

Department of Community Planning and Economic Development – Planning Division
Variance
BZZ-4674

Date: February 25, 2009

Applicant: Lisa Austin, Mn/DOT Office of Transit

Address of Property: 516 2nd Avenue North

Project Name: Ramp B Signage

Contact Person and Phone: Bill Prince, 612-673-3901

Planning Staff and Phone: Jacob Steen, 612-673-2264

Date Application Deemed Complete: January 27, 2010

End of 60-Day Decision Period: March 25, 2010

Ward: 07 **Neighborhood Organization:** Downtown Minneapolis Neighborhood Association, adjacent to North Loop

Existing Zoning: B4S-1 Downtown Service District
 DP Downtown Parking Overlay District

Zoning Plate Number: 19

Legal Description: N/A

Proposed Use: Signage for a Principal Parking Facility

Concurrent Review:

 Variance to increase the maximum height of two (2) flat wall signs

 Variance to increase the maximum projection of three (3) projecting, dynamic changeable copy sign

 Variance to allow three (3) dynamic changeable copy signs on one zoning lot

Applicable zoning code provisions: Chapter 525, Article IX Variances, Specifically Section 525.520(21) To vary the number, type, height, area or location of allowed signs on property located in an OR2 or OR3 District or a commercial, downtown or industrial district, pursuant to Chapter 543, On-Premise Signs.

Background: Bill Prince, on behalf of Mn/Dot, has applied for three variances as part of their update to the wayfinding signage plan for Ramp B in anticipation of the 2010 opening of Target Field. The subject site is approximately 130,472 sq. ft. and consists of a Principal Parking Facility that spans more than a city block, constructed primarily in the air rights above Interstate 394 and 2nd Avenue North.

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The ramp has street frontages on 3rd Avenue North and 5th Street North. 2nd Avenue North runs under a portion of the structure. Ramp entrances are on 5th Street and 2nd Avenue North.

The B4S-1 Downtown Service District allows for a maximum wall sign height of 28 feet. Projecting signs are allowed a maximum projection of four feet. The sign chapter has been recently changed to allow dynamic changeable copy signs, subject to the following applicable standards:

- The dynamic changeable copy sign shall be limited to letters or numbers only. The background of the dynamic changeable copy sign shall be black and the text shall be colored.
- There shall not be more than one (1) dynamic changeable copy sign located on a zoning lot.
- The dynamic changeable copy sign shall be located on a primary building wall or be part of a freestanding sign.
- The maximum size of the dynamic changeable copy sign shall be sixteen (16) square feet. Dynamic changeable copy signs shall be included in the calculation of the total permitted sign area.
- The copy of the dynamic changeable copy sign shall remain static for a period of not less than one (1) hour.
- Between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. the maximum luminance shall be 5,000 nits and between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m. the maximum luminance shall be 500 nits.

The applicant is proposing to erect new signage at the Mn/DOT owned downtown ramps A, B, and C as part of a comprehensive signage identification program in anticipation of the opening of Target Field. Each facility will have color-coded signage intended to assist event attendees to differentiate between the three ramps which have similar brick facades. At Ramp B, the applicant is proposing two flat wall signs, ten feet in diameter: one facing NE, down 2nd Avenue at a height of 60 feet; and one facing NW, down 5th Street at approximately 41 feet above grade. Additionally, the applicant is proposing three dynamic changeable copy wall signs around the perimeter of the ramp to identify the primary entrance points. All of the dynamic changeable copy signs are intended to project approximately five feet, as opposed to the four feet as allowed by the sign ordinance.

Findings Required by the Minneapolis Zoning Code:

- 1. The property cannot be put to a reasonable use under the conditions allowed and strict adherence to the regulations of this zoning ordinance would cause undue hardship.**

Wall signs: The applicant is seeking a variance to increase the maximum height of two non-illuminated flat wall signs. The subject property is a parking ramp on a large site covering over two and a half acres. The applicant states that the proposed wall signs would enable event attendees to locate the parking ramp from the two primary approaches, 2nd Avenue North and 5th Street, at a distance of at least 300 feet. The signage would allow visitors that are unfamiliar with downtown Minneapolis and the Target Center/Target Field area to distinguish between Ramps A, B and C which are all within four blocks of each other. Signage directing automobile traffic to a public parking facility is a reasonable use on a site that covers more than two and a half acres. Strict adherence to the regulations of the zoning ordinance would prevent appropriate signage causing undue hardship.

Dynamic changeable copy signs: The applicant is seeking a variance to increase the number of dynamic changeable copy signs on a single zoning lot to three, and increase the maximum allowed projection of these signs to five feet. The purpose of installing the dynamic changeable copy sign is to quickly and effectively inform customers about parking ramp entrances and provide them with information such as rates and vacancy. The property fronts on two streets, with access points on 2nd Ave and 5th street. Staff believes that the proposed signage is a reasonable use on the site and strict adherence to the regulations of the zoning ordinance would prevent adequate signage for locating the entrances.

- 2. The circumstances are unique to the parcel of land for which the variance is sought and have not been created by any persons presently having an interest in the property. Economic considerations alone shall not constitute an undue hardship if reasonable use for the property exists under the terms of the ordinance.**

Wall signs: With the planned opening of the Target Field, the immediate vicinity and the intended customer have changed and the ramp no longer caters primarily to commuters. The ramps have fairly similar brick facades and are all interconnected through skyways, which could lead to confusion between the ramps, particularly for parking patrons attending events that are unfamiliar with the surroundings. Confusion between ramps would have negative implications during high traffic events when the ramps are experiencing high levels of use. The parcel occupies more than a city block but only has two vehicle access points. Staff believes the increased sign height would allow drivers to identify the ramp from a long distance and limit unnecessary turns and traffic along the streets adjoining the ramp. The conditions upon which the variance is requested are unique to the parcel and were not created by the applicant.

Dynamic changeable copy signs: The structure occupies more than a city block with multiple access points for automobile and pedestrian traffic. Both 2nd Avenue and 5th Street have one-way traffic which makes it difficult for customers to see the entrances. Staff believes that the additional dynamic changeable copy signs and the increase in projection would allow drivers to make an earlier decision on whether to enter the ramp and how to locate the entrances, limiting unnecessary turns and traffic along the streets adjoining the ramp. The conditions upon which the variance is requested are unique to the parcel and were not created by the applicant.

- 3. The granting of the variance will be in keeping with the spirit and intent of the ordinance and will not alter the essential character of the locality or be injurious to the use or enjoyment of other property in the vicinity.**

Staff believes that the granting of these variances would be in keeping with the spirit and intent of the ordinance and will not alter the essential character of the locality. The proposed signs would meet all other requirements of the zoning code and overall site signage is well under the maximum allowed signage area. However, the proposed signs will eliminate the need for existing sandwich board signs located near ramp entrances and staff recommends that they are removed if the proposed signs are erected. Staff believes that the signs are in keeping with the scale and character of the ramp and other

buildings in the vicinity and that the proposed signage will improve ramp identification, contributing to a reduction of unnecessary traffic in the vicinity.

- 4. The proposed variance will not substantially increase the congestion of the public streets, or increase the danger of fire, or be detrimental to the public welfare or endanger the public safety.**

Granting the variance would likely decrease the congestion of area streets since drivers would be more effectively able to locate the ramp as they approach and reduce confusion between the numerous ramps in the direct vicinity. Granting the variance would likely have no impact on fire safety, nor would the proposed signs be detrimental to the public welfare or endanger the public safety.

Findings required by the Minneapolis Zoning Code for a sign adjustment:

- 1. The sign adjustment will not significantly increase or lead to sign clutter in the area or result in a sign that is inconsistent with the purpose of the zoning district in which the property is located.**

Wall signs: The proposed wall signs would be 41 feet and 60 feet above grade and are minimal in size compared to the overall surface area of the ramps. The applicant intends the signs to be placed so that only one sign is viewable from any given point. The proposed wall signs are consistent with the B4S-1 Downtown Service District because they help to safely and effectively direct drivers to a parking ramp that is vital for the operation of facilities in the immediate vicinity.

Dynamic changeable copy signs: The proposed dynamic changeable copy signs would act as the primary signage for street level navigation to ramp entrances. The proposed signs are positioned to clearly identify ramp access but only so that one sign face is visible from any approach. Staff believes that if the existing sandwich board signs near ramp entrances are removed, that the proposed signs will reduce visible sign clutter.

- 2. The sign adjustment will allow a sign that relates in size, shape, materials, color, illumination and character to the function and architectural character of the building or property on which the sign will be located.**

Wall signs: The proposed wall signs are flat, non-illuminated, painted aluminum. They are color-coded with bright blue paint and a white letter “B” to differentiate between Ramps A and C, which have red and green color schemes respectively. It is staff’s opinion that the signs will relate to the function and character of the building and assist in making a distinction between the multiple ramps in the area.

Dynamic changeable copy signs: The proposed changeable copy dynamic signs are directly related to the function and character of the building. They will be constructed of an aluminum and Lexan frame which houses the variable message display indicating the pricing and availability of parking. The sign

will be internally illuminated so that only the letters are backlit. The signs will be painted bright blue and white to correspond with the color-coding of Ramps A, B and C

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation of the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development – Planning Division for the variance:

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development – Planning Division recommends that the Board of Adjustment adopt the above findings and **approve** the variance to increase the maximum height of one flat wall sign to 41 feet, and to increase the maximum height of one flat wall sign to 60 feet for the property located 516 2nd Avenue North in the B4S-1 Downtown Service District subject to the following conditions:

1. The applicant must obtain sign permits.

Recommendation of the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development – Planning Division for the variance:

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development – Planning Division recommends that the Board of Adjustment adopt the above findings and **approve** the variance to increase the maximum projection of three (3) projecting, dynamic changeable copy signs from 4 feet to 5 feet, for the property located at 516 2nd Avenue North in the B4S-1 Downtown Service District subject to the following conditions:

1. The applicant must obtain sign permits.
2. All existing sandwich board signs advertising public parking are removed within 50 feet of the newly erected signs.

Recommendation of the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development – Planning Division for the variance:

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development – Planning Division recommends that the Board of Adjustment adopt the above findings and **approve** the variance to allow three (3) dynamic changeable copy signs on a single zoning lot for the property located at 516 2nd Avenue North in the B4S-1 Downtown Service District subject to the following conditions:

1. The applicant must obtain sign permits.
2. All existing sandwich board signs advertising public parking are removed within 50 feet of the newly erected signs.

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Attachments:

- 1) Written descriptions and findings submitted by the applicant
- 2) Zoning map
- 3) Sign schematics
- 4) Site plan/floor plan
- 5) Building elevations
- 6) Photographs