signs are well presented and coordinated, the image of the development as well as the individual businesses and tenants is enhanced. The Retail Plan specifies that buildings within a multi-building retail center should exhibit a unity of design through the use of similar elements such as rooflines, materials, window arrangement, location of signage and architectural details (*Retail Plan, Design Guidelines, Building Placement and Design*). The Retail Plan specifies that signs for commercial centers should be developed as an integral part of the overall center design and that a unified graphic design scheme is strongly encouraged (*Retail Plan, Design Guidelines, Signs and Lighting*).

The Comprehensive Sign Plan application for Ashburn Village Shopping Center includes guidelines and illustrative drawings of representative buildings and signage proposed for the development. The proposed sign plan includes permanent ground-mounted entrance signs, informational signs, directional signs, and building-mounted signs and banners. In addition to these permanent signs, temporary signs for the construction, sales and marketing of the community during the developmental phases are also proposed. The temporary signs will be removed when the construction and sales phases of the development are completed.

The proposed ground-mounted monument signs appear uniform in design, size and composition. These signs range in height from 6 to 13 feet and are located at prominent entrances into the development and along major roadways. The proposed monument signs will be constructed of brick with concrete caps and inset community logos and sign blocks similar to the architecture of the buildings. The application proposes signage at two entrances in front of the site (along Ashburn Village Boulevard and Gloucester Parkway) and three signs are proposed at the rear of the building along Christiana Drive. It appears five monument entrance signs may be excessive and are not necessary to identify the location of center, particularly along the rear of the building. The proposed monument signs should be reduced to be more human in scale and in keeping with the pedestrian-friendly character of the proposed development.

The flush-mounted building signs are proposed to be located along the upper walls and/or above business storefronts on the first floor level. The application is proposing that each tenant will have two flush-mounted building signs. Additionally, smaller signs mounted on brackets and suspended above the sidewalk on the first floor level are also proposed to identify businesses. An increase in signage for second floor tenants has also been requested. It is proposed that end units will be allowed to have a total of four signs, (three flush-mounted and one under the canopy sign). The building-mounted

signs and suspended signs feature similar lettering and designs which are intended complement the architecture of the buildings. The application does not provide adequate justification as to the need for each tenant to have three or four signs nor where the signs will be located.

The application also proposes that each pad site tenant would be allowed additional signage with an increase in sign size. Several of the modifications allow for two times the number of signs permitted and up to ten times the amount of square footage allowed for each sign. A site visit by staff revealed that all buildings in the shopping center were adequately visible to both pedestrian and vehicular traffic. The application does not provide adequate justification for the proposed signage.

In general, the proposed signage appears uniform in design and composition; however, the application materials indicate that the "Designs are for illustrative purposes only". Staff recognizes the applicant's attempt to retain some design flexibility by not providing details, but without such commitments and assurances, staff is not able to fully assess the entire sign plan in relation to the guidelines found in the Revised General Plan and the Retail Plan for unified graphic design.

The existing signage that is already in place for the shopping center exhibits compatibility with the surrounding residential signage of Ashburn Village. Staff agrees that a more coordinated sign package with respect to materials and design may be appropriate for the site, however the size and number of proposed signs is excessive. The shopping center is located at a major intersection of the Ashburn Village development making it highly visible from all directions. The shopping center is located and designed to function as a "service area-based retail" use which serves the surrounding community and is not intended to attract drive-by shoppers *(Retail Plan, Service Area-Based Retail Polices, text).* As such, the majority of the shoppers are aware of the center's location and the available retail and service offerings, thereby limiting the need for excessive signage.

As stated above, this shopping center is existing and is surrounded by the existing residential community of Ashburn Village. While an update of sign design and materials may be appropriate, given the nature of this community serving retail center and its visible location in the neighborhood, increasing the number of the signs would be excessive. Additionally, several of the proposed signs are much larger than the zoning ordinance permits and are not in scale with the overall development. Therefore, staff does not support an increase in the number of signs or sign size as proposed for the buildings or for the pad sites.

Staff recognizes the applicant's attempt to retain some design flexibility by not providing details except "for illustrative purposes only", but without such commitments and assurances, staff is not able to fully assess the entire sign plan in relation to the guidelines found in the Revised General Plan and the Retail Plan for unified graphic design.

Circulation, Parking, and Loading

The Retail Plan states that pedestrian traffic internal to the retail center should be provided with a safe travel route from the parking area to the building with a demarcated pathway and clear directional signage (*Retail Plan, Design Guidelines, Circulation, Parking, and Loading*). Directional signage is proposed throughout the shopping center to help customers find their destination. Eight tenant identification signs are proposed through the development including ones near the entrances to the site. Monument signs are already proposed in those locations and include some tenant identification. The application proposes directional signage on the pad sites to help identify drive-thru locations. Staff agrees that signage to direct drive-thru traffic on pad sites is necessary to provide safe pedestrian passage into stores, however, tenant directional signs throughout the site would be unnecessary, as the existing building signage clearly identifies the location of the tenants.

Staff recommends that the applicant revise the application to reduce the number of signs to only those necessary to provide safe passage of vehicles and pedestrians to and from uses.

Lighting

The Plan promotes the use of lighting for convenience and public safety without the nuisance associated with light pollution (*Revised General Plan, Chapter 5, Lighting and the Night Sky*). The Retail Plan also specifies that all lighting should be designed to reduce glare and spillage of light onto adjoining properties and streets and that fixtures should be attractive site elements that are compatible with the architecture of the retail center *(Retail Plan, Design Guidelines, Signs and Lighting).* The proposed sign plan specifies that "signs illumination should be directional to illuminate the surface of the sign only or internally illuminated and shall not spill upward or reflect or cast glare onto adjacent properties or roadways" and that "ground-mounted light fixtures will be shielded and will use focused optic lenses to direct illumination only at the intended sign element .

Staff recommends that the applicant commit to the proposed language pertaining to lighting included within the submitted sign plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The general concept of the updating the signage for the Ashburn Village Shopping Center appears to be consistent with the guidelines found in the Revised General Plan and the Retail Plan for unified graphic design. However, Community Planning staff is not able to support approval of the Zoning Modification request for an increase in the amount of signage proposed and an increase in size of the signs themselves. As the existing shopping center signage is adequately visible from the roadways and adjacent residential community, staff requests that the applicant reduce the height of the monument signs to be more human in scale, eliminate or reduce the number and size of the proposed signs, commit to the final colors and design of the signs, and commit to the use of lighting for signs that eliminates intrusive light trespass and light pollution within the development.

Staff would be happy to meet with the applicant to discuss these issues.

cc: Julie Pastor, AICP, Planning Director
Cindy Keegan, AICP, Community Planning Program Manager, via e-mail