

**MINUTES  
CITY OF SUWANEE, GEORGIA  
ZONING APPEALS BOARD MEETING  
September 17, 2019**

**PLANNING AND ZONING APPEALS BOARD MEMBERS:** Present: James Thigpen, Ray Brown, Pete Charpentier, Paul Altnauer, and David Sullivan. Staff members present: Alyssa Durden, and MaryAnn Jackson.

**CALL TO ORDER**

James Thigpen called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

**ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

*David Sullivan moved to approve the agenda as presented, second by Paul Altnauer. Motion carried 5-0.*

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

*Pete Charpentier moved to approve the August 20, 2019 minutes, second by Ray Brown. Motion carried 5-0.*

**OLD BUSINESS**

**NEW BUSINESS**

V-2019-016- Owner: Noro Noble Farms LLC. Applicant: Katie Getz. The applicant requests a variance from Section 1611 of the City of Suwanee Zoning Ordinance to allow for an electronic sign. The site contains approximately 1.02 acres in Land Lot 238 of the 7<sup>th</sup> District and is located at 1125 Peachtree Industrial Blvd.

V-2019-017- Owner: Noro Noble Farms LLC. Applicant: Katie Getz. The applicant requests a variance from Section 1611 of the City of Suwanee Zoning Ordinance to allow for an electronic sign. The site contains approximately 1.02 acres in Land Lot 238 of the 7<sup>th</sup> District and is located at 1125 Peachtree Industrial Blvd.

V-2019-018- Owner: Noro Noble Farms LLC. Applicant: Katie Getz. The applicant requests a variance from Section 1611 of the City of Suwanee Zoning Ordinance to allow for an electronic sign. The site contains approximately 1.02 acres in Land Lot 238 of the 7<sup>th</sup> District and is located at 1125 Peachtree Industrial Blvd.

Alyssa Durden informed the Zoning Board of Appeals that V-2019-018 had been administratively withdrawn.

Alyssa Durden presented the staff report as follows: The applicant seeks three variances from Section 1611 of the City of Suwanee Zoning Ordinance to allow for replacement of three existing menu boards with one electronic display menu board and one electronic display pre-browser board. The subject property is located at 1125 Peachtree Industrial Boulevard and totals approximately 1.02 acres. The property is developed with a fast food restaurant (McDonalds)

that includes a drive through with one lane. The proposed signs would serve the drive through. The property is zoned C-2 (General Commercial District).

The City of Suwanee Zoning Ordinance does not allow for “electronic signs used for purposes other than traffic management and official government signs” (Section 1611). The request to replace existing display menu boards with an electronic menu sign with two screens and an electronic pre-browser board with digital displays results in the need to obtain variances. The applicant has indicated these electronic signs will be able to provide options for limited time offers, new items to the menu, and assist in making changes to prices or menu items, reducing down time.

The subject property is located near the southwest corner of Peachtree Industrial Boulevard. It is surrounded by other commercial uses. The outparcel is part of a larger shopping center (zoned C-2A) including a grocery, garden store, and a multi-tenant commercial building located behind the McDonald’s. Outparcels on either side of the property (zoned C-2) contain a freestanding bank under construction to the north and a car wash to the south. Across Peachtree Industrial Boulevard to the east is a large shopping center (zoned C-3) with outparcels along Peachtree Industrial Boulevard including a bank and a drug store. Behind the outparcels is a two story multi-tenant commercial building.

The three existing menu boards total 31.9, 10.8 and 10.6 square feet. The applicant is proposing to replace the menu boards with one digital menu board comprised of two screens totaling 27.4 square feet, and one pre-menu board, which is 13.7 square feet. The proposed change would result in less overall signage, but since the City prohibits electronic signs, variances are required in order to install the signs. Typically, the City allows for menu boards without sign permits because the message contained on them is conveyed in such a way (small print/symbols) that it is clearly targeting users on the property. Electronic signs are capable of being used in such a way that the boards could convey messages out to the general public making them signage regulated by the Zoning Ordinance.

The Zoning Ordinance prohibits electronic signs because the continuously changing displays are a distraction to drivers. The proposed location of the signs on the south side of the building would be approximately 150 feet back from the road and would not be visible from Peachtree Industrial Boulevard. Additionally, the message on the signs as proposed would be geared to the drivers in the drive through. As such, the signs are unlikely to cause distractions to drivers along Peachtree Industrial Boulevard.

Although there does not appear to be a hardship, the proposed location and size of the two requested signs should not cause substantial detriment to the public good or impair the purposes or intent of the Zoning Ordinance. Staff recommends approval with conditions of the requests.

James Thigpen called upon the applicant.

James Herzig, 6353 Deep Cannon Road, Chattanooga, TN. Mr. Herzig stated the signs are illuminated which will help process orders.

Pete Charpentier asked if there would be video on the signs. Mr. Herzig indicated that there will not be video on the signs.

James Thigpen called for opposition. There was none.

***Pete Charpentier moved to approve V-2019-016 with conditions, second by Ray Brown. Motion carried 5-0.***

1. The sign shall be no larger than 28 square feet and may include up to 2 screens.
2. The sign shall be located in approximately the same location as shown on “Exhibit A”
3. The displayed message shall not change more than once per hour.
4. The size of the font and any symbols on the sign shall not be large enough to be clearly visible from the right-of-way.

***David Sullivan moved to approve V-2019-017 with conditions, second by Ray Brown. Motion carried 5-0.***

1. The sign shall be no larger than 13.7 square feet.
2. The sign shall be located in approximately the same location as shown on “Exhibit A”
3. The displayed message shall not change more than once per hour.
4. The size of the font and any symbols on the sign shall not be large enough to be clearly visible from the right-of-way.

V-2019-019- Owner: Hank Friend. Applicant: Kathy Pallansch. The applicant requests a variance from Section 1612 of the City of Suwanee Zoning Ordinance to allow for monument style sign mounted on a base other than brick or stone. The site contains approximately 18.61 acres in Land Lot 194 of the 7<sup>th</sup> District and is located at 300 Satellite Blvd.

V-2019-020- Owner: Hank Friend. Applicant: Kathy Pallansch. The applicant requests a variance from Section 1612 of the City of Suwanee Zoning Ordinance to allow a second free-standing sign for an individual establishment on an individual lot with only one road frontage. The site contains approximately 18.61 acres in Land Lot 194 of the 7<sup>th</sup> District and is located at 300 Satellite Blvd.

Alyssa Durden presented the staff report as follows: The applicant seeks a variance from Section 1612 of the City of Suwanee Zoning Ordinance to allow for two freestanding signs that are each mounted on a base other than brick or stone. The City of Suwanee Zoning Ordinance allows only one freestanding sign per road frontage and requires all freestanding signs to be mounted on a base that is either brick or stone. As such, two variances are necessary to allow the signs as proposed.

The subject property is approximately 18.6 acres and has approximately 1,350 linear feet of road frontage along Satellite Boulevard. The property is accessed by two separate driveways off Satellite Boulevard located approximately 1,000 feet apart. The property contains a 297,000 square foot data center.

The subject property is zoned M-1 (Light Industry District). It is located on the east side of

Satellite Boulevard within an industrial corridor with similar industrial uses zoned M-1. The property backs up to Burnette Elementary School (zoned Gwinnett County RTZ) and an undeveloped tract of land (zoned PMUD allowing M-1 uses) that is part of the Terraces at Suwanee Gateway mixed-use development.

The owner of the property recently installed a security fence at the front of the property to secure the existing data center. This new fence limits vehicular circulation on the property. The southern driveway provides access to a parking lot in front of the building for employees and visitors. Vehicles enter the one-way drive parking lot through a security gate near the southern driveway and exit the parking lot through a security gate near the northern driveway. The northern driveway allows vehicles to exit this parking lot and also allows truck traffic to access the rear of the property.

Section 1612 of the City of Suwanee Zoning Ordinance states that an “individual establishment on an individual lot” is allowed “one freestanding sign per road frontage.” The applicant proposes two freestanding monument signs, one to be located at each of the two separate driveways into the property to direct truck traffic to the northern entrance. The sign at the southern driveway would direct trucks to the northern driveway and the northern driveway sign would read “truck entrance only.”

The proposed signs would be have red aluminum bases with a gray aluminum vertical element that is part of the base and rises above it. The sign at the southern entrance would be 9 feet 6.5 inches tall, have a total of 82 square feet of copy area, and be setback 12 feet from the right-of-way. The sign at the northern entrance would be 4 feet tall, have a total of 30.8 square feet of copy area, and be setback 7 feet from the right-of-way. The building is allowed one sign with a maximum of 96 square feet of copy area and maximum height of 10 feet. Both signs meet these requirements.

Approval of the request for a variance for a second freestanding sign (V-2019-020) should not impact nearby properties or compromise the intent of the zoning ordinance. The intent of the ordinance is to limit the number of signs along roads. The parcels along Satellite Boulevard are primarily industrial and larger than most parcels within the City thus having wider road frontages. The subject property has approximately 1,350 linear feet of road frontage, and the proposed signs would be located approximately 1,000 linear feet apart. Many other areas of the City with smaller parcels fronting the roads have freestanding signs located closer than 1,000 feet.

The proposed signs meet all other applicable signage regulations with the exception of regulations regarding materials. The definitions section of the signage ordinance requires monument-style signs, such as those proposed, to be mounted on a base that is either brick or stone. The applicant requests a variance from this requirement to allow for signs with red aluminum bases to comply company branding and sign standards instead of brick or stone bases (V-2019-019). The intent of the required base is to prohibit pole signs along the right-of-way. The proposed signs would not be mounted on poles. The aluminum bases would come completely down to the ground; therefore, allowing an exception to this regulation would not compromise the intent of the zoning ordinance or have a negative impact on surrounding properties.

The City of Suwanee's Zoning Ordinance grants the Zoning Board of Appeals the authority to grant variances. Due to the distance between the existing and proposed freestanding signs, approval of the request for a second freestanding sign would not undermine the intent of the zoning ordinance; therefore, staff recommends approval with conditions of V-2019-020. The proposed design of the subject signs on aluminum bases instead of brick or stone bases would not undermine the intent of the zoning ordinance; therefore, staff recommends approval with conditions of V-2019-019.

James Thigpen called upon the applicant.

Kathy Palansche, 300 Royal Boulevard South, Alpharetta, GA. Ms. Palansche stated that QTS would like to be able to direct traffic with the signs.

David Sullivan asked if the signs are illuminated. Ms. Palansche stated that only the QTS on the sign will be illuminated.

James Thigpen called for opposition. There was none.

***Ray Brown moved to approve V-2019-019 with staff recommended conditions, second by David Sullinvan. Motion carried 5-0.***

1. Any monument sign located at the southern entrance shall be consistent with "Exhibit B" or meet all the regulations of Section 1612 of the City of Suwanee Zoning Ordinance.
2. Any monument sign located at the northern entrance shall be consistent with "Exhibit C" and meet all the regulations of Section 1612 of the City of Suwanee Zoning Ordinance.
3. Freestanding signs on the property shall have an enclosed base, but they are not required to provide brick or stone.

***Paul Altnauer moved to approve V-2019-020 with staff recommended conditions, second by Pete Charpentier. Motion carried 5-0.***

1. The subject property shall be limited to two monument signs, one at each driveway, located as shown in "Exhibit A."

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

## **ANNOUNCEMENT**

Alyssa Durden informed the Zoning Board of Appeals that the Open House for the Pedestrian and Bike Plan has been postponed. A date for the next Open House has not been determined.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

***David Sullivan moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:48 pm.***