



Commissioners of Leonardtown

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LASCHELLE E. MCKAY
Town Administrator

DANIEL W. BURRIS
Mayor

Commissioners of Leonardtown LEONARDTOWN BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS December 14, 2011 at 5:00 p.m.

Attendees: Jerome DuVal, Vice-Chairman
Joan Ritchie, Member
Darren Meyer, Member

Absent: Dr. William Icenhower, Member
Dr. Herbert Winnik, Chairman

Also in attendance were: Mr. Mark Boucot, representing St. Mary's Hospital; and Cory Hiles, resident; Laschelle McKay, Town Administrator; DeAnn Adler, Plans Reviewer; and Teri Dimsey, Recorder. An official list of attendees is on file at the Town Hall.

Vice-Chairman Duval called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. and then took up the first item of business.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – August 23, 2011

Vice-Chairman Duval entertained a motion to approve the August 23, 2011 meeting minutes as presented.

Member Meyer moved to approve the August 23, 2011 minutes; seconded by Member Ritchie; no further discussion, motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS:

Case # 78-11 – 25500 Point Lookout Road – St. Mary's Hospital, Applicant –

Vice-Chairman Duval introduced the case stating that the hospital is seeking a variance from the Leonardtown Signage Ordinance for sizes and heights of four new signs MedStar Health is requesting the hospital to erect. They are also requesting approval to add a digital L.E.D. sign at their entrance on Point Lookout Road.

Ms. Adler pointed out that the town adopted a new signage ordinance in Feb. 2011, and noted that L.E.D. signs are now permitted, but only along Point Lookout Road. If they are within 100' of a

residence, there must be a public hearing and approval granted and they are very strictly regulated as to how they are to be programmed. A public hearing will be held today. Two newspaper public hearing notices were published, the property was posted with hearing notice signs, and letters were sent to the contiguous neighbors, as required. The hospital is seeking a variance for 4 proposed signs that are larger than what is allowed in our sign ordinance: Sign #1 on Point Lookout Road (with L.E.D.) proposed height of 7'10" – 54.92 s.f./ Sign #2 - proposed height of 6'11" – 37.48 s.f./ Sign #4 – proposed height of 7'3" – 26.81 s.f./ Sign #10 – proposed height of 7'3" – 26.81 s.f.. This square footage does not include the base of the sign, only the sign face, but the height number does include the base.

The Board has a copy of the minutes of the Nov. 28, 2011, P & Z meeting at which a recommendation was made to reduce the height of Sign #1, on Point Lookout Road, to 8' from the originally requested 9'3" and to reduce the square footage to a maximum of 56 s.f. from their originally requested 74 square feet. The drawings you have today reflect those requests.

Vice-Chairman Duval entertained a motion to close the regular hearing and open the public hearing. Member Ritchie made that motion. It was seconded by Member Meyer, motion passed unanimously.

Resident Cory Hiles introduced herself, and stated that she lived directly across from the hospital entrance at 25515 Point Lookout Road. She stated that her opinion is purely personal because of her location, and she is opposed to the digital sign being erected in that location. She felt that this sign would detract from her view out her front windows and is a safety hazard. She felt that a new sign is needed at the entrance, but it doesn't need to be digital. Point Lookout Road is dangerous enough without having people slow down to read a digital sign. This would be more of a distraction on that road, and we have enough of a sign problem already at the corner of Rt. 5 and Hollywood Road with all the signs that are at that intersection.

Member Meyer just wanted to make clear to Ms. Hiles that she will be looking only at the edge of the sign from her house, not the sign face, because of the orientation of the sign.

Member Ritchie stated that she shares Ms. Hiles concerns for the safety of drivers on Point Lookout Road. That road is extremely dangerous and she has concerns about the L.E.D. sign being a distraction to drivers as well. She also wondered if anyone would be able to read this L.E.D. sign considering the speed limit on that road.

There being no other comments, Vice-Chairman Duval entertained a motion to close the public hearing and re-open the regular meeting. Member Ritchie made that motion. It was seconded by Member Meyer, motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Mark Boucot, Vice President of St. Mary's Hospital, gave a brief presentation stating that there have been many instances when patients and even ambulance drivers have missed the entrance to the hospital. They have painted the curb yellow to try and make it more visible and have requested a traffic light at that intersection on numerous occasions to State Highway, to no avail. The sign needs to be more visible. It is a public safety issue not to have it more visible. Sometimes people are arriving at the

hospital in moments of great stress and need, maybe not thinking clearly, and without a clearly visible sign they may miss the entrance. In terms of the L.E.D., it would be used to advertise blood drives, prenatal classes and other community programs that benefit the public. They have gotten letters asking for this sign. The hospital provides about 9 million dollars in community benefit every year to St. Mary's County residents. They see 54,000 emergency visits every year, 30% of those visits go uncompensated. This is not going to be advertising commercially like a business would.

The Planning and Zoning Board was generally unanimously in favor of the L.E.D. portion of the proposed sign and there are already two L.E.D. signs in Leonardtown on Point Lookout Road. Their issues were mainly with size and height and we re-did our drawings to incorporate the board's recommendations.

Ms. McKay pointed out that the new ordinance does allow for L.E.D. signs on Point Lookout Road and some of them can be installed without a public hearing if they are not within 100' of a residence. CVS Pharmacy will probably come in asking for one in the future and possibly others.

Member Ritchie asked if the current entrance would be changing in the future, when the hospital does its next round of renovations.

Mr. Boucot answered that those renovations have been put on hold, so no, the entrance would not be changing in the foreseeable future.

Member Ritchie asked where exactly the new sign on Point Lookout Road would be located.

Mr. Boucot answered that the hospital would be adding a sidewalk across the median and the sign would be about two feet behind that.

Member Ritchie asked about the purpose of the sign on Moakley Street.

Mr. Boucot answered that quite a few people use that entrance, and the sign would be replacing an existing sign, the same with sign #4 at Miss Bessie Drive. There would be no sign on Hollywood Road, since they don't own that property. They get a lot of complaints that people can't find their way even once they get into the hospital, hence the need for bigger, clearer signs.

Member Duval asked if the sign on Point Lookout Road was within 100' of a residence and has the hospital looked at any other alternatives.

Mr. Boucot answered that yes the hospital entrance is less than 100' from a residence and the new proposed sign will actually not be as bright as the current sign. It will be blue and the lettering will be backlit and so there should be less glare than the old sign, but the lettering will be clear and easy to read. Also the new (perpendicular to the road) location of the sign should make it less noticeable to nearby residences.

Ms. McKay pointed out that the new ordinance is very stringent as to how often the messages can change, how bright the light can be, in order to make the signs less distracting and glaring.

Ms. Adler pointed out that the sign messages will only change about once a week or so, there is not going to be scrolling messages going across the screen.

Member Duval asked if the sign was needed as a public safety measure. Mr. Boucot stated that absolutely it was needed for public safety. As he said earlier, people miss the entrance all the time.

Member Duval agreed that the entrance is hard to find, especially at night. He also didn't believe that the sign itself would either increase or decrease the number of accidents in that area. A traffic light in that area is the answer to that problem.

Ms. McKay stated that the light is State Highway's jurisdiction and there is no money right now in their budget to do the widening project and they are unwilling to put a light in at this time. The Town has met with them several times requesting a light in that area. The Town is trying to do other small measures to improve safety at that intersection, such as increasing police presence.

Member Meyer stated that his main concern for granting this variance would be that the Board is setting a precedent for allowing large changes to the ordinance by one establishment. Mr. Boucot stated that the hospital is a unique entity, it's not a business, it's a non-profit community service, and it should be allowed signs equal to the signs the commercial establishments on Point Lookout Road already have.

Member Meyer addressed Cory Hiles, stating that he felt that the sign would not be a big detriment to her view, considering the orientation of the new sign, and that the benefits to the community outweigh her objections.

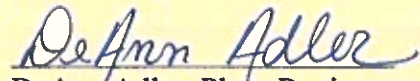
Member Meyer made a motion to approve the variance request, made by St. Mary's Hospital, for all four signs, as shown on the submitted drawings, at the heights and sizes stated at the beginning of the hearing. Vice-Chair Duval seconded the motion. The vote was - Members Duval and Meyer voting yes and Member Ritchie voting no. Motion passed.

Member Ritchie stated that she voted no because she felt the project was overkill.

Vice-Chair Ritchie made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Member Meyer, no further discussion, motion passed unanimously.

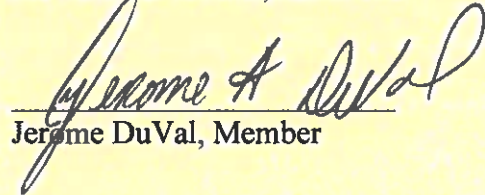
Adjournment at 5:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted:

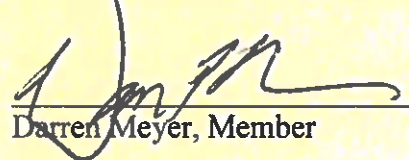

DeAnn Adler, Plans Reviewer

Approved:

Absent
Dr. Herbert Winnik, Chairman


Jerome DuVal, Member

Absent
Dr. William Icenhower, Member


Darren Meyer, Member


Joan Ritchie, Member