



Charles County Board of Commissioners Public Hearing of July 22, 2025

Department of Planning and Growth Management Staff Report

Master Sign Plan for Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Properties

Bill 2025-06 Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) #24-186

Applicant: GGCAL Waldorf Holdings, LLC

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I. BACKGROUND

Section 297-447 of the Charles County Zoning Ordinance requires the Planning Commission to first consider the proposed amendments and provide a recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners as to whether the requested Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) should be granted. The Planning Commission's recommendation is further discussed in Section V. of this Staff Report. In your examination of the proposed amendments, please consider the following:

The Transit Oriented Development (TOD) zoning district was first created by the County Commissioners through the adoption of Ordinance No. 99-92 (ZTA #46-26), which became effective on November 4, 1999. The TOD zoning district currently encompasses approximately 143 acres located entirely with the Development District on the southbound side of U.S. Route 301 adjacent to Prince George's County, and, along the northbound side of U.S. Route 301 in the area south of Mattawoman-Beantown Road and north of Sub-Station Road. On October 27, 2004, the Charles County Commissioners granted approval for an overlay zone of TOD – Transit Oriented Development for the subject properties under Planned Development Zone Amendment (PDZA) application #00-07, and Charles County Commissioner Bill 2004-08. A Master Plan for the development was established at that time. The base zones of the subject properties were CB – Central Business, CC – Community Commercial, IG – General Industrial, and RH – Residential High Density. To date, there are several commercial / residential land uses actively under construction or currently being reviewed for approval consideration.

Locations of these TOD zoned properties in Charles County are illustrated on the Zoning Map included within the Appendices of this Staff Report. The northwestern parcels contain approximately 89 acres, and the southeast parcels contain approximately 54 acres.

In accordance with § 297-110 of the Zoning Ordinance, it is the purpose of the Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Zone to *"establish standards for the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan recommendations for master-planned developments which will promote the integrated development of high-density transit-oriented development along major transportation arteries where transit opportunities exist and in the vicinity of existing or planned transit stops in a manner that will support existing or future public transportation systems."*

This zone contains 16 additional purposes, of which one (1) directly pertains to the proposed ZTA application:

(10) To ensure that the development is architecturally integrated by requiring an internal policy mechanism, such as a design code.

II. REQUESTED AMENDMENT

This amendment seeks to add new text to the Charles County Zoning Ordinance to allow signage for a TOD zoned project to comply with a Master Sign Plan, which will govern the location, number, height, illumination, size and design of the signage. Affected portions of the Charles County Zoning Ordinance include Article VII, Section 297-109, regarding Design guidelines and requirements of the TOD zone and Article XIX, Section 297-319, regarding General provisions of the Sign regulations. More specifically, Section 297-109 C. (4) and Section 297-319 C.

III. APPLICANT JUSTIFICATION

In accordance with Section 297-447 C. of the Zoning Ordinance, an application for a text amendment shall set forth the following required information:

- (1)** The new text to be added and the existing text, if any, to be deleted or amended.

The text proposed to be added is referenced within Exhibit 1, p.1 and p.2 of the Applicant's application materials.

- (2)** The specific reasons why such a text amendment is necessary and should be approved by the County Commissioners.

Within Exhibit 2 of the Applicant's application materials, a justification statement summarizing the proposed amendments has been supplied by Mr. Eric M. DeVito, General Counsel.

Within the statement, the Applicant offers the following justification for approval of the amendments:

"The TOD Zone in Charles County integrates multiple uses, including residential and commercial in the same planned communities, similar to a mixed-use development. The appearance and quality of TOD developments is improved when there is consistency and uniformity of signage so as to promote a sense of place and community. The Applicant is requesting a change from the standards in the Zoning Ordinance with respect to signage for the TOD Zone in order to enhance the appearance of a TOD development and provide uniform standards for signage and branding to promote a higher quality presence in the community. The Applicant is requesting that the same master sign plan alternative design standards presently existing for the BP (Business Park) Zone be extended to the TOD Zone. The Applicant's proposed language change to the Zoning Ordinance is the same language presently existing in Article VI, Section 297-91 E. (1)(b)[8] of the Zoning Ordinance as alternative design and development standards for the BP Zone."

The existing language referenced by the Applicant under Section 297-91 E. (1)(b)[8] states: "A master sign plan governing the location, number, height, illumination, size and design of signage." This language was adopted into the Zoning Ordinance by the County Commissioners via Bill 2021-08 (ZTA #21-164), which codified an Applicant's ability to pursue approval of an Alternative Design and Development Code in the BP (Business Park) Zone. Please reference the staff analysis of this construct as presented in the corresponding Planning Commission Report from August 30, 2021:

Alternate Design & Development Code:

The Applicant's proposal to introduce an Alternative Design and Development Code criteria for the Business Park (BP) Zone, under § 297-91 E., is similar to the existing framework for Planned Development Zone (PDZ) applications and is supported by staff because it is recognized as a viable avenue to foster flexibility and innovation of design. The Alternative Design and Development Code shall govern the location and design of signage, landscaping, and parking within the Business Park. The standards set forth may not strictly conform to and may vary from the standards set forth in the Zoning Ordinance in order to encourage and promote economic vitality, enhance the community's appearance, and foster flexibility and innovation of design. The Planning Commission would be authorized to review and approve the Alternative Design and Development Code. Once initially

approved, the Planning Director would be authorized to approve minor amendments. Major amendments would require re-evaluation by the Planning Commission.

The currently approved Waldorf Station (Formerly Waldorf Crossing) Design Guidelines and Standards applicable to development in the TOD zoning district does not permit the desired Master Sign Plan flexibility. More specifically, Section 6.1, page 50, regarding Signage design intent currently states that signage “*will comply with the Current County Sign Ordinance Article XIX...*” Therefore, the Applicant (GGCAL Waldorf Holdings, LLC) is pursuing amendments to codify their ability to instead pursue Master Sign Plan governance of their location, number, height, illumination, size and design of signage, via an Alternative Design and Development Code.

IV. STAFF ANALYSIS

County staff has reviewed the proposed zoning text amendment, including the associated justification letter, and offer the following findings for the Planning Commission’s consideration:

Analysis of Proposed Amendments

The Alternative Design and Development Codes, containing a Master Sign Plan, for the Redevelopment of Greensward Technology Park (aka Berry Pointe) and the White Plains Corporate Business Park, in the Business Park (BP) zoning designation, were both required to be approved by the Planning Commission in accordance with Chapter 297-91 E. (1) (c); therefore, should this amendment proposal for the Transit Oriented Development (TOD) zoning designation ultimately be adopted by the County Commissioners, it is likely that a revision to the previously approved Waldorf Station (Formerly Waldorf Crossing) Design Guidelines and Standards, to incorporate a Master Sign Plan, will necessitate approval from the Planning Commission in accordance with Chapter 297-109 E. (4), which states:

“In approving a design and development code, the Planning Commission shall be guided by the purposes of the planned development zone, the orderly development of the existing PRD, MX, PUD, TOD, PEP, or WPC Zone and the other provisions of this article.”

If upon review of the future Master Sign Plan, it is determined that the revisions to the existing code can be considered minor changes, the Planning Director has the discretion to approve them administratively in accordance with Chapter 297-109 E. (5). Such a determination will be made once the revised Waldorf Station (Formerly Waldorf Crossing) design code has been formally submitted for analysis and the scope of the proposed alternative signage regulations are apparent.

With respect to the 2016 Comprehensive Plan, County staff from Preservation and Long-Range Planning (PLRP) offer the following finding:

The ZTA’s proposal to allow development in the TOD Zone to provide a Master Sign Plan would not pose any inconsistencies or conflicts with the 2016 Comprehensive Plan.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

County staff has thoroughly evaluated the justification for ZTA #24-186 and do not find cause to object to the Applicant’s request. Allowing the requested signage flexibility in the TOD zoning district will facilitate alternative proposals comparable to those that have already been successfully

integrated into commercial development projects within the BP zoning district. Adoption of this amendment does not permit an applicant to bypass adherence to codified signage regulations within Article XIX of the Zoning Ordinance, only provide a mechanism to proffer attractive and cohesive alternatives for approval consideration.

Should this amendment proposal be adopted by the County Commissioners, it is likely that a revision to the previously approved Waldorf Station Design Guidelines and Standards, to incorporate a Master Sign Plan, will necessitate approval from the Planning Commission. Such a determination will be made by the Planning Director once a revised Design Code has been formally submitted for analysis and the scope of the proposed alternative signage regulations are apparent.

On Monday, May 5, 2025, the Planning Commission held a Public Hearing on ZTA #24-186. There were no public speakers at the hearing or comments submitted in advance. The Planning Commission members posed questions to County staff regarding major vs minor approval authority, precedent setting, and sign regulation consistency throughout the county, which were answered to their satisfaction. At the conclusion of the Public Hearing, the record was closed, and the Planning Commission subsequently conducted their Work Session. At the conclusion of the Work Session, the Planning Commission voted unanimously to recommend approval of ZTA #24-186, Master Sign Plan for Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Properties, as presented.

On Tuesday, June 10, 2025, the Board of Commissioners conducted their Briefing/Introduction to designate this amendment proposal as Bill 2025-06 and schedule the Public Hearing date of Tuesday, July 22, 2025.

VI. APPENDICES

All relevant application materials, maps and reports, associated with Bill 2025-06 (ZTA #24-186) are uploaded into the Agenda Packet on Granicus for your review and consideration.