

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
STAFF REPORT

PLANNING COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING

DATE OF HEARING: February 22, 2010
ZMOD 2008-0017, Belmont Executive Center Comprehensive Sign Plan
DECISION DEADLINE: May 4, 2010
ELECTION DISTRICT: Broad Run PROJECT PLANNER: Sophia Fisher

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

Staff can support the approval of this application provided that:

- Sign types A1 and M1, project entrance icon signs are removed (modifying Sections 5-1204(D)(3)(k) development entrance signs and 5-1204(D)(3)(c), entrance signs).
- Sign type M2, community commercial sector, is reduced in size (modifying Section 5-1204(D)(3)(c), entrance signs).
- Sign type A3, sector directional sign, is not located at or near an intersection or change in direction (modifying Section 5-1204(D)(7)(h) Directional Signs, On-Site). The purpose of the sign is unclear, and should either be relocated or removed from the sign plan.

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I.

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PROPOSAL: A Zoning Modification for a Comprehensive Sign Plan

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: Unresolved —the number of freestanding monument signs has been reduced to 18 from the 43 originally propose; however, staff remains concerned that the number of signs will lead to visual clutter and driver confusion.
	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 loated 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 sign is too large.
	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: Unresolved .

Policy or Ordinance Sections Subject to Application
<u>Revised General Plan</u>
Planned Land Use Map
Countywide Retail Plan Amendment (Retail Plan); Service-Area Based Retail Policies
Chapter 5 / Built Environment Policies / Policy 1
Chapter 11 / Design Guidelines / B. Suburban Community Design Guidelines
Retail Plan, Design Guidelines, Building Placement and Design
Retail Plan, Design Guidelines, Signs and Lighting
<u>Revised 1993 Zoning Ordinance</u>
Article 8 – Definitions – Preamble
Section 5-1202 (E)(1) – Sign Regulations / General Provisions / Modification to Sign Regulations
Section 5-1202 (E) (3) – Sign Regulations / Submission Requirements
Section 5-1204(D)(3)(c) – Sign Regulations / Sign Requirements / Sign Requirements Matrix / Commercial / Office Signs / PD-CC-CC, Entrance Signs
Section 5-1204(D)(3)(d) – Sign Regulations / Sign Requirements / Sign Requirements Matrix / Commercial / Office Signs / PD-CC-CC, Tenant Signs
Section 6-1504 – Rezoning to Planned Development (PD) Districts / Modifications.
Section 6-1511(B)(5) – Rezoning to Planned Development (PD) Districts / Approved Changes to Concept Development Plan After Approval / Special Exception Change

III. CONCLUSIONS

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. However, the Comprehensive Sign Plan contains signs that are too large and are poorly situated on the site.
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. The application does not conform to the Revised 1993 Zoning Ordinance, because it attempts to modify signs not contained in the Ordinance.

IV. CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL (February 4, 2010)

1. Signs shall be provided in substantial conformance with the Belmont Executive Center Comprehensive Sign Plan prepared by Urban, Ltd. dated January 4, 2010.
2. Sign materials, colors, size, height, location, and lighting shall be provided in substantial conformance with the Belmont Executive Center Comprehensive Sign Plan prepared by Urban, Ltd. dated January 4, 2010.
3. Individual signs and associated landscaping materials shall be maintained in good condition, assuring sign legibility and health of landscaped plantings.
4. Lighting for signs will be directed toward the sign and all of the fixtures will be shielded to not spill upward or reflect or cast glare onto the adjacent residential properties or roads. Animation, neon lights, and moving lights shall be prohibited.
5. 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 sale of the commercial building.

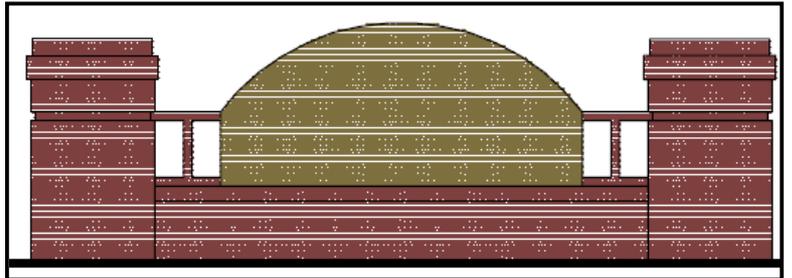
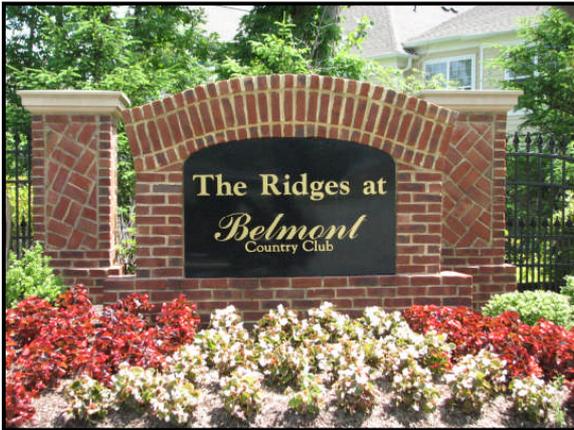
V. PROJECT REVIEW

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

- 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 appears to be too large and should be reduced in size (modifying Section 5-1204(D)(3)(c), entrance signs).
- Sign type A3, directional sign, is not located at road intersection or other change in direction (modifying Section 5-1204(D)(7)(h) Directional Signs, On-Site). The purpose the sign serves is not clear.

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 four 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, no more than three signs, than 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 these freestanding monument signs to the minimum necessary to meet the public purpose, and eliminate any sign that provides redundant

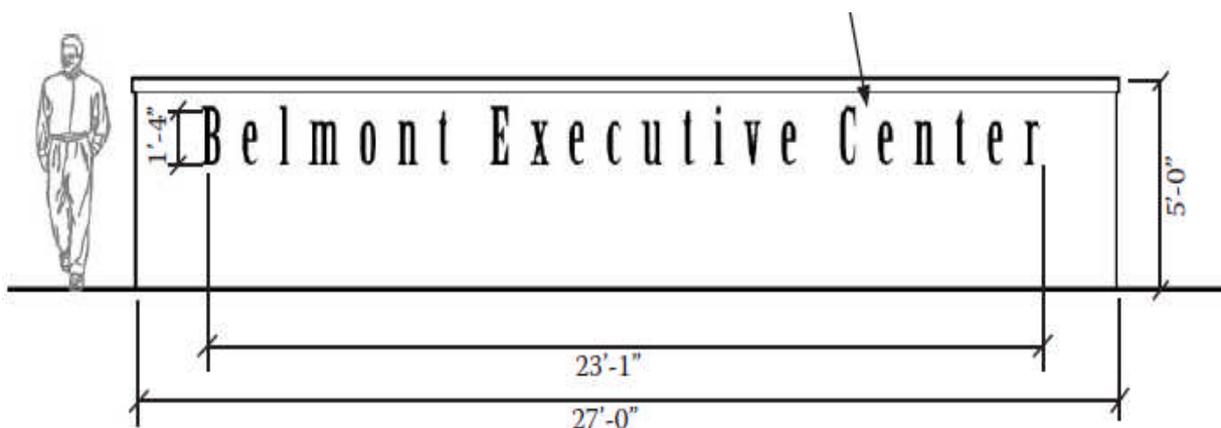
information. Subsequent revisions fixed a number of those problems through removing, reclassifying, and reducing the number of some signs. However, there are still a number of signs that are of concern to staff, which are outlined below.

SIGN REVIEW

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

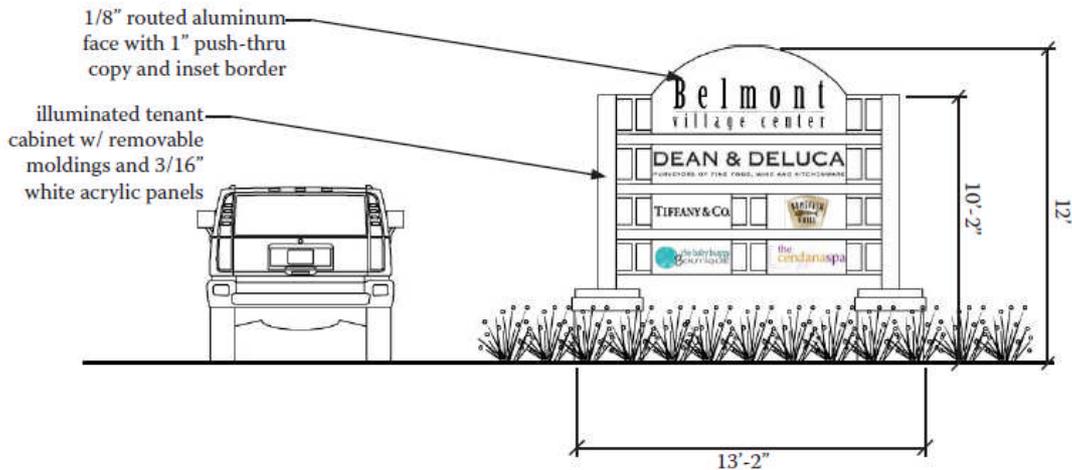
1. A1 and M1, project icon signs (modifying Sections 5-1204(D)(3)(k) development entrance signs and 5-1204(D)(3)(c), entrance signs). A1 and M1 are identical 5' by 27' monument signs. The A1 signs are located in PD-OP, while the M1 signs are located in PD-CC-CC. Both signs are classified as development 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 are 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 appear to 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.



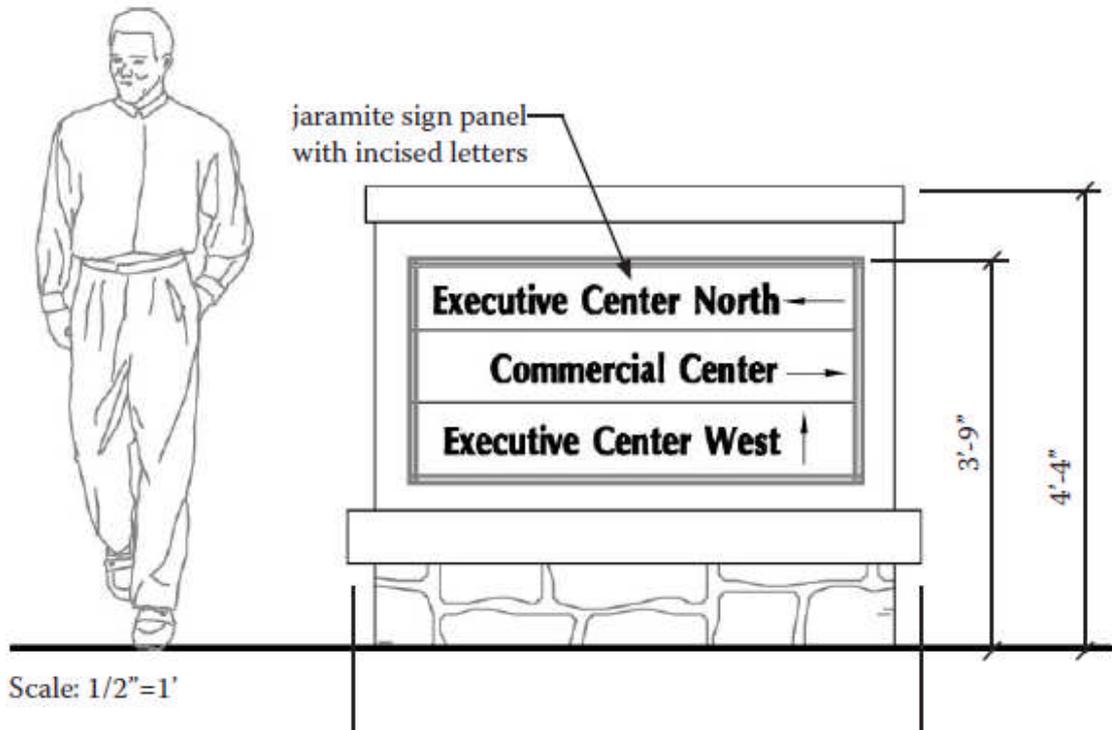
Sign types A1 and M1

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 background structure be reduced in height and width.



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

3. A3, sector directional sign (modifying Section 5-1204(D)(7)(h) Directional Signs, On-Site). A3 is a directional sign intended to help people navigate from one portion of the site to another. Staff can support the sign type, as the office and retail components of this project are spread out over three separate locations. According to the sign definition in the Ordinance, the signs shall be located only where there is a change in direction. As currently proposed, the signs are located along vehicular travelways and not at a change in direction. Furthermore, the A3 signs are all located in very close proximity to the proposed A2 freestanding signs, which are located at vehicular entrances and identify the building address and that they are part of Belmont Executive Center. Staff is concerned that the high number of signs proposed along the roads (currently a total of 16 signs¹ in the section of the project that straddles Claiborne and Russell Branch Parkways) will result in visual clutter that is hazardous to the traveling public, and recommends that the signs either be removed or relocated to a decision point.



Sign Type A3

¹ Includes M₁, A₁, M₂, M₃, A₂, A₃, A₄, M₄, and C₂ signs.

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.

VI. 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