



HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING

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Ellicott City, Maryland 21043

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Voice/Relay

Valdis Lazdins, Director

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January 31, 2017

Ruth Hoang
The Howard Research and Development Corporation
10480 Little Patuxent Parkway, Suite 400
Columbia, MD 21044

RE: WP-17-052, Downtown Columbia, Various
Neighborhoods (Intersection Truncation and
Public Road Frontage for Apartment and
Commercial Building)

Dear Mr. Hoang:

The Director of the Department of Planning and Zoning considered your request for an alternative compliance from the Howard County Subdivision and Land Development Regulations.

As of the date of this letter, the Planning Director approved your request for an alternative compliance of the following sections of the Subdivision and Land Development Regulations:

- Section 16.119(e)(5) - The public right-of-way lines on corner lots at an intersection shall be truncated by straight lines joining points 25 feet back from the theoretical property line intersection in each quadrant; and,
- Section 16.120(c)(1) – All commercial, industrial or apartment lots shall have a minimum frontage of 60 feet on an approved public road which provides access to the property. Lots for individual businesses within a commercial center or industrial development that have shared access and parking may be approved by the Department of Planning and Zoning without public road frontage.

Approval is subject to the following conditions:

For Section 16.119(e)(5) –

1. A sight distance analysis must be submitted for all site development plans proposed at public and private street intersections in Downtown Columbia (all six neighborhoods).
2. Please include a general note with the WP file number, the regulatory section number, the date of the approval, and the conditions of approval on all future Downtown Columbia plans.

For Section 16.120(c)(1) -

3. Alternative compliance of Section 16.120(c)(1) is approved only for Crescent Neighborhood Parcels D-8 through Parcels D-9 as shown on the associated plan exhibit (attached) if the Department of Public Works requires all roads providing frontage to these properties be private due to enhanced design features and materials.

4. A reciprocal easement agreement must be recorded for all parcels in Crescent Neighborhood Area 3 to outline the operation of the private roadways for safe and efficient access to each individual parcel and parking area. This agreement must include maintenance for storm drainage, stormwater management facilities, sewer systems, snow removal, street lighting, and any other typical roadway maintenance and operational issues.
5. Unimpeded public access for Crescent Neighborhood Parcels D-8 through D-9 must be provided at all times for emergency purposes, including when street festivals may close sections of the private road.
6. Please include a general note with the WP file number, the regulatory section number, the date of the approval, and the conditions of approval on all future Crescent Area 3 plan submissions.

Our decision was made based on the following:

Extraordinary Hardships or Practical Difficulties: The goals of Downtown Columbia identified in the Downtown Columbia Plan and the Downtown-wide Design Guidelines seek to create a pedestrian-oriented community with complete streets supporting all modes of transportation. Standard regulations for road construction for the County come at odds with urban design standards that promote narrower streets and increased crossings to promote pedestrian and bicycle movement.

Enforcing truncation at intersections would be contrary to urban design because it would force buildings to be setback further from the street corners irrespective of sight distance, and cause sidewalk treatments and material changes at the intersection, as the County would own and maintain the corners rather than the private property owner.

DPZ is supportive of alternative paving materials, narrower streets, and traffic calming features such as raised crosswalk tables which encourage slower vehicular travel speeds and create a safer environment for pedestrians and bicycles. Unfortunately, these features require higher maintenance expertise and budgetary costs not currently available to DPW. For these reason, the developer must choose between standard DPW materials that would be permitted in public roads or the preferred design features meeting the goals of the Downtown Columbia Plan.

Alternative Proposal: Downtown Neighborhood Design Guidelines provide street design standards and block design. Buildings are generally located 15-25 feet from the right-of-way. Sight distance will be evaluated for all site development plans proposed at street intersections in Downtown Columbia. In lieu of public road frontage, the developer shall provide a reciprocal easement agreement to address access and maintenance issues.

Not Detrimental to the Public Interest: Alternative compliance for road truncation throughout Downtown Columbia is not detrimental to the public interest since a more unified urban streetscape appearance with enhanced pedestrian facilities are to be provided per the Neighborhood Design Guidelines. Adequate sight distance will be assured at every street corner through analysis with each Site Development Plan located at a street intersection. Alternative compliance for public road frontage will not be detrimental to the public interest since there will be a reciprocal easement agreement to provide access and outline maintenance and operational responsibilities for all property owners.

Will not nullify the intent or purpose of the regulations: Individual sight distance analysis with any site development plans at a street intersection will ensure the intent of the regulations are upheld. The intent of public road frontage will be addressed through a reciprocal easement agreement covering all issues typically taken for granted when a property is accessed directly from a public road.

Indicate this alternative compliance petition file number, request, section of the regulations, action, conditions of approval, and date on all related plats, and site development plans, and building permits. For Section 16.120(c)(1), this alternative compliance approval will remain valid for one year from the date of this letter or as long as a subdivision or site development plan for Crescent Neighborhood Area 3 is being actively processed in accordance with the processing provisions of the Regulations. For Section 16.119(e)(5), the alternative compliance will remain effective throughout the build-out of Downtown Columbia Revitalization.

If you have any questions, please contact Jill Manion-Farrar at (410) 313-2350 or email at jfarrar@howardcountymd.gov.

Sincerely,



Kent Sheubrooks, Chief
Division of Land Development

KS/JMF 

cc: Research
DED
Real Estate Services
GLW

