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DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
STAFF REPORT

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS PUBLIC HEARING

DATE OF HEARING: June 7, 2010
ZMOD 2008-0017, Belmont Executive Center Comprehensive Sign Plan
DECISION DEADLINE: July 6, 2010
ELECTION DISTRICT: Broad Run
PROJECT PLANNER: Sophia Fisher **DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR: Julie Pastor**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Belmont Land, L.P., Toll Land XV Limited Partnership, and Episcopal Church on Belmont, all of Ashburn, Virginia, have submitted an application for a special exception to modify the applicable provisions of Section 5-1204 of the Revised 1993 Zoning Ordinance to implement a Comprehensive Sign Package that proposes changes to the permitted number, size, height, location, and illumination of signs. The property is being developed pursuant to ZMAP 1996-0003/ZCPA 1996-0002/SPEX 1996-0005, Belmont and ZMAP 1997-0009 & SPEX 1997-0017, Belmont Executive Center, in the PD-CC-CC (Planned Development-Commercial Center-Community Center), PD-OP (Planned Development-Office Park), and PD-H4 (Planned Development-Housing) zoning districts. The proposed Comprehensive Sign Package is for the commercial and office components of the Belmont development. The subject property is approximately 432 acres in size and is located on the south side of Harry Byrd Highway (Route 7), on the east side and east of Belmont Ridge Road (Route 659), on the west side and west of Ashburn Road (Route 641), and along Russell Branch Parkway in the Broad Run Election District.

RECOMMENDATION

Planning Commission:

At the worksession on April 21, 2010, the Commission voted 7-2 (Robinson, Maio opposed) to forward the application to the Board of Supervisors with a recommendation of approval subject to the following changes:

- Remove the M1 sign from Claiborne Parkway just past the end of the off ramp from Route 7.
- Remove one of the two A1/M1 signs from the intersection of Claiborne Parkway and Russell Branch Parkway.

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I.

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REPRESENTATIVES: Sack, Harris, & Martin PC
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PROPOSAL: A Zoning Modification for a Comprehensive Sign Plan for a retail and office development

LOCATION: Intersection of Route 7 and Claiborne Parkway

TAX MAP/PIN #:

Tax Map	PIN #	Tax Map	PIN #
/62/M10//LBPP/	083-17-8172	/62////////16/	083-37-8701
/62////////22/	083-37-1744	/62////////23/	083-27-1064
/62/M10//LB001	083-17-2087	/62////////24/	083-35-9224

ZONING: PD-OP & PD-CC(CC)

SURROUNDING ZONING/LAND USES:

NORTH	PDH-3 & PD-OP	Lansdowne
SOUTH	PDH-4	Belmont Country Club Residential
EAST	PD-IP	Commercial
WEST	PD-OP & PDH-4	Belmont Country Club

ELECTION DISTRICT: Broad Run

II. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

Topic/Issue Area	Issues Examined and Status
Community Planning	Ensure that the signage for the Belmont Executive Center is compatible with the previously approved signage for Belmont Estates. Status: Resolved.
	Reduce the number of freestanding monument signs. Status: Resolved—the number of signs has been significantly reduced.
	Add landscaping around the base of monument signs and commit to maintaining the landscaping in good condition. Status: Resolved—landscaping was added to the signs, and the applicant has agreed to a condition to maintain it.
Zoning	Signs A1 and M1 are development entrance signs that are not located at vehicular entrances to the development. Status: Unresolved —staff recommends that the signs be either relocated or removed, and other signs currently located at the vehicular entrances should be removed.
	Reclassify signs in the appropriate categories set forth in the Zoning Ordinance. Status: Resolved.
	Reduce the size of the primary retail monument sign (M2) as it does not conform to the intent of a PD-CC-CC zoning district. Status: Unresolved —the background structure of the sign is 31% larger than the approved sign at Goose Creek Village Center, which in turn is wider than other signs approved in PD-CC-CC shopping centers.
	Clarify the purpose of sign type A3, directional sign. The sign is not located at an intersection, and staff is unclear what purpose the sign will serve. Status: Resolved. The applicant has relocated the signs.

III. PLANNING COMMISSION REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATION

On February 22, 2010, the Planning Commission held a public hearing on this application. No members of the public spoke. During the public hearing, the Planning Commission asked the following:

- How is “vehicular entrance” defined as referred to by project icon entrance signs?
- How does the hotel signage compare to the Springhill Suites on Route 28?
- Are there any other directional signs on major collector roads?

The Planning Commission held a worksession on this application on April 21, 2010. At the worksession, the Commission discussed the location and number of the A1 and M1 monument signs and the size of the M2 signs (see attached Comprehensive Sign Plan). The Commission concluded that it would be appropriate to allow the applicant two A1/M1 signs (the signs are identical, but fall in different zoning districts): one at the intersection of Russell Branch Parkway and Belmont Ridge Road, and the other at the intersection of Russell Branch Parkway and Claiborne Parkway. The Commission also discussed the retail monument sign (M2), which staff has determined to be too large compared to other existing retail monument signs in the PD-CC-CC zoning district that have been previously approved in Comprehensive Sign Plans. More specifically, the background structure for the proposed M2 sign is 13’2” wide (1’2” or 10% wider than the sign for Belmont Greene) at the base and 11’4” wide at the top (2’8” or 31% wider than Goose Creek Village Center). The Commission came to the conclusion that the size of the sign is acceptable based on the sign’s design: the open

latticework gives the sign the appearance of not being as massive as the dimensions would indicate. The Commission also recommended that language be added to the Conditions of Approval specifying that the M2 be constructed as shown in the Comprehensive Sign Plan.

The worksession concluded with the Commission voting 7-2 (Robinson and Maio opposed) to forward the application with two of A1/M1 signs and the language regarding the M2 signs as discussed at the worksession to the Board of Supervisors with a recommendation of approval.

In response to the discussion at the Worksession, the applicant provided an updated sign plan that still contains four A1/M1 signs, which is two more than the Commission recommended. The applicant did not remove the M1 sign that is located on Claiborne Parkway just past the end of the off ramp from Route 7, as recommended by the Commission.

IV. PLANNING COMMISSION FINDINGS FOR APPROVAL

1. The Comprehensive Sign Plan, as conditioned, is generally compatible with the environs and architectural design of the existing comprehensive sign plan for Belmont Estates and is consistent with the Revised General Plan.
2. The Comprehensive Sign Plan establishes a consistent palette of colors and materials.
3. The sign modification establishes appropriate requirements for the maintenance of permanent signs and the removal of temporary signs.
4. A1/M1 signs (project icon entrance signs) are appropriate in the following two locations: one at the intersection of Russell Branch Parkway and Belmont Ridge Road, and the other at the intersection of Russell Branch Parkway and Claiborne Parkway.
5. Sign type M2, Community Commercial Sector Signage, is of an appropriate size because the openwork lattice design reduces the bulk of the sign.

V. CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL (May 26, 2010)

1. Substantial Conformance. Signs and sign standards (size, height, location, number, colors, materials, lighting etc.) for the signs depicted on the Sign Plan shall be in substantial conformance with the Belmont Executive Center Comprehensive Sign Plan ("Sign Plan") prepared by Urban, Ltd. dated April 22, 2010, and the Revised 1993 Loudoun County Zoning Ordinance (the "Zoning Ordinance"). Sign M2 shall be constructed in substantial conformance with the design shown on page 21 of the Sign Plan. Approval of this application for Tax Map 62M Parcels 10//LBPP and 10//LB001 and Tax Map 62 Parcels 16, 22, 23, and 24 (PIN #'s 083-17-8172, 083-17-2087, 083-37-8701, 083-37-1744, 083-27-1064, and 083-35-9224) (the "Property") shall not relieve the applicant or the owners of the Property from the obligation to comply with and conform to any other Zoning Ordinance, Codified Ordinance, or applicable regulatory requirement not

modified hereby. This approval applies only to the modification of sign standards as modified in the Sign Plan and/or in these conditions for signs that are otherwise permitted and is not intended to approve the use or placement of signs that are not permitted per Section 5-1202(A) of the Revised 1993 Zoning Ordinance. The modifications approved herein supersede the provisions of the Zoning Ordinance regarding such modified standards and shall apply to the signs identified in the Sign Package. In the event of a conflict between the approved Comprehensive Sign Plan and the Zoning Ordinance, other than with respect to the specific modification of standards approved in this application, the provisions of the Zoning Ordinance shall supersede the approved Comprehensive Sign Plan.

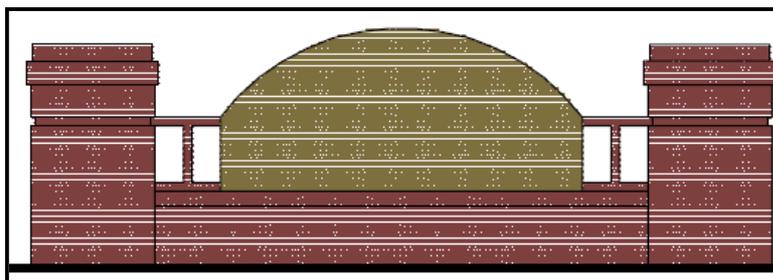
2. Maintenance. Individual signs and associated landscaping materials shall be maintained in good condition, assuring sign legibility and health of landscaped plantings.
3. Lighting. Lighting for any sign will be directed toward the sign, and all such lighting fixtures will be shielded so that light will not spill upward or reflect or cast glare onto the adjacent residential properties or roads. Animation, neon lights, and moving lights shall be prohibited.
4. Removal of Real Estate Signs. Once a commercial building is either 100 percent leased or sold, all real estate and marketing signs shall be removed within 30 days following the execution of the lease or of the recordation of the deed of conveyance.

VI. PROJECT REVIEW

A. Context

Belmont Land L.P. and Toll Land XV L.P. have submitted a Zoning Ordinance Modification (ZMOD) to modify the applicable provisions of Section 5-1204 of the Revised 1993 Loudoun County Zoning Ordinance in order to develop a Comprehensive Sign Plan within Belmont Executive Center. The development is part of the Belmont Country Club, a mixed-use community consisting of residential, retail, and employment land uses that is located on the south side of Route 7, between Belmont Ridge Road (Route 659) and Ashburn Road (Route 641). A sign plan (ZMOD 2004-0002, Belmont Country Club Comprehensive Sign Plan) for the residential PD-H4 (Planned Development-Housing) component was approved on May 10, 2005. The proposed sign plan would regulate signage in the PD-CC-CC (Planned Development-Commercial Center-Community Center) and PD-OP (Planned Development-Office Park) zoned portions of the property.

The signs being proposed for the commercial and retail portions of the Belmont development are compatible with the existing signage for the residential component in material, color, and general design.



Left: existing residential sign
Above: general design guideline for Belmont Executive Center.

The proposed sign package includes a variety of freestanding and building-mounted signs, including monument entrance signs, directional signs, façade signs, blade signs, and canopy signs that are designed to both identify the overall development and specific tenants and provide clear directional information. The submitted package includes sign location maps and detailed renderings depicting the proposed size, design, and materials of the signage. It also includes a matrix comparing the proposed signage with that permitted by the Zoning Ordinance. According to the plan's General Design Guidelines, a tenant shall have the landlord provide a letter indicating which sign types apply to their space and approve the site and style of the proposed signage. This letter shall accompany the tenant's application for a zoning permit for their signs.

B. Summary of Outstanding Issues

Staff generally supports the sign plan. Staff maintains the following outstanding issues, which are discussed under Sign Review, page 10.

- Sign types A1 and M1, project entrance icon sign, are not permitted and should be removed from the Comprehensive Sign Plan (modifying Sections 5-1204(D)(3)(k) development entrance signs and 5-1204(D)(3)(c), entrance signs).
- Sign type M2, community commercial sector sign is 31% wider than previously approved retail monument signs in PD-CC-CC retail centers and should be reduced in size (modifying Section 5-1204(D)(3)(c), entrance signs).

C. Overall Analysis

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The application is subject to the policies of the Keynote Employment areas of the Revised General Plan, which envision that the large-sale buildings will be the prominent feature when viewed from periphery roads. Signage in these areas should be high-quality and complement, not overwhelm the buildings themselves. With the first submission of the sign plan, staff was concerned with the overall number and size of the proposed signs. The original submission had a total of 43 freestanding monument signs, which has been reduced to 18 with the latest submission. In addition, the number and size of the proposed building mounted signs have

been reduced. The majority of staff's concerns have been addressed by the most recent submission. The proposed sign plan is generally supportable. However, there remain three sign types that are still of concern. Those signs are discussed below.

ZONING

The applicant seeks to modify Section 5-1200 to change the size, number, type, location, height and illumination of the signs for the Belmont Executive Center. This modification is authorized by special exception under Section 6-1511(B)(5) and is reviewed in accordance with Section 5-1202(E).

Applicant Justification

The applicant's Statement of Justification states that "The Applicant wishes to realize the vision for Belmont Executive Center which evolved during the rezoning process, as reflected in the approved Proffer Statement (SOJ Attachment XI). Belmont Executive Center was described as, and the Applicant proposed to construct, a high quality shopping enclave. In order to achieve this purpose, the applicant seeks a ZMOD to design a coordinated and unique Comprehensive Sign Package (the "Package") for Belmont Executive Center."

Staff Review

The initial submittal included numerous signs that were either misclassified or not permitted by the Ordinance. In addition, there appeared to be an excessive amount of signage compared to the size of the center. Staff further questions how the proposed signs meet or exceed the public purpose, as the number and size of the freestanding monument signs seems to provide an opportunity for significant visual clutter, and potential safety hazards. For example, the proposal originally contained 43 development entrance and directional signs, significantly more than Zoning Ordinance regulations which allow two development entrance signs per vehicular entrance for the PD-OP zoning district and one commercial entrance sign (no more than three total) per vehicular entrance for the PD-CC zoning district. In addition, the originally proposed sign plan would have allowed primary inline retail tenants to display up to 20 signs on their front facade, far more than the one sign per façade, and no more than three signs, that the Zoning Ordinance would otherwise allow. The revised sign plan reduced the number of proposed building-mounted signs, and placed a cap on the number of square feet of signage allowed, thereby addressing staff's concerns on the matter.

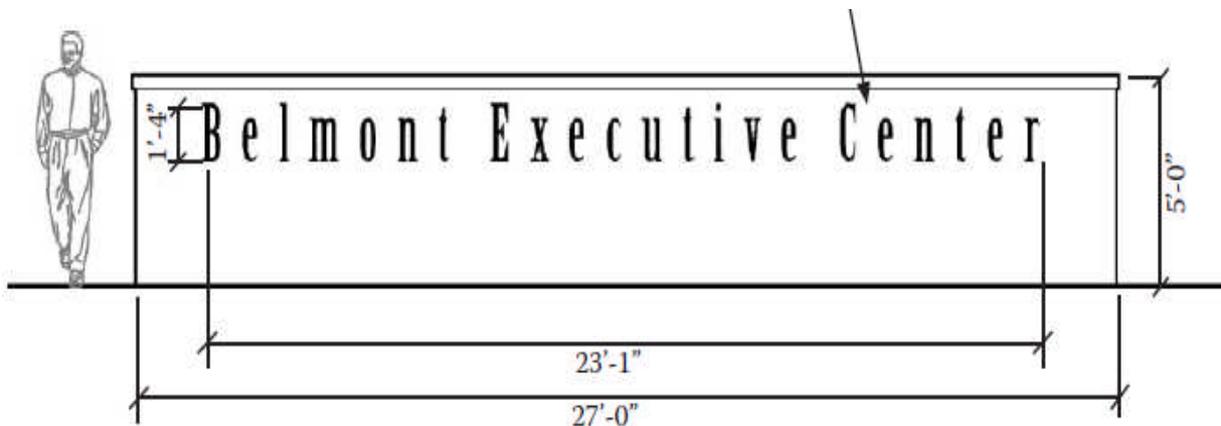
Staff recommended reducing the number of the freestanding monument signs to the minimum necessary to meet the public purpose, and eliminate any sign that provides redundant information. Subsequent revisions fixed a number of those problems through removing, reclassifying, and reducing the number of some signs. However, there are still a number of signs that are of concern to staff, which are outlined below.

SIGN REVIEW

As previously noted, the latest version of the proposed sign plan adequately addresses many of staff's concerns. The three sign types discussed below are the remaining outstanding issues. Staff can support the application if the following issues are addressed.

1. A1 and M1, project icon signs (modifying Sections 5-1204(D)(3)(k) development entrance signs and 5-1204(D)(3)(c), entrance signs). A1 and M1 are identical 5' by 27' monument signs. The A1 signs are located in PD-OP, while the M1 signs are located in PD-CC-CC. Both signs are classified as development entrance signs, and are intended to be at the vehicular entrance to the development. Two of the four signs are located at the intersection of Claiborne Parkway and Russell Branch Parkway. One is located adjacent to Route 7, where the off-ramp to Claiborne Parkway begins, and the final one is located on Claiborne Parkway just past the end of the off-ramp. None of the proposed A1 and M1 signs are located at vehicular entrances into the development. Entrance signs are to be located at the vehicular entrance into the development, not at the intersection of roadways or along interchange ramps.

Staff recommends that sign types A1 and M1 be removed from the comprehensive sign plan or relocated to vehicular entrances. However, staff notes that should the applicant choose to relocate the A1 and M1 signs, other signs such as the A2 signs should be removed so as to avoid the potential for visual clutter and confusion. It also appears that these two signs serve the same purpose and will be redundant, particularly when considered in conjunction with the Community Commercial Sector Sign (M2) proposed at the main entrance to the retail center.



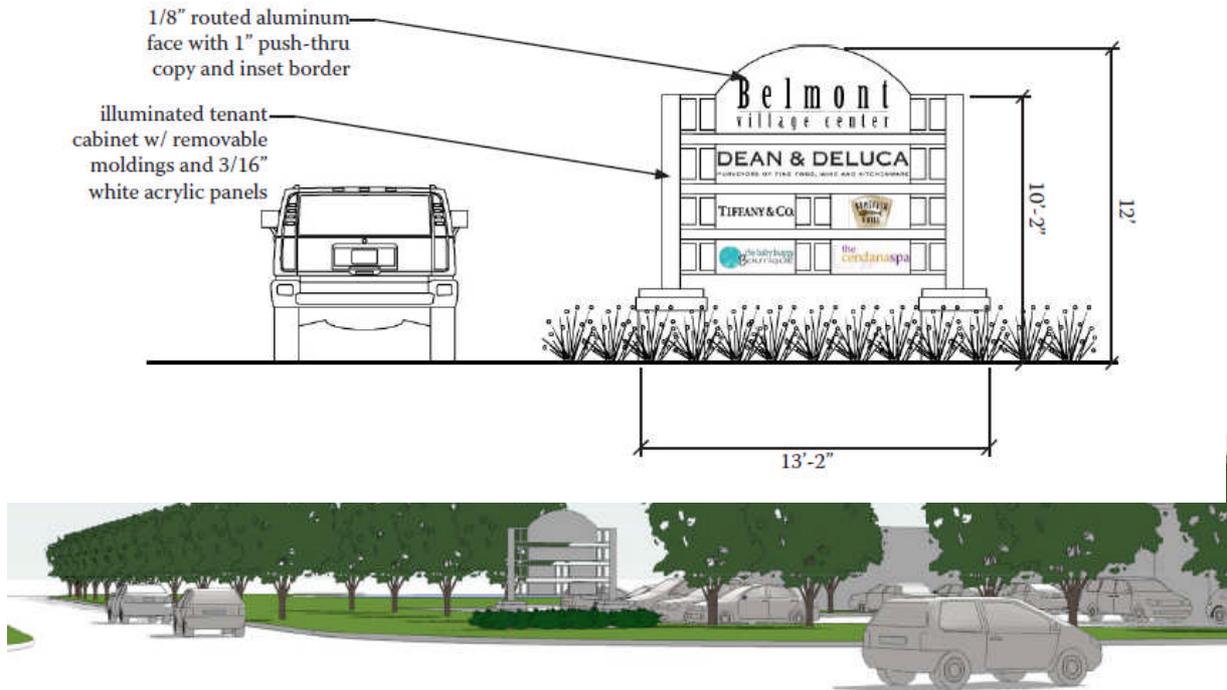
Sign types A1 and M1

2. M2, community commercial sector signage (modifying Section 5-1204(D)(3)(c), entrance signs). M2 is the monument sign for the retail center. Although it has been reduced from 20' tall by 21 ½' wide to 12' tall by 13'2" wide, the sign still appears to be out of scale for the amount of retail in the Belmont Village Center, zoned PD-CC-CC (Planned Development – Commercial Center – Community Center), which is intended to serve the retail shopping needs of the surrounding communities. As such, most of its users will be familiar with the center once it has been operating for a short period of time and will not

need a significant number of large signs identifying specific tenants at entrances. Furthermore, many of the retail tenants will be easily visible from the surrounding roadways of Russell Branch Parkway and Claiborne Parkway and the proposed sign plan includes significant modifications regarding the size and number of building-mounted retail signs. The main concern is the background structure. The proposed height of 12' is on par with the monument signs at Lansdowne Village Green, Goose Creek Village Center, and the Village Center at Belmont Greene. However, the proposed width of 13'-2" is significantly wider, leading to an excessively large monument sign. The proposed sign panels, at 51 ½ SF per side are on par with sign panels approved elsewhere in the county.

Staff recommends that the width of the background structure of the sign be reduced to 8'8", to be compatible with other retail monument signs at other PD-CC-CC centers in the area such as Goose Creek Village, Lansdowne, and The Village Center at Belmont Greene. The background structure for the proposed M2 sign is 13'2" wide (1'2" or 10% wider than the sign for Belmont Greene) at the base and 11'4" wide at the top (2'8" or 31% wider than Goose Creek Village Center). Staff does not object to the width of the sign panel, which is 7'4" wide, nor to the area of the sign itself. However, retail monument signs approved for PD-CC-CC centers have grown steadily in width from Lansdowne (7'10", approved 2006) to Belmont Greene (8', approved 2008) to Goose Creek Village Center (8'8", approved 2009), an overall increase of almost 11% from Lansdowne to Goose Creek Village Center.

The Planning Commission recommended that the sign remain unchanged, but that language be added to the Conditions of Approval holding the applicant to construct the sign as designed. This language has been added per the Commission's recommendation.



Sign type M2, as shown in the Comprehensive Sign Plan (top) and in a 3-D rendering (bottom)

D. ZONING ORDINANCE CRITERIA FOR APPROVAL

Section 6-1310 states " ... (i)in considering a special exception application, the following factors shall be given reasonable consideration, to the extent applicable, in addition to any other standards imposed by this Ordinance ... ":

(A) *Whether the proposed special exception is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.*

The proposed comprehensive sign plan is generally consistent with the Comprehensive Plan in that it provides coordinated materials, colors, and general appearance for the signage in the Belmont Executive Center. In addition, the proposed comprehensive sign plan is also similar to the previous sign plan approved for Belmont Estates, the residential portion of the community. However, the sign plan contains what appears to be an excessive number of entrance signs, many of which are not located at vehicular entrances to the development as envisioned by the Zoning Ordinance. Staff cannot support approval of this application until some of these signs are removed, especially the sign proposed on Route 7.

- (B) *Whether the proposed special exception will adequately provide for safety from fire hazards and have effective measures of fire control.*

Not applicable.

- (C) *Whether the level and impact of any noise emanating from the site, including that generated by the proposed use, negatively impacts the uses in the immediate area.*

Not applicable.

- (D) *Whether the glare or light that may be generated by the proposed use negatively impacts uses in the immediate area.*

Not applicable.

- (E) *Whether the proposed use is compatible with other existing or proposed uses in the neighborhood, and adjacent parcels.*

The proposed signs are compatible with other approved signage in the Belmont community.

- (F) *Whether sufficient existing or proposed landscaping, screening and buffering on the site and in the neighborhood to adequately screen surrounding uses.*

The sign plan contains commitments to provide landscaping around the base of the freestanding monument signs, and to maintain that landscaping in good condition.

- (G) *Whether the proposed special exception will result in the preservation of any topographic or physical, natural, scenic, archaeological or historic feature of significant importance.*

Not applicable.

- (H) *Whether the proposed special exception will damage existing animal habitat, vegetation, water quality (including groundwater) or air quality.*

Not applicable.

- (I) *Whether the proposed special exception at the specified location will contribute to or promote the welfare or convenience of the public.*

Overall, the proposed sign plan has the potential to promote the welfare and convenience of the public by identifying the office buildings and retail tenants of the Belmont Executive center. However, as currently proposed, the sign plan contains signs that do not appear to meet the public purpose, and could potentially cause confusion and visual confusion and is not consistent with the Plan's vision for Keynote Employment areas.

- (J) *Whether the traffic expected to be generated by the proposed use will be adequately and safely served by roads, pedestrian connections and other transportation services.*

Not applicable.

- (K) *Whether, in the case of existing structures proposed to be converted to uses requiring a special exception, the structures meet all code requirements of Loudoun County.*

Not applicable.

- (L) *Whether the proposed special exception will be served adequately by essential public facilities and services.*

Not applicable.

- (M) *The effect of the proposed special exception on groundwater supply.*

Not applicable.

- (N) *Whether the proposed use will affect the structural capacity of the soils.*

Not applicable.

- (O) *Whether the proposed use will negatively impact orderly and safe road development and transportation.*

Not applicable.

- (P) *Whether the proposed special exception use will provide desirable employment and enlarge the tax base by encouraging economic development activities consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.*

The proposed signs will identify office buildings and retail tenants, which can aid economic development by advertising the presence of various businesses and helping the public to locate the businesses.

- (Q) *Whether the proposed special exception considers the needs of agriculture, industry, and businesses in future growth.*

Not applicable.

- (R) *Whether adequate on and off-site infrastructure is available.*

Not applicable.

(S) *Any anticipated odors which may be generated by the uses on site, and which may negatively impact adjacent uses.*

Not applicable.

(T) *Whether the proposed special exception uses sufficient measure to mitigate the impact of construction traffic on existing neighborhoods and school areas.*

Not applicable.

VII. ATTACHMENTS (Unless noted otherwise, attachments are not available electronically but may be obtained from the Department of Planning)	PAGE NUMBER
1. Review Agency Comments	
a. Planning, Comprehensive Planning	A-1
b. Building and Development, Zoning Administration	A-15
2. Disclosure of Real Parties in Interest	A-25
3. Applicant's Statement of Justification	A-39
4. Applicant's Response to Referral Comments	A-43
5. Comprehensive Sign Plan	Follows A-60

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