

MINUTES

Valdosta-Lowndes Zoning Board of Appeals

Valdosta City Hall Annex Multi-Purpose Room

300 North Lee Street, Valdosta, Georgia

March 3, 2020 2:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Nathan Brantley
Victoria Copeland
Nancy Hobby
John Hogan III

John Holt
John "Mac" McCall
Gretchen Quarterman
Allan Strickland

MEMBERS ABSENT

STAFF PRESENT

Trinni Amiot
James Horton
Tracy Tolley
Debra Tulloch

VISITORS PRESENT

Michael Burke
Jimmy Cone
Jack Langdale
Bill Nljem

Agenda Item # 1: CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chairman McCall. It was determined that a quorum of members was present. Chairman McCall thanked everyone for coming and reviewed the meeting procedures with those in attendance today.

CITY OF VALDOSTA CASE

Agenda Item # 2: APP-2020-02 — Quick Trip Corporation (1394 N St Augustine Rd)

Chairman McCall announced the case. Ms. Tolley stated that the Quick Trip Corporation was requesting a variance to LDR Section 230-9 and 230-11 as they relate to size, height, and location of signs in a CH zoning district. The property is located at 1394 N St Augustine Rd and consists of approximately 6.7 acres. The applicant intended to develop a travel center with gasoline for cars and diesel for trucks, as well as a convenience store with food and assorted items. The company submitted a sign package, and it was determined that several of the signs needed variances. The first variances relate to freestanding signage. The applicant is proposing two freestanding signs, one along N. St Augustine Rd., and one near the scales towards the rear of the property. The property is allowed three freestanding signs—one per each street frontage, with the largest being 75 square feet and 24 feet in height, with the second and third freestanding signs being no taller than 24 feet in height and 37.5 square feet in size. The secondary frontage signs must be oriented for visibility from the secondary street and shall be located a minimum distance of half the secondary lot frontage from the primary street. The main sign, located on N. St Augustine, is a total of 83.0775 sq. ft, with the secondary sign being 84.34 sq. ft., and not viewable from any street frontage, because it is serving as a large directional to direct customers to the scales. The second variance relates to canopy signs. They are allowed to have one canopy sign per road frontage per canopy. The applicant is proposing two canopies—one for diesel fuel, and one for gasoline. The gasoline canopy signs meet regulations; they are proposing two canopy signs, each at 14 sq. ft. The diesel canopy sign does not meet regulations. They are proposing one diesel canopy sign, made up of the Quick Trip logo and a diesel pricer sign, for a total of 29.75 sq. ft, rather than the 16 sq. ft. maximum. The third variance relates to the high rise sign, in terms of size and location. High rise signs are required to be at least 75 feet tall from the grade to the bottom of the sign panel, no larger than 250 sq. ft. in size, no closer than 150 feet to a ROW, and preferably located in the rear yard of the parcel. The sign is proposed to be 451.5 sq. ft in copy area, 15 to 20 feet from a ROW, and it is located in a side/secondary front yard. The schematics depict a sign ranging from 45 to 100 feet in height. If the clearance is less than 75 feet from the bottom of the lowest panel to the ground, the sign will need a height variance. The sign is intended to be a high rise sign, which requires the height to be viewed from the interstate.

The fourth variance relates to directional signage. Directionals are allowed to be no larger than 3 sq. ft. each, no taller than 2.5 feet each, and the site is allowed a cumulative directional total of 12 sq.ft. The applicant is proposing four directionals at 4 sq. ft. each, for a cumulative site total of 16 sq. ft. The fifth and last variance is for wall signage for the main building/convenience store. The applicant is proposing unframed copy area that is accentuated/set apart by a panel, which functions as a part of the sign. The total signage, including the panel, is 182.7 sq. ft. The maximum, based on the size of the proposed building, is approximately 110 sq. ft. If the applicant could frame the sign with an obvious frame, or decrease substantially the burgundy panel, the wall sign could easily meet regulations. (The QuikTrip copy area is 44.78 sq. ft, but since the burgundy panel functions as a part of the sign, it is added to the signage calculations.) Variances are intended to relieve hardship beyond design's control. Staff reviewed the application, found no hardship, and recommends denial. However, if the Board considered approving any of the variance request, staff proposed placing conditions on the approval—that no additional freestanding wall, directional, or canopy square footage would be allowed, even if it met the current applicable code.

Chairman McCall asked the Board if they had any questions. Mrs. Hobby stated that there was a lot of signage involved, and multiple variances. Mrs. Quarterman asked how big the QuickTrip parcel was proposed to be. Ms. Tolley stated it was proposed to be 6.7 acres, just under 7 acres. Mrs. Quarterman mentioned that the high-rise sign had some locational requirements. Ms. Tolley stated it did, and may be difficult to place, given the street frontages, without a variance of some sort. Vice-Chairman Strickland verified that the high-rise had to be so many feet from the ROW. Ms. Tolley stated that the high-rise was supposed to be at least 150 feet from a ROW. Mrs. Hobby verified the adjacent zoning. Mr. Holt asked if the County line was close to this property. Ms. Tolley stated it was west of the Raceway. Ms. Tolley stated the Raceway was city, as was the apartment complex across N. St. Augustine Rd.

There being no further questions for staff, Chairman McCall asked if anyone would like to speak in support of the application. Bill Nijem, an attorney with Langdale Valotten at 1007 N Patterson Street. Mr. Nijem stated that Michael Burke, a representative from QuickTrip, was also in the audience. Mr. Nijem stated the signage was to help facilitate traffic both on and off the QuickTrip parcel, and that a lot of the signs were directional or informational, geared towards tractor trailers. The concern was visibility of the signage in order to help keep the tractor trailer traffic and automobile traffic separated to assist in the circulation of the lot. Mrs. Hobby asked if there was only one high-rise sign. Mr. Nijem stated there was, and that there was an additional freestanding sign with the QuickTrip logo near N. St Augustine, and another freestanding sign for the scales towards the back of the parcel. Mrs. Quarterman stated they could have three signs, but they were combining three freestanding signs into two larger freestanding signs. Mr. Nijem stated that was the intent, and that there was a lengthy Pre-App meeting to flesh through the request. Mr. Nijem stated he was concerned that if the Board decided not to approve one of the variance requests, that they would deny all of the variances. Mr. Nijem stated he wanted to go through the variances, group by group. Mr. Nijem stated that with the directionals, they were allowed to be 2.5 sq. ft in size, 3 ft. tall, and 12 feet cumulatively. Mr. Nijem stated they were increasing the size of the directional signs due to truck traffic, but decreasing the number allowed. Mrs. Quarterman asked if there were 2 entrances from James Circle and one from James Road. Mr. Nijem pointed out the entrances/exits for Mrs. Quarterman. Mrs. Hobby stated the one at the rear was intended for trucks. Mrs. Quarterman stated there was a concrete median on James Road that the trucks couldn't navigate. Vice Chairman Strickland asked how cars would navigate a left turn with the median. Mr. Burke stated they would not be able to navigate the median either, and would have to use the truck entrance/exit. Mr. Nijem addressed the canopy signs next. Mr. Nijem stated that the property was allowed two canopy signs, and the thought was to combine all the canopy signage into one larger canopy sign rather than two smaller canopy signs. Mr. Nijem stated the next variance was for wall signs, and that there is some gray area in the ordinance as to what constitutes a sign. Mr. Nijem stated that the maroon panel was not an integral part of the sign, and was not illuminated, but staff considered that to be part of the sign. Mrs. Quarterman asked if there was something that prevented QuickTrip from making the maroon part smaller. Mr. Burke stated that their typical prototype was to include wall signage on three walls rather than just the one shown. Ms. Tolley stated that measuring the QuickTrip channel letters alone was well beneath the maximum allowed wall

sign allowance, but since the maroon panel functioned as a part of the signage, it was what pushed the signage into the variance realm. Chairman McCall asked how staff measured the signage. Ms. Tolley stated she measured the signage length by width. Mr. Nijem stated the third variance was for freestanding signage. QuickTrip was currently proposing two freestanding signs that had the cumulative total of the three that would be allowed. Mr. Nijem stated that one sign, the Scales sign, was minimally visible from the road and intended to direct trucks towards the scales. Chairman McCall verified how many freestanding signs the parcel could have. Mr. Nijem stated the property had three road frontages, which would potentially afford up to three freestanding signs. Mr. Nijem stated that he would address the high-rise sign next, and that the issues were its location and total square footage. Mr. Nijem stated that the three roadways presented a problem when the high rise was required to be at least 150 feet away from a ROW, and the only other place was the detention pond. Vice Chairman Strickland asked if it was possible, engineering wise, to put a peninsula in the detention area for the high rise. Mr. Nijem stated he was not sure that was possible. Mr. Burke stated he was not sure it was possible to engineer the detention area to accommodate the high rise, and they were trying to obtain visibility from the Interstate and visibility over the neighboring uses and trees. Mr. Burke stated that the taller the sign, the more expensive it became. Mr. Burke stated they wanted to keep it as short as possible, but clearly visible. Vice Chairman Strickland stated he would like to consider another location other than the corner. Mr. McCall asked how far from the grade that the bottom of the sign has to be. Ms. Tolley verified that the high rise panel had to be at least 75 feet from the grade. Vice Chairman Strickland asked if they could move the high rise closer to the Scales sign. Mr. Burke said it was a possibility, but it would need to be taller. Mrs. Quarterman noted that the sign was almost double (at its proposed size) the square footage allowed. Mr. Burke stated that a typical billboard was about this size, and he had worked with a Love's Travel Center near Macon that was almost twice as big as this. Mr. Nijem stated they wanted the sign to be easily readable from travelers on the Interstate. Mrs. Quarterman expressed concern that Valdosta had its own sign regulations, and was different in nature than other municipalities in the state; Mrs. Quarterman also expressed concern that this property may not be large enough to accommodate what QuickTrip wanted to do. Mr. Burke stated that there was more property available to purchase if needed/desired, and that their business model was about quality food and quality service. Mr. Nijem stated a preference that they would rather the Board vote on the variances individually rather than collectively. Vice Chairman Strickland asked if they voted on the variances, and not all variances were approved, would QuickTrip not locate in Valdosta? Mr. Nijem stated it would be a long trip back to Atlanta. Mr. Burke stated there was a team that would ultimately make the decision as whether to proceed or not.

There being no further questions, Chairman McCall asked if anyone would like to speak in support. No one spoke. Chairman McCall asked if anyone would like to speak in opposition. No one spoke. Chairman McCall asked if anyone had contacted staff's office. Ms. Tolley stated there was a phone call from a citizen who thought the property was being rezoned, and she explained the property had already been rezoned. The second phone call inquired as to what specific variances were involved.

Chairman McCall asked if the Board was ready to make a motion. Vice Chairman Strickland stated he had no issues with the directional signs, the freestanding signs, or the canopy sign, but that his concern was the high rise. Vice Chairman Strickland stated that he would prefer they look at alternative locations for the high rise. Mrs. Quarterman said she agreed.

There being no further discussion, Chairman McCall asked if someone would like to make a motion. Mrs. Hobby made a motion to approve the variance package as presented, with the condition that no further signage be permitted. Mr. Brantley seconded the motion. The motion was called and carried with a vote of 5 to 2, with Vice Chairman Strickland and Mrs. Quarterman voting against.

Agenda Item # 3: APP-2020-03 — Dover Miller Karras Langdale & Brantley (701 N Patterson St)

Chairman McCall announced the case. Nathan Brantley and Gretchen Quarterman noted they were abstaining from discussion regarding this case and sat with the crowd. Ms. Tolley stated that Dover Miller Karras Langdale & Brantley is requesting variances to LDR Section 214-1 Table 1 as it pertains to

setbacks and impervious maximums and a variance to LDR Section 222-2 as it pertains to the minimum number of parking spaces. The property is located at 701 N Patterson St on a parcel that is zoned C-C and R-P, and is in the Historic District as well. The applicant is proposing to remove an existing garage and replace it with a 1291 sq. ft. addition. The addition is extending to the side and rear property lines, so the applicant is asking for 8 feet side yard setback variance and for a 25 feet rear yard setback variance. (R-P has a 8 ft side yard setback and a 25 ft rear yard setback.) The second variance pertains to parking. Offices require 3 parking spaces per 1000 sq ft of GFA. This building and the addition would require a total of 18 parking spaces. However, the applicant intend to add more parking at some point in the future on nearby property. The third variance is to impervious maximums. The C-C portion will be 6% over the 75% impervious cap, so the applicant is asking for a 6% imperious variance. The last variance is to the rear yard setbacks for the rea of the existing office/deck. The applicant is asking for a rear yard variance of 17 feet for the deck and 7 feet for the existing office. Staff reviewed the application, found no hardship, and recommends for denial. Ms. Tolley made a note that the case was heard at the HPC meeting the previous night before.

Vice Chairman Strickland asked if the HPC had concerns about removal of the existing building. Ms. Tolley noted that Mr. James Horton, Historic Preservation Planner, was in the audience and could speak if the Board had questions. Mr. Horton expressed that the HPC approved the demolition of the existing garage, with the building of a new addition. Mrs. Hobby asked if the HPC had approved the addition. Ms. Tolley stated that the HPC had approved the addition. Mr. Horton confirmed that the HPC had approved the addition. Vice Chairman Strickland asked if the HPC had approved something similar. Mr. Horton stated the HPC had approved a brick structure, but not with extruding mortar. Mrs. Hobby asked if the law firm already owned the property for the nearby parking. Ms. Tolley stated that she had discussed the future parking would either need a variance for non-adjacent parking, or to combine the parcels somehow.

Chairman McCall asked if anyone would like to speak in support of the application. Mr. Jack Langdale, 701 N Patterson St., and a partner in the firm, spoke on behalf of the application. Mr. Langdale stated they were fortunate to have experienced growth that necessitated an expansion; they spoke to Mr. Cone, who came up with a best-circumstances plan for expansion. Mr. Langdale stated that the existing garage was not in the best shape, and was currently used for storage; the firm intended to remove a dilapidated building and replace it in the exact same spot with a new building. Mr. Langdale stated he owned a parcel immediately adjacent, and the Langdale Company owned several parcels nearby, and that they intended to recombine for access to the proposed new parking.

Chairman McCall asked if anyone else would like to speak in support of the application. Jimmy Cone, architect, 1804 Plum Street, spoke in support. Mr. Cone stated that the existing building had a roof structure that was rotting and that the height of the building was not accommodating, especially since the floor needed to be raised a few inches. Mr. Cone emphasized that the building was currently on the property lines currently, and that where the new building would be situated, it wouldn't be clearly visible driving down the street.

Chairman McCall asked if anyone else would like to speak in support of the application. No one spoke. Chairman McCall asked if anyone would like to speak in opposition. No one spoke. Chairman McCall asked Ms. Tolley if anyone had called her office. Ms. Tolley stated no one had called.

There being no more discussion, Chairman McCall called for a motion. Vice Chairman Strickland made a motion to approve as presented. Mr. Holt seconded the motion. The motion was called and carried with a vote of 5-0-2, with Mr. Brantley and Mrs. Quarterman abstaining.

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Agenda Item # 4: Approval of Minutes: February 4, 2020

Mr. Brantley and Mrs. Quarterman resumed their seats at the Board table.

Chairman McCall asked if any changes needed to be made to the draft minutes. There being none, Chairman McCall called for a motion regarding the February 4, 2020 meeting minutes. Vice-Chairman Strickland made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Mr. Hogan seconded the motion. The motion was called and carried with a vote of 7-0.

Agenda Item # 5: Attendance Review

Chairman McCall noted that all ZBOA members were in attendance.

Agenda Item # 6: Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:41 p.m.

/s/ John "Mac" McCall
John "Mac" McCall, Chairman

June 3, 2020
Date