

**Docket Item #11**

**SUP #2007-0107**

**Amendment to the  
Carlyle Coordinated  
Sign Program**

**Planning Commission**

**May 6, 2008**



Docket Item # 11

SPECIAL USE PERMIT #2007-0107  
CARLYLE COORDINATED SIGN PROGRAM

Planning Commission Meeting  
May 6, 2008

**ISSUE:** Consideration of a request for an amendment to the Carlyle Coordinated Sign Program.

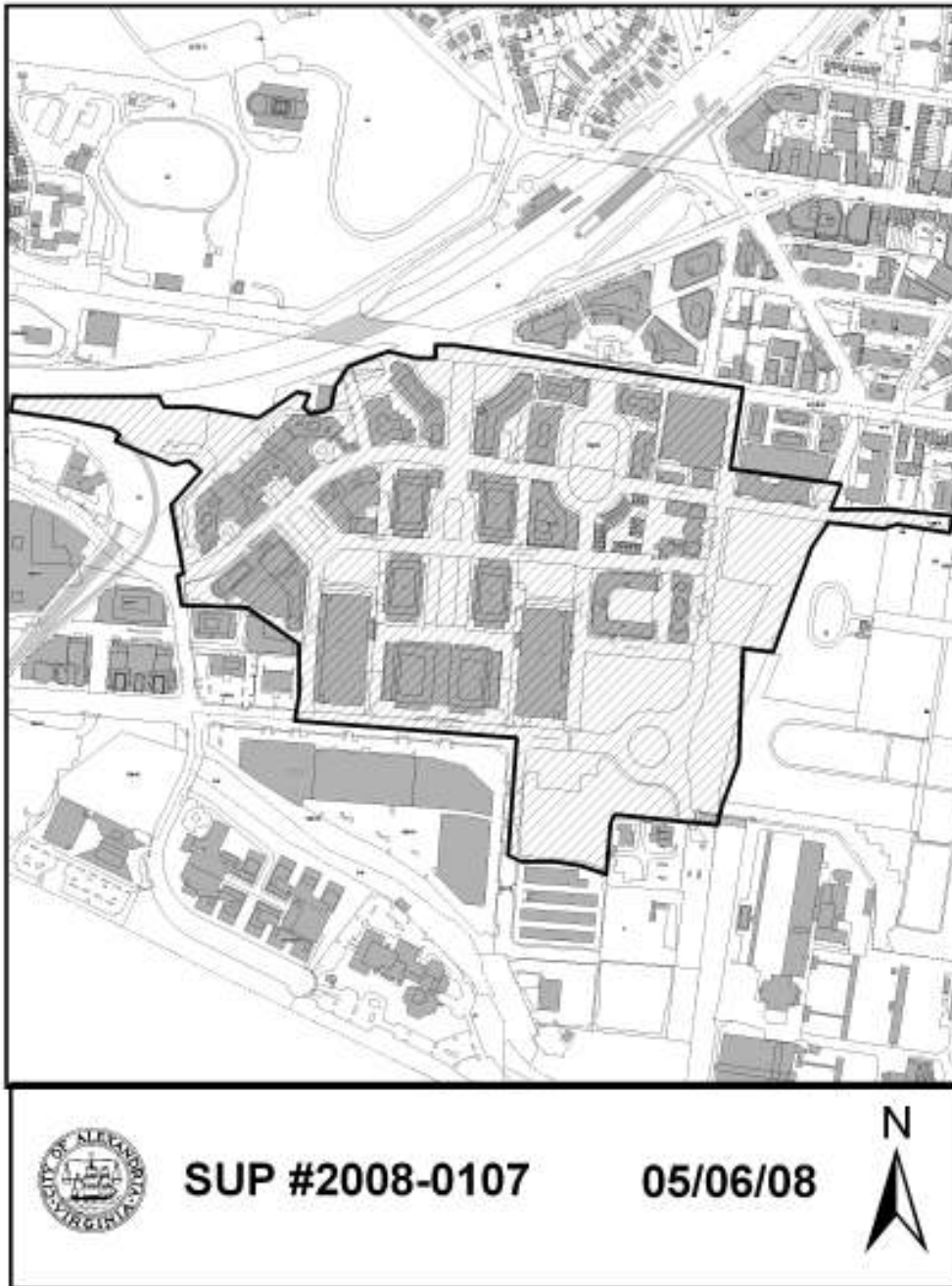
**APPLICANT:** Carlyle-Lane CFRI Venture II, LLC, 1900 Ballenger, LLC, and Regent Partners, LLC  
by Jonathan Rak

**STAFF:** Jeffrey Farner, Division Chief, Development  
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**LOCATION:** CARLYLE DEVELOPMENT-Area bounded by Duke Street to the north, Holland Lane to the east, Eisenhower Ave to the south and Mill Road to the west known as the Carlyle Development

**ZONE:** Coordinated Development District # 1/CDD #1

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## I. OVERVIEW

A coordinated sign program was approved for the Carlyle development by City Council on September 13, 1997 (SUP #97-0074) and later amended on May 16, 1998 (SUP #98-0023). Since that time, several of the blocks that were planned for retail space have been constructed and more retail uses are opening in the area. Eight new retail and restaurant tenants are in the process of opening in the near future. A concern of staff, the property owners, and the retail operators is that the current sign program discourages creative and appropriately scaled signs.

The owners of the buildings on Blocks G, K, and F have filed a request for an amendment to the coordinated sign program for Carlyle. The applicants have requested (1) the amount of signage allowed for buildings in Carlyle be increased by 50%, (2) staff be permitted to administratively approve signs under 50 sf rather than being reviewed at the Design Review Board (DRB), (3) signs may be located on facades facing a public park, and (4) illumination of signs above 35 feet.



*Figure 1: Block G office and retail*

Staff has reviewed the request and analyzed sign programs in other jurisdictions. As a result, staff has several proposed modifications to the coordinated sign program for Carlyle which are consistent with what the applicants have requested. Staff recognizes that there are several challenges with the Carlyle sign requirements and review process. With this amendment, staff is attempting to address these challenges by incorporating key improvements such as:

- A more streamlined review process;
- Design flexibility for the Design Review Board; and
- High quality and imaginative signage.

## II. BACKGROUND

### A. *Carlyle Coordinated Sign Program*

The coordinated sign program for Carlyle (SUP #97-0074) was originally created to reinforce a sense of place by installing monument signs at the project's entrances and to maintain a high-quality urban pedestrian environment by limiting the size and quantity of retail signs and by installing a series of uniform kiosks/directories to orient pedestrians. As part of the coordinated sign program an accompanying set of design guidelines also govern the design of sign sin Carlyle. With adoption of these guidelines, staff can administratively approve some of the signs that comply with the guidelines. However, the location and quantity of additional retail, professional or business identification signs must be approved by the Carlyle Design Review Board for consistency with the overall guidelines.



*Figure 2: Directory Sign*

It was originally anticipated that the Carlyle project would be developed as a series of speculative residential and commercial structures and that ground floor retail spaces would be coordinated and leased by a common developer. Changes in the market have altered that scenario, with owner-occupied, build-to-suit structures now the norm. The Design Guidelines have served as a useful guide for the Design Review Board and contains several small sections on recommended signs. However, as more retail tenants are coming in to Carlyle, some limitations and unanticipated impacts of the guidelines have been identified.

The coordinated sign program currently requires that signs larger than 16 sf require approval by the Design Review Board. Additionally, businesses proposing more than one sign also need approval by the DRB for the additional sign. These signs are reviewed for consistency with the guidelines and appropriateness for the use and location. Overall, the Design Guidelines encourage a minimalist approach which is inconsistent with the recommendations staff has heard from the Planning Commission, City Council, business owners, and community.

### ***B. Retail in Carlyle***

In April 2007, the City Council and Planning Commission held a joint worksession to discuss the retail in Carlyle. At that time, there were approximately 14 retail establishments in the area, including a bank and several different quick-service restaurants. A common criticism of this existing retail was a lack of signage to make these uses visible to the public. In many cases it was not immediately obvious that the space was a retail use rather than office space.



*Figure 3: Example of lack of signage (Jimmy Johns)*

In October 2007, a follow-up worksession was held to discuss what had occurred in Carlyle since April. By then several new retail establishments had opened, including two full-service restaurants (Carlyle Club and Jamieson Grill/Trademark Bar). In addition, the residential high-rise and mid-rise buildings developed by Post Properties on Block L (501 Holland and 520 John Carlyle) had completed construction (350 units) and the Jamieson Condominiums on Block F (79 units) opened, which has brought an added residential population to Carlyle that contributes to the development of a 24/7 community.

Several other retail uses have opened and the two residential Mill Race buildings, which are just west of Carlyle, are constructed and are occupied. Three full service restaurants are proceeding with the building permit process and will be opening in the coming months. The new retail uses and people in the Carlyle area have helped the overall retail image for Carlyle, but further development of vibrant retail is desired. Additional efforts need to be made, such as this sign amendment, to encourage unique, vibrant, and visible retail frontages that foster pedestrian and community activity and ensure successful retail.

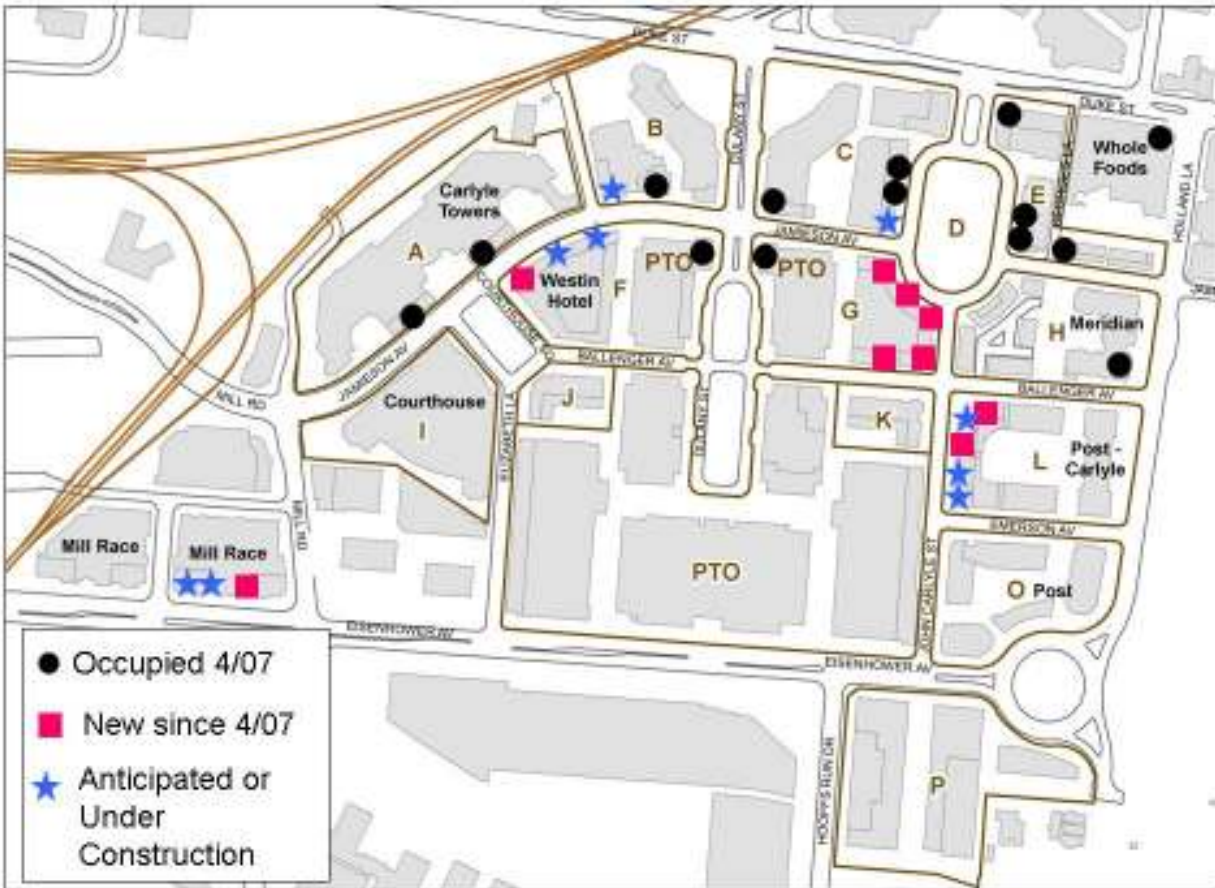


Figure 4: Retail Locations

### C. Types of Signs

There are several types of signs that are discussed in the design guidelines. The following summarizes the different types of signs.

1. *Wall signs* – Signs that are parallel to and attached to the wall of a building, often located above the main entrance to a business.
2. *Window signs* – Signs applied to a window or installed just inside of a window. These signs cannot cover more than 20% of the total window surface.
3. *Projecting signs/ Blade Signs / Hanging Signs* – Signs that are perpendicular to the building that typically hang above a sidewalk.



Figure 5: Projecting Sign

4. *Awning signs* - Signage installed on awnings, including a logo or graphic that is related to the business. Patterns on awnings, such as stripes or checkerboard, are not considered signage.

5. *Flags* – Signs made of a material that a design is woven into. If the design is a business trademark or some other pattern or symbol that does not constitute an official government symbol, the flag is counted as a sign.

6. *Freestanding signs- Monument signs* – A sign that is fixed to the ground on a foundation or pole independent of any building or other structure.

7. *Roof signs* – A sign that extends above the roof line. Although signage at the top portion of a building is permitted, signs above the roof of a building are not permitted.

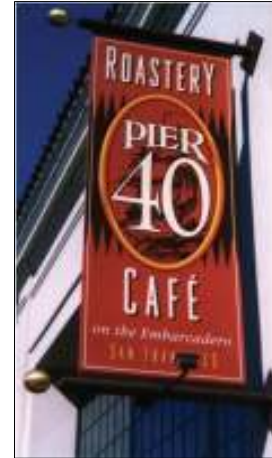


Figure 6: Flag Sign

### III. STAFF ANALYSIS

#### A. *Sign Programs for Other Jurisdictions*

As part of the analysis for the proposed sign amendment staff evaluated several comparable retail areas throughout the region that included Market Commons Clarendon, Crystal City, Shirlington Village, Reston Town Center, and Rockville Town Square. In general, Alexandria allows about the same amount of signage as other jurisdictions (1 sf per linear foot). However, one notable difference with other locations is that a fixed amount of square footage is allowed, which allows retail spaces with smaller frontages to have more signage despite a smaller frontage. Table 1 summarizes the signage that is permitted for each of the jurisdictions that were reviewed.

**Table 1: Amount of Permitted Signage**

| <b>Location</b>                 | <b>Signage Permitted</b>  |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <b>Alexandria- Carlyle</b>      | 1 sf per linear foot of frontage  |
| <b>Market Commons Clarendon</b> | 60 sf or 1 sf per linear foot of frontage, whichever is greater   |
| <b>Crystal City</b>             | 60 sf or 1 sf per linear foot of frontage, whichever is greater   |
| <b>Shirlington Village</b>      | 60 sf or 1 sf per linear foot of frontage, whichever is greater; 1 primary sign and 1 blade or undercanopy sign |
| <b>Reston Town Center</b>       | 50 sf per retail bay  |
| <b>Rockville Town Square</b>    | 2 sf per linear foot of frontage up to 50 sf; in excess of 50 linear feet                                       |

Sign review in Carlyle is handled differently from the majority of the jurisdictions reviewed. For all of the jurisdictions reviewed, general design standards were established for the area. Some guidelines were prepared by the landlord, while others were established by city/county staff. In most cases, sign review is dealt with at the staff level. Reston Town Center and various parts of

Washington, DC were the exceptions. Table 2 summarizes the sign review across the jurisdictions.

**Table 2: Review Process**

| <b>Location</b>                 | <b>Review Process</b>  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>Alexandria – Carlyle</b>     | Design Review Board review for signs larger than 16 sf or for more than 1 sign |
| <b>Market Commons Clarendon</b> | Approved administratively  |
| <b>Crystal City</b>             | Approved administratively  |
| <b>Shirlington Village</b>      | Approved administratively  |
| <b>Reston Town Center</b>       | Approved administratively with a DRB member                                    |
| <b>Rockville Town Square</b>    | Approved administratively  |

***B. Possible Improvements to the Coordinated Sign Program***

In reviewing the sign programs for various jurisdictions throughout the region and considering the goals for retail in Carlyle, Staff has compiled the following as possible improvements to the Carlyle coordinated sign program. These proposed amendments to the sign program were discussed with the Carlyle Design Review Board (DRB). Overall, the Board supported the proposed amendments and provided staff with some suggestions for improvement, which are incorporated into the staff recommendations.

**Staff Approval of Signs Allowed by the Zoning Ordinance**

While the benefit of having review of signs by the Board is apparent with the quality signs that are eventually installed, the process of getting approval can be time-consuming as the Board meets every two months and applications must be submitted at least one month in advance for review. Unfortunately many of the retail tenants elected to have the smaller 16 sf signs rather than the larger signs that would be permitted with the review of the Board. Therefore, one recommendation for improving the coordinated sign program is to allow staff to review and approve all signs that comply with the allowed sizes of the Zoning Ordinance (1 sf per linear foot of frontage up to 50 sf). This administrative review would be based on the design parameters of the sign design standards (see Attachment #1) and the Zoning Ordinance.

**Additional Signage for Smaller Retail Frontages**

There are several retail spaces that have limited street frontage, which has implications on the amount of allowable signage that is allowed for the business. To address this, Staff is recommending that a minimum of 50 sf of signage be permitted for each retail tenant regardless of the street frontage. Similar to



*Figure 7: Example of a small storefront*



the above recommendation, this signage would be administratively reviewed for consistency with the Design Guidelines and approved by staff.

### **Additional Signage**

In some cases additional signage beyond what is allowed by the Zoning Ordinance (1 sf per linear foot of frontage) may be appropriate and in fact enhance the retail frontage. There is a fine threshold of what might be considered too much signage. As a result, staff is recommending that the amount of signage for retail uses in Carlyle be increased to 2 sf per linear foot of frontage through a special review. This means that applicants who request signage in excess of 1 sf per linear foot of frontage can submit an application for review of their signs by the DRB.

### **Minimum Sign Requirements**

To encourage a variety of signage in Carlyle, staff is recommending that each retail space be required to incorporate at least two different types of signs into the retail frontage. In the case of a corner space, this requirement would apply to each façade (i.e. two different signs would be required on each façade). Possible sign types include wall signs, projecting signs, window signs, and signage on awnings. Retail tenants that cannot meet this requirement may obtain approval from the DRB for less signage.

### **Illuminated Projecting Signs**

The current coordinated sign program prohibits illuminated projecting signs. However, several retail businesses/tenants have requested that the projecting signs be allowed to be illuminated. Many of the surrounding jurisdictions permit internally illuminated signs. In addition, many of these signs have been done in a manner that are architecturally integrated and add visual interest to the streetscape at night. Staff does not anticipate that all projecting signs would be illuminated, but rather a mix of illuminated and non-illuminated projecting signs would occur which would further contribute to the mix of signs and diversity of the retail uses. Staff is recommending that internally illuminated signs be permitted with approval by the Director of Planning and Zoning. Additionally, illuminated projecting signs would be subject to the same hours of illumination as other signs incorporated into the retail frontage.

### **Illumination of Signs near Residential Uses**

Carlyle is anticipated to be a community with a mix of residential, office, and retail uses. With this mixture, the issue of illuminated signs near residential uses has been raised. The Zoning Ordinance prohibits illuminated signs facing and in close proximity to residential uses between 10:30pm and 6:30 am. Since many of the new retail establishments are at the ground floor of a residential building (Block L) or across the street from a residential use (Block G), this would require these establishments to turn off their signs at 10:30 pm regardless of whether they are still open. The appearance of open businesses by way of illuminated signs is key to creating and maintaining a 24/7 environment. Considering the urban environment and recognition of multiple uses occurring simultaneously, a recommendation for



*Figure 8: Restaurant below residential*

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this issue would be to permit illuminated signs to stay lit until 12:00 am or the close of the business, whichever is later.

### **Illumination of Signs Above 35 feet**

Currently, the Zoning Ordinance does not permit illuminated signage higher 35 feet from grade unless they are facing the Beltway. However, in some cases, if they are appropriately located illuminated signage can create a more vibrant and engaging streetscape. Staff recommends allowing the Design Review Board to determine whether an illuminated hotel sign above 35 feet from grade is appropriately designed and located.

### **Placement of Signs**

The plan for Carlyle identifies several pocket parks throughout the area, in some cases adjacent to ground floor retail areas. Given the integral role the open space will have on retail adjacent to the space, careful consideration has been given to the design of the building facing the park. Retail signage is a significant element of retail frontage and it would make sense to carry this frontage around the building to the park. However, the Zoning Ordinance prohibits the placement of any signage on a building wall that does not face a street, alley, or parking area. To reinforce the retail use and connection to the parks, staff recommends that retail and hotel signage be permitted facing pocket parks if located no higher than 50 feet above the lowest grade elevation directly below any point on the sign. These signs would require DRB approval for appropriateness and would be limited to only retail and hotel signage (office signage would not be allowed on this frontage).



*Figure 9: Location of proposed Westin Sign*

### **Retail and Wayfinding Signage in Carlyle**

While not part of this request, a future amendment to the coordinated sign program will be a comprehensive wayfinding sign program for Carlyle. Staff is working with the property owners and tenants in Carlyle to prepare a comprehensive evaluation of appropriate locations for directional signage for the retail use and hotel uses from Duke Street and Eisenhower Avenue. The approach currently being discussed is that the wayfinding signage be incorporated as sculptural elements integrated into the open space, streets, or buildings within Carlyle. These additional signs could improve the visibility of existing retail and hotel uses and enhance the vitality of businesses in the area by assisting visitors traveling on foot and by car in finding Carlyle tenants. The overall discussions regarding the approach of such signage is in the early stages with the property owners and the proposed amendment would require a community process, review by the Design Review Board, and special use permit approval by the Planning Commission and City Council.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Staff recommends **approval** of the amendments to the Carlyle Coordinated Sign Program and accompanying Sign Design Guidelines subject to compliance with all applicable codes, ordinances, and Staff Recommendations.

STAFF: Faroll Hamer, Director, Planning and Zoning;  
Jeffrey Farner, Chief, Development;  
Katie Parker, Urban Planner; and  
Natalie Sun, Urban Planner.

## VI. CONDITIONS

Staff recommends **approval** subject to compliance with all applicable codes and ordinances and the following conditions:

1. No more than one real estate sign shall be permitted for a single project, unless that project has frontage on two or more streets, in which case two real estate signs shall be permitted, if approved by CDC, at the locations designated in the coordinated sign guidelines. (P&Z) (SUP 98-0023)
2. Awnings shall be permitted to project up to four feet without Design Review Board (DRB) review. Greater projections require DRB approval. Greater projections which encroach into the public street easements may also require City Council approval of an encroachment. (P&Z) (SUP 98-0023)
3. Illustrate the Carlyle Sign Guideline text, similar to the *Carlyle Streetscape Design Guidelines*, to the satisfaction of the Director of Planning and Zoning. (P&Z) (SUP 98-0023)
4. **[AMENDED CONDITION]** Business Names/Logo Signs shall be no larger than otherwise allowed in the Zoning Ordinance except that all retail and hotel uses shall be allowed 1 sf of sign area per linear foot of tenant storefront or 50 sf of signage, whichever is greater. The Design Review Board may approve signage for retail and hotel uses up to 2 sf per linear foot of frontage. (P&Z) (SUP 98-0023)
5. **[NEW CONDITION]** Retail, professional, and hotel signage may be permitted administratively by the Director of P&Z subject to the following minimum criteria and conditions. Applicants who do not agree with staff's decision may appeal to the Design Review Board.
  - a. Signs shall be constructed of durable quality materials and finishes. Natural construction materials are desirable.
  - b. Sculptural and dimensional signs shall be provided to the extent possible and graphics with depth shall be provided to the extent possible.
  - c. Back-lit, halo-lit illumination or reverse channel letters with halo illumination are encouraged for lighting purposes.
  - d. All retail and hotel signage permitted to be illuminated, regardless of the proximity to residential uses, shall be allowed to be illuminated until 12:00 am or the close of the business, whichever is later.
  - e. Letters and graphics mounted directly onto building facades shall be pin mounted at least 2 inches from the surface onto which the sign is mounted and provide dimensional returns.
  - f. Modifications to logos and corporate identifiers may be required to fit attractively on the building or storefront.
  - g. The scale of signs shall be appropriate to the building/storefront on which they are placed.
  - h. Awnings shall be constructed of natural materials, such as canvas or metal.

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- i. Each retail tenant shall display at least two sign types on each storefront façade, unless otherwise approved by the Design Review Board. One of the two sign types must be a primary sign (sign above the main entry). Examples of other signs include but are not limited to: wall signs, window signs, projecting signs, awning signs, flags, and freestanding signs.
  - j. Box signs are prohibited.
  - k. Signs shall comply with the Carlyle Sign Design Guidelines. (P&Z) (SUP 2007-0107)
6. [NEW CONDITION] With approval by the Design Review Board, hotel signage above 35 feet may be illuminated provided that the illumination does not have an adverse impact on adjoining residential uses, park or roadways. (P&Z) (SUP 2007-0107)
7. [NEW CONDITION] With approval by the Design Review Board, retail and hotel signs may be located on a building face fronting a pocket park, provided the sign is located no higher than 50 feet above the lowest grade elevation directly below any point on the sign and is integrated with the design of the building and open space. The maximum allowable signage shall be 1 sf per linear foot of park frontage. (P&Z) (SUP 2007-0107)
8. [AMENDED CONDITION] Projecting signs are encouraged and should be appropriately sized and proportional to the building and/or storefront. Signs projecting over the sidewalk shall be a minimum of eight feet (8') above the sidewalk and at least 14 feet (14') above a vehicular driveway. Projecting signs may be internally illuminated if approved by the Director of P&Z. Externally illuminated projecting signs shall have lighting fixtures that are complementary and integrated into the storefront design (P&Z) (SUP 97-0074)
9. [NEW CONDITION] Illuminate parking signage for a building and/or parking area may be permitted by the Director of P&Z. (P&Z) (SUP 2007-0107)

**CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS**

Legend: C - code requirement R - recommendation S - suggestion F - finding

**Transportation & Environmental Services:**

- R-1 No sign shall protrude into public Right of Ways, public easements, and pedestrian or vehicular travelways. (Engineering/Transportation)
- R-2 Signs shall be placed as per MUTCD and shall not obstruct the line sight for vehicles or pedestrians. Also, signs shall not be placed on the pedestrian paths obstructing path of visually impaired pedestrians. (Transportation)
- C-1 The applicant shall comply with the City of Alexandria's Noise Control Code, Title 11, Chapter 5, which sets the maximum permissible noise level as measured at the property line. (DEQ)