



ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

**County Board Agenda Item
Meeting of September 13, 2008**

DATE: August 26, 2008

SUBJECT: U-3203-08-1 USE PERMIT for a comprehensive sign plan at 5100A 8th Rd. S. (RPC #22-014-131, -400).

Applicant:

Columbia Heights LP

By:

Bob Biroonak
Art Display Co.
401 Hampton Park Boulevard
Capitol Heights, MD 20743

C. M. RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the use permit for a comprehensive sign plan subject to the conditions of the staff report.

ISSUE: This is a use permit for a comprehensive sign plan for an apartment complex, and no issues have been raised.

SUMMARY: The applicant requests a comprehensive sign plan at an apartment complex to place one (1) freestanding project identification sign at the main vehicle entrance, four (4) freestanding permit parking signs, and one (1) freestanding leasing office sign. The proposed signs added together are less than the total permitted square footage for signs on a multi-building complex. The proposed signs do not create an adverse impact on the community, and meet the intent of the County's *Sign Guidelines*. Therefore, staff recommends approval of the comprehensive sign plan subject to the conditions of the staff report.

BACKGROUND: The following provides additional information regarding the subject property:

Site: The former Columbia Commons Apartments (rebranded as "The Fields") consist of three garden-style apartment buildings on a nine (9) acre site, with a total of 199 dwelling units. The apartment buildings are set significantly back from the street frontage. Two of the buildings and the leasing center are accessed from 8th Road South and the third building is

County Manager: _____

County Attorney: _____

Staff: Peter Schulz, CPHD, Planning Division

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accessed from a stub of South Dickerson Street. There is an additional vehicle entrance for garbage collection and service vehicles from a stub of South Emerson Street. The site is surrounded by apartment and condominium complexes, and townhouses at a similar density to this site.

Zoning: The subject site is zoned “RA14-26”, Apartment Dwelling Districts. Section 34.F.3 states that one (1) building name sign is permitted in “RA” districts on the basis of one-quarter (1/4) square foot per dwelling unit, not to exceed 24 square feet for any permitted building. The project contains a total of 199 dwelling units, and three separate buildings, which permits a maximum sign area of 49.75 square feet. The applicant requests one (1) freestanding project identification sign, four (4) freestanding permit parking signs, and one (1) leasing office sign. The type and total area for the proposed signs are generally consistent with the Zoning Ordinance.

Land Use: The subject site is designated on the General Land Use Plan (GLUP) as Low-Medium Residential, 16-36 units per acre.

Neighborhood: The subject site is located in the Columbia Heights West Civic Association. The association was notified of the comprehensive sign plan application, but to date has not responded to staff’s request for comments on this request.

DISCUSSION: The owners of the Columbia Commons apartment complex are rebranding the complex as “The Fields Arlington”. As part of this effort, the applicant proposes to replace an existing 12 square foot freestanding sign at the main vehicle entrance from 8th Road South with a slightly larger (17.6 s.f.) freestanding monument-style identification sign. The applicant also seeks retroactive approval of four (4) freestanding permit parking signs and one (1) freestanding leasing office sign that have already been placed on the property.

Sign	Location	Proposed Sign Area
One (1) project ID sign	Freestanding, Main vehicle entrance from 8 th Road South	17.6 sq ft
Four (4) permit parking signs	Freestanding, One (1) at each vehicular entrance	8 sq ft each X 4 signs =32 sq ft
	Total sign area	49.6 sq ft

The Zoning Ordinance in Section 34.F.3 requires that “[o]ne (1) building name sign may be displayed for buildings permitted in “R” and “RA” Districts, other than one- and two-family and townhouse dwellings, as follows: a sign area for residential buildings to be computed on the basis of one-quarter (1/4) square foot per dwelling unit, with a maximum sign area for any permitted building of twenty-four (24) square feet”. Additionally, Section 34.D.1 also requires such signage be placed flat against the building.

The apartment complex has 199 dwelling units. Based on ¼ square feet of signs for every unit, “The Fields” is allowed 49.75 total square feet of signs. The project identification sign is 17.6

square feet, including a 1.1 square foot “Kettler” logo on the base of the sign. It will be freestanding, located at the main vehicle entrance to the apartment complex, the vehicle entrance closest to the leasing center. The applicant has agreed that the project ID sign will not be illuminated.

The Zoning Ordinance in section 34.E.11. allows freestanding permit parking signs at the perimeter of the property by right, without a permit, not to exceed two (2) square feet and four (4) feet in height, and placed a minimum of 25 feet apart. The signs installed by the applicant are eight (8) square feet and five (5) feet tall. However, these signs, when added to the proposed monument sign, do not exceed the total permitted square footage of signs for the apartment complex. One sign is placed at each of the four vehicle entrances to the property. The parking permit signs conform to the 25-foot spacing requirements, and while less than 15 feet from the street line (as required by Section 34.D.1) are not placed in ways that constitute a vision obstruction. The applicant states that the larger signs are needed due to a chronic unauthorized parking problem.

In addition to the signs allowed above, Section 34.F.5.a. allows one (1) sign of no more than 20 square feet advertising the leasing of dwelling units. The applicant is seeking retroactive approval of an 8.69 square foot freestanding leasing office sign that is placed directly in front of the leasing office entrance. The sign has the telephone number, website, and opening hours of the leasing office.

The Zoning Ordinance in section 34.A.3 gives the County Board the authority to approve a comprehensive sign plan by use permit which shall establish the placement, height, lighting, number, and square footage of signs.

CONCLUSION: The proposed freestanding signs, except where noted above, are largely consistent with the Zoning Ordinance, provide visual cues signifying the main entrance to a large multi-building residential rental community, provide guidance to prospective tenants, and warn non-residents of parking restrictions. Staff finds that the requests for one (1) freestanding building identification sign, four (4) freestanding permit parking signs, and one (1) freestanding leasing office sign are reasonable given the nine-acre size of the site. Therefore, staff recommends approval of the comprehensive sign plan, subject to the following conditions:

1. The applicant agrees to limit the total freestanding signs to a maximum of one (1) freestanding building identification sign, four (4) freestanding permit parking signs, and one (1) freestanding leasing office sign. The building identification sign shall be as shown on the drawing submitted to Arlington County from Art Display Company and dated 5/12/08 and approved by the County Board on September 13, 2008. The total area of the building identification sign shall be no more than 17.6 square feet and 4.08 feet tall from the base. The placement of the building identification sign shall be as on the plat from Art Display Company dated 3/10/08 and approved by the County Board on September 13, 2008. The four (4) freestanding permit parking signs and one (1) freestanding leasing office sign shall be as shown and at the locations as shown on the drawings submitted to Arlington County from Art Display Company and dated 3/10/08 and approved by the County Board on September 13, 2008. The total area of the four (4)

freestanding signs shall not exceed eight (8) square feet each and five (5) feet in height. The leasing office sign shall not exceed 8.69 square feet and five (5) feet in height. None of the signs shall be illuminated.

2. The applicant agrees that the area at the base of the freestanding building identification sign shall be landscaped with perennial ground cover or seasonal flowers planted in an area not less than two (2) feet in width at the base.
3. The applicant agrees to obtain from the Zoning Office retroactive sign permits for the (4) freestanding permit parking signs, and one (1) freestanding leasing office sign, and a sign permit for the proposed monument identification sign.

PREVIOUS COUNTY BOARD ACTIONS: There are no previous County Board actions on this site.