

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: DECEMBER 12, 2008

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

THROUGH: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER

FROM: FAROLL HAMER, DIRECTOR, PLANNING AND ZONING

SUBJECT: CORRECTION TO SUP 2008-0079, SANDELLA'S

A condition on the above referenced SUP was inadvertently left out of the staff's recommendation. The condition that should be included is:

Applicant shall contribute \$500.00 to the Litter Control Fund for the installation of litter receptacles along the public right-of-ways. Monetary contribution to be submitted to the Department of T&ES, Engineering Division, Room 4130, 301 King Street within 60 days of City Council approval.

As we have discussed recently, this is a standard condition where the \$500 contribution is for maintenance and is typically applied in SUP cases where there already exists a trash can (within one-half a block), but there is a new use proposed that will contribute to waste at street level and the funds are used for repair and replacement of the existing cans.

We have discussed this condition with the applicant and they concur.



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DATE: February 20, 2009

TO: Mayor and Members of City Council

FROM: Faroll Hamer, Director, Department of Planning and Zoning 

SUBJECT: Interim Practices on Trash Cans and Street Trees; Plan for Presenting
Standard Conditions and Formal City Policy on Development Requirements

BACKGROUND

In December, the Council requested information on current City practices in terms of conditions placed on land use and development applications regarding trashcans and street trees. Staff from T&ES, RP&CA, and P&Z wrote an email that explained the current practices (see attachment.)

Subsequently, Councilmembers had additional questions about these practices and expressed concern about consistency issues. In this memo, staff will update the Council on activities undertaken to date in terms of looking at consistency and improvements to the development process.

Although we are not currently suggesting changes to the present practices regarding trash cans and street trees, we are committed to looking at improvements to these practices as part of a comprehensive revision to the standard conditions placed on land use and development projects. We believe that the comprehensive effort, which will be presented to the Council as a package in May or June, will address the goal of making the development process in the City clear, consistent, and predictable.

NEW INITIATIVES

Staff has been undertaking a series of discussions with the Northern Virginia Building Industry Association (NVBIA) about improvements to the development process.

Out of these discussions, several initiatives are being undertaken:

1. Revisions to the Concept Plan Checklist to make the submission requirements clearer;
2. Distribution of a development process chart to clearly depict all steps in the development process; and

3. Standardization of meeting times, so that applicants can meet with all City Departments in a timely and efficient manner – this includes:

a.) Scheduling meetings to go over DSUP and DSP draft conditions with applicants during the regular IDR meeting that proceeds the deadlines for Planning Commission staff reports to be completed (this is typically the 3rd IDR meeting each month.)

b.) Setting aside time each week when a member from each of the various City departments will be available to attend “Development Project Workgroup” meetings with other City departments and the applicant to review all substantive issues related to a development application. The purpose of the Development Project Workgroup meetings will be to ensure that all City reviewers are available one day each week for applicants to schedule their meetings. This predetermined Development Project Workgroup meeting day will reduce the difficulty that currently exists in coordinating the availability of individuals from separate agencies to attend meetings requested by various applicants. Applicants will be required to submit an application request form one week in advance and submit a list of issues that will be discussed at each meeting. By submitting the list of issues in advance, the staff will be able to ensure that the appropriate decision-making personnel will attend the meeting.

c.) Meetings are meant to include appropriate City staff, developers, and private technical professionals in order to ensure that issues which cross departmental lines (e.g. public vs. private roadways, resource protection areas, utility availability, etc.) are discussed and evaluated at the earliest stage of review. These interdepartmental meetings are designed to eliminate ad hoc individual departmental/developer meetings and enhance early coordination.

In addition, staff has been making major efforts to improve communication and coordination between City departments with the goal of improving the development process and making it more consistent. One of the recent activities in this regard was a staff retreat involving all staff from different departments who are involved in the Interdepartmental Review Committee (IDR). Outcomes and assignments from this retreat are included on the attached IDR Retreat Notes.

With regard to interdepartmental coordination on non-development land use applications, such as SUPs for restaurants, planning staff facilitates monthly meetings with staff from City departments who normally provide comments on such applications. The purpose of the meetings is to review SUP requests, identify issues and resolve any conflicts on departmental recommendations.

CONCLUSION

Staff has heard and understands the Council’s concern about consistency regarding development requirements imposed on applicants – as most recently evidenced by the discussions on trash cans and street trees. Staff asked that the Council allow us to continue our current practices (applying them consistently) for the next several months until we are able to bring a larger package of development process improvements forward – including standard conditions – in the May/June timeframe.

cc: Jim Hartman, City Manager
Mark Jinks, Assistant City Manager
Michele Evans, Assistant City Manager
Kirk Kincannon, Director, RP&CA
Rich Baier, Director, T&ES
Richard Josephson, Deputy Director, P&Z
Gwen Wright, Development Division Chief, P&Z
Ron Kagawa, Acting Division Chief, RP&CA

Dear Mayor and Council,

A number of issues and questions arose from the cases that were heard by City Council at their November 15 public hearing. Staff has prepared the following responses to these issues/questions:

Trees

During discussion of the SUP request for 904 King Street, the Old Town Gourmet Market, Councilman Smedberg asked whether a condition from RPCA requiring a \$250 contribution toward a street tree, was a standard condition that would be applied in future cases and whether it had been applied in previous cases.

When preparing comments on SUP applications, RPCA conducts a review of street trees associated with the subject property, typically those directly in front of, and within the immediate blockface, and determines whether there are terminally damaged (as determined by the City Arborist), missing or dead trees. If such conditions are found, RPCA has requested that the tree(s) either be replaced by the applicant or that the applicant provide a contribution to the Living Landscape Fund for installation of a replacement by the City. Cost per tree is based on current City contract costs for installation and funds are identified specifically to be used for replacement of project trees-not other items. Replacement tree species would have to be in conformance with the City Landscape Guidelines and are typically scheduled for installation during the planting season following certificate of occupancy and receipt of funds. If healthy street trees are present, there would be no recommendation to provide payment into the fund.

The review by RPCA to determine if a tree needs to be replaced or a contribution made is a standard part of their process. The result of that review does not always translate into a condition requiring replacement or a contribution, since there may already be a healthy tree in place.

P&Z staff will advise applicants for SUPs that RPCA will be looking at street trees in front of and on the same blockface as the subject property and may require replacement or a contribution if the tree(s) are missing or dead.

Trash cans

During the discussion of the DSUP for the Alexandria Country Day School, Councilman Smedberg asked about the \$1,150 fee for purchasing new trash cans, noting the \$500 contribution required for a maintenance fund to repair/replace existing trash cans.

Staff explained that there is no inconsistency regarding the requested funding amounts in these separate recommendations. The \$500 contribution for maintenance is typically applied in SUP cases where there already exists a trash can, but there is a new use proposed that will contribute to waste at street level and the funds are used for repair and replacement of the existing cans. The \$1,150 contribution is to purchase and install

trash cans in locations where trash cans have never existed. It was noted that the purchase price for specified city trash cans used to be \$1,000 and now has gone up to \$1,150 – this is due to an increase in the capital cost of the trash receptacle

Countdown pedestrian signals

During the discussion of the DSUP for the McDonalds at 5311 Duke Street, Councilman Smedberg asked about the condition requiring the applicant to contribute towards the cost of installing countdown pedestrian signals and accessible pedestrian push-buttons at the light in the vicinity of the project.

Rich Baier of T&ES explained that this condition is only used when a project 1) will, by its nature, generate a significant amount of pedestrian traffic; and 2) no countdown pedestrian signals exist in the immediate area. In this case, there are improvements scheduled for the signal in the vicinity of the project and, because the project will generate pedestrian traffic, it was determined that it would be appropriate for the project to contribute a pro-rated share of the cost of installing the countdown pedestrian signals.

Gwen Wright explained that staff is looking at a menu of standardized conditions so that the language of each condition in each regulatory case is consistent. However, it will still be necessary to only use those conditions that are appropriate to the specifics of the case at hand and to custom tailor some portions of the conditions (such as appropriate pro rata contribution amounts) to the specifics of the case.

Signage standards

Also during the discussion of the DSUP for the McDonalds at 5311 Duke Street, Councilman Smedberg asked about the height of the monument sign for the project.

Gwen Wright explained that staff originally negotiated for the sign to be 4 feet in height (consistent with a recent decision on another nearby case – the Wendy's/PNC Bank case). However, the applicant wanted a sign that would be 12 feet in height. Staff had recommended a compromise of 6 feet; however, the Planning Commission had recommended 8 feet. Councilman Smedberg expressed concern about consistency and, ultimately, the Council voted to approve a sign 6 feet in height.

Consistency in signage height is very important in creating a high quality streetscape. However, there are currently no written standards for this portion of Duke Street. Each signage case is reviewed and negotiated on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the specifics of the case at hand. Staff believes that an important goal for major thoroughfares such as Duke Street should be to have written streetscape standards so that there can be consistency in all streetscape improvements and signage projects. Preparation of such standards is not on P&Z's or T&ES's work program.

SUP Checklist

At the November 15 public hearing, Council members asked about the status of the "checklist" of standards being prepared by staff for SUP applicants. During previous

discussion by City Council and staff on the small business zoning changes, staff indicated that there would be a checklist for applicants for Administrative SUPs that would clearly explain the requirements and standards by which these requests would be evaluated and approved. Staff indicated that this "checklist" would be completed within 60 days after adoption of the ordinance. We are working on this now and are on schedule to provide this checklist to City Council by mid February 2009.

We hope this information is responsive to your questions/comments. Please let me know if you have any other questions.

Rich Josephson
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Department of Planning and Zoning
City of Alexandria
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Notes from IDR Retreat Held February 12, 2009

Consensus on Major Issues to be Addressed:

- Communication – between departments and with applicants
- Tracking Approved Conditions – assuring that conditions approved by the Planning Commission and City Council are enforced, that triggers are adhered to, and that Certificates of Occupancy are not issued until conditions are met
- Keeping Concept Plans truly conceptual

Follow-Up Items and Assignments:

- Provide an update on discussions that have taken place with NVBIA re: initiatives to improve the development process ***GWEN WRIGHT WILL PROVIDE THIS UPDATE AT THE NEXT IDR MEETING***
- Establish a staff working group to look at checklists for Preliminary and Final Site Plans, including reviewing Final Site Plan/ESI coordination and timing and considering using a change in fee structure to improve the Final Site Plan process ***PAT ESCHER, SHANNA SIZEMORE, LAURA DURHAM, ERIC KEELER***
- Establish a staff working group to look at the As Built/Certificate of Occupancy issue ***JESSICA RYAN, SHANNA SIZEMORE, KENDRA JACOBS, FRAN BROMBERG***
- Continue and complete work on standard conditions ***JESSICA RYAN, GARY WAGNER***
- Departments will ensure that all emails on development projects that transmit departmental decisions or opinions to applicants will be copied to relevant staff in other departments (i.e. P&Z will copy appropriate contacts in T&ES, RP&CA, Code, etc. and other departments will do likewise.) ***ALL DEPARTMENTS***
- Develop a procedure to assure that all changes in the field are communicated to the appropriate P&Z project manager. ***KENDRA JACOBS, SHANNA SIZEMORE, JAMES HUNT***
- Explore ways to improve efficiency and effectiveness of ESI. ***ALL DEPARTMENTS***
- Take 15 minutes at the beginning of each IDR meeting to provide updates on the progress of the projects noted above. ***ALL DEPARTMENTS***