



Chatham County Planning Board Agenda Notes

Date: April 5, 2011

Agenda Item: VII. 1.

Attachment #: 3

☐ **Subdivision**

☐ **Conditional Use Permit**

☐ **Rezoning Request**

☒ **Other: Text Amendment**

Subject:	Request by the Chatham County Board of Education for a text amendment to Section 15.5.6 of the Chatham County Zoning Ordinance, Signs Permitted in Any Zoning District, to allow up to two (2) signs for each street abutting the lot or one (1) such sign not exceeding 64 sq. ft. in area.
Action Requested:	See Recommendations
Attachments:	1. Application packet – provided prior to the March 21 public hearing 2. Photos of Margaret Pollard signage as an example

Introduction & Background

A public hearing was held on March 21, 2011. Robert Logan, School Superintendent, spoke on the issue.

The zoning ordinance states in Section 15.5.6 "church, community, or public building bulletin board and identification sign, lighted or unlighted shall not exceed 32 square feet in area. There shall be a limit of one such sign for each street abutting the lot."

During a field inspection of the new Margaret Pollard Middle School located off Andrews Store Road, it was discovered that a monument sign had been constructed. Planning staff records indicated there had not been a sign application submitted and approved for the sign nor had a building permit been issued for its construction. On the site plans submitted to Building Inspections, a 32 square foot monument sign was noted but no information or rendering was included. At the time of inspection, prior to the opening of the school, there was a long concrete riser where the monument sign was erected and LED display was not constructed (see photos). There was an electrical service installed and wired to prepare for its construction, and the LED display was added later. The monument sign area was measured by the contractor as 30 square feet. The contractor noted the LED display sign area is 15.5 square feet making the entire structure 61 square feet which included the structure member itself.

Discussion & Analysis

The Zoning Ordinance provides the definition of sign area as "measured by the smallest square, rectangle, triangle, circle, or combination thereof, which will encompass the entire advertising copy area, excluding

architectural trim and structural members. In computing area, only one side of a double-faced sign shall be considered". This allows flexibility for the owners/occupants to be more creative in their sign design and allows for the architectural and structural components of the sign to be larger than 32 square feet. It was discussed at the public hearing, by the Board of Commissioners, to look into other measuring methods so that there is a cap on the size of the entire sign not just the copy area. The change would require a text amendment to be submitted. Once staff has investigated that option, they will present it to the Board.

The Board of Education thinks this added, technologically advanced signage is a benefit for changing school information on events, school closings, etc. as they occur for the students and community at large. They feel one sign limited to 32 square feet of copy area cannot fill both roles of an identification and bulletin board.

The matter of an LED sign being allowed is already permitted under Section 15.4.6 Prohibited Signs where it states "signs with flashing, intermittent, or animated illumination except for official warning or regulatory signs are prohibited. Provided, however, electronically or electrically controlled message centers or reader boards where different copy changes, involving alphabetical or numerical characters only, present messages of a public service or commercial nature on the same lamp bank shall not be considered to be flashing signs." However, this amendment, as written, would not only apply to schools. It would also apply to all churches and community bulletin board and identification signs. Planning staff thinks the allowance for an additional 32 square foot of signage area is acceptable for these uses.

A concern was raised about the brightness of the LED display. Staff has contacted Progress Energy and has been advised there can be several ways to regulate a wattage maximum placed on the display in order to keep down the "brightness" and still remain effective. Staff is currently working on other ordinance revisions as directed by the Board on sign and lighting regulations and will incorporate this into their findings. There may be more defined regulations proposed at a later date when staff reviews ordinance amendments for signage and lighting in general.

Recommendation

Planning staff recommends approval of the amendment. The Planning Board has up to three meetings to make a recommendation to the Board of Commissioners.