



DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Planning Division

m e m o r a n d u m

TO: The Urbana Zoning Board of Appeals

FROM: Paul Lindahl, Planner II

DATE: November 9, 2007

SUBJECT: ZBA 2007-MAJ-09: A request to allow an Electronic Message Board (LED) Sign to increase the frequency of message changes from once per three minutes to once per ten seconds at the south east corner of Windsor and Philo Roads in the B-3, General Business Zoning District

Introduction and Background

This case is a request by The Atkins Group to allow an Electronic Message Board (LED) Sign to increase the frequency of message changes from once per three minute to once per ten seconds. The subject property is located on the southeast corner of Windsor and Philo Roads in the B-3, General Business Zoning District. Section IX-4.G.2 of the Urbana Zoning Ordinance restricts the frequency of message changes on Electronic Message Board (LED) signs to no more than once every three minutes. In addition, Zoning Ordinance Section IX-4.G.1 prohibits electronic message board signs from being animated, flashing, multi-colored, or scrolling. Electronic message board signs are permitted by right up to 30% of the sign allowance for the property.

The proposed sign would be constructed for The Pines at Stone Creek Commons, a neighborhood business center being constructed as part of a larger office/retail development at the southeast corner of Windsor and Philo Roads. The applicants state that this type of development constructed under a common design theme is best served by a flexible approach to signage. The purpose of the message board is to provide all businesses at The Pines visibility from Windsor and South Philo Roads without creating an oversized shopping center structure. The message board will allow the overall size of sign to be smaller but still display the names of all the tenants.

In lieu of constructing a larger shopping center sign, the petitioners propose a variance to allow an electronic message board message to change more frequently. In the B-3 zoning district a General Shopping Center could have a shopping center sign of 150-square feet plus an additional 50-square feet allowance for a tenant directory. The petitioners propose to have a total sign area of only 115-square feet with an electronic message board of only 33.33-square feet which at 29% of the entire sign complies with the restriction that message boards be no more than 30% of the total sign area.

The issue is whether there are certain aspects of the property which justify the requested variance. The petitioners believes that erecting a larger shopping center sign would undermine the visual aesthetic of the development.

Adjacent Land Uses and Zoning Designations

This area is part of southeast Urbana that is developing a mix of residential and commercial uses. The majority of The Pines at Stone Creek Commons shopping center is currently under construction. Further north across Windsor Road and also under construction is the Meijer Superstore and gas station which is also zoned B-3, General Business. To the west is the University of Illinois Pomology agricultural research farm. In the event the University sells or leases the land for development the Urbana Comprehensive Plan designates the area for a future land use of community business at the southwest corner of Philo and Windsor Roads with mixed residential and park development further to the west. On the northwest corner of Philo and Windsor Roads is an electrical utility substation with church owned land further to the north and west. There are no existing or proposed residential dwellings within approximately 725-feet of the proposed sign.

Zoning and Land Use Table

The following is a summary of surrounding zoning and land uses for the subject site:

Location	Zoning	Existing Land Use	2005 Comprehensive Plan – Future Land Use
Subject Property	B-3, General Business	Commercial - Retail	Community Business
North	B-3, General Business	Commercial - Retail	Regional Business
South	B-3, General Business	Commercial - Retail	Community Business
East	B-3, General Business	Commercial - Office	Office
West	County AG-2 Agriculture	Agriculture / Institutional	Community Business

Issues and Discussion

Visibility of signage is a primary requirement of all retailers. Shopping Centers pose a special challenge when multiple tenants seek to have sign visibility on the road frontage. Such traditional sign methods can result in an appearance that is not consistent with the aesthetic objectives of the project. This location in south Urbana is a newly developing area with a Meijer Superstore adjacent to the north. It is the petitioner's goal to become a destination shopping environment and the signage is considered by the petitioners to be supplementary yet necessary

to attract viable retail merchants.

The location of The Pines at a key southern gateway to Urbana is worthy of a high quality approach to site design and signage treatments. With that in mind the orientation of the retail center was planned in an effort to develop a unique neighborhood shopping experience. This orientation does not focus on frontage to South Philo Road or Windsor Roads and so does not allow tenants to optimize visibility by use of conventional signage methods.

The original signage concept for The Pines was to develop a monument sign that would accommodate the names and logos of all the tenants in the shopping center. After generating and reviewing multiple designs, the petitioners determined that maximizing the dimensions of the monument sign (as allowed by the City of Urbana) would not have the desired result. The petitioners believe that the design aesthetic of The Pines would be undermined if a large conventional shopping center sign were installed showing each tenant's name and logo. According to the petitioners such a sign would be too large and would not complement the architecture of the shopping center.

Instead the petitioners propose "...a tastefully designed and fully integrated monument sign and electronic message board that are consistent with the materials and colors of the adjacent retail center..." The goal of the proposed shopping center sign and LED message board is to eliminate the need for independent tenant signs and thus maintain a more uniform and unique environment. The purpose of the LED message board is to provide all businesses of The Pines visibility to Windsor and South Philo Roads, but to allow the overall size of the shopping center sign to be smaller while still displaying the names of all the tenants.

The petitioner's state that the 3-minute image duration permitted by the Zoning Ordinance will not accommodate sufficient cycles for enough of the business tenants' names to be viewed on the LED message board in the time a car might pass. The duration needed for a vehicle to traverse the stretch of property within viewing distance of the sign will be limited, and a car could pass by within the 10 second period if it does not have to stop at the intersection. The petitioners state the LED sign minimum time delay should be at least 10 seconds to allow a sufficient viewing opportunity for multiple tenants to be represented. Under these conditions it is likely that many drivers will still only experience two or three tenant representations lasting 10 seconds as they wait for a signal change at the intersection and then pass the sign.

Variance Criteria

Section XI-3 of the Urbana Zoning Ordinance requires the Zoning Board of Appeals to make findings based on variance criteria. The following is a review of the criteria as they pertain to this case and the criteria outlined in the ordinance:

- 1. Are there special circumstances or special practical difficulties with reference to the parcel concerned, in carrying out the strict application of the ordinance?*

The purpose of the message board is to provide all businesses of The Pines visibility to Windsor

and South Philo Roads. The practical difficulty is that the 3-minute image duration permitted by the Zoning Ordinance will not accommodate sufficient cycles for enough of the business tenants' names to be viewed on the LED message board in the time a car might pass. The special circumstance is that the design aesthetic of The Pines would be undermined if a large conventional shopping center sign were installed showing each tenant's name and logo.

2. *The proposed variance will not serve as a special privilege because the variance requested is necessary due to special circumstances relating to the land or structure involved or to be used for occupancy thereof which is not generally applicable to other lands or structures in the same district.*

Visibility of signage is a primary requirement of all retailers. However traditional sign methods could result in an appearance that is not consistent with the aesthetic objectives of the project. The location of The Pines at a key southern gateway to the city is worthy of a high quality approach to site design and signage treatments. With that in mind the orientation of the retail center was planned in an effort to develop a unique neighborhood shopping experience. This orientation does not focus on frontage to South Philo Road or Windsor Roads and so does not allow tenants to optimize visibility by use of conventional signage methods.

3. *The variance requested was not the result of a situation or condition having been knowingly or deliberately created by the Petitioner.*

The original signage concept was to develop a monument sign that would accommodate the names and logos of all the tenants. After generating and reviewing multiple designs it was determined that maximizing the dimensions of the monument sign as allowed by the City of Urbana would not maintain the visual aesthetic desired by the petitioners. The allowable signage would be too large and would not complement the architecture of the surrounding environment. The petitioners still have the option of the conventional approach, but feel that it would undermine their efforts to create a superior design environment at The Pines.

4. *The variance will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood.*

The goal of the proposed shopping center sign and LED message board is to eliminate the need for independent "tenant" monument signs and thus maintain a more uniform and unique environment. The proposed sign is designed to be a fully integrated monument sign and message board that are consistent with the high quality of materials and colors of The Pines.

5. *The variance will not cause a nuisance to the adjacent property.*

This is a newly developed area with a Meijer Superstore and gas station / convenience store adjacent to the north. The Pines signage including the increased cycle time of the LED board will not make a significant impact by comparison. The proposed sign will not be animated, flashing, multi-colored, or scrolling. The sign will not be a nuisance to the adjacent properties. The sign should not cause a traffic safety hazard or motorist distraction.

6. *The variance represents generally the minimum deviation from requirements of the Zoning Ordinance necessary to accommodate the request.*

The petitioners state the minimum time delay needs to be 10 seconds to allow a sufficient viewing opportunity for multiple tenants to be represented. The duration needed for a vehicle to traverse the stretch of property within viewing distance of the sign will be limited and could easily be accomplished within the 10-second period. Under these conditions it is likely that many drivers will only experience two or three tenant representations as they wait for a signal change and then pass the sign.

7. *The variance requested is the result of practical difficulties or particular hardship in the way of carrying out the strict letter of the Zoning Ordinance relating to the use, construction, or alteration of buildings or structures or the use of land.*

The purpose of the message board is to provide all businesses of The Pines visibility to Windsor and South Philo Roads while reducing the amount of signage overall. The practical difficulty is that the three minute image duration permitted by the Zoning Ordinance will not accommodate sufficient cycles for enough of the business tenants' names to be viewed on the LED message board in the time a car might pass. The special circumstance according to the petitioners is that the design aesthetic of The Pines would be undermined if a large conventional shopping center sign were installed showing each tenant's name and logo.

Options

The Zoning Board of Appeals has the following options in this case:

- a. The Urbana Zoning Board of Appeals may recommend approval of the variance as requested based on the findings outlined in this memo;
- b. The Urbana Zoning Board of Appeals may recommend approval of the variance as requested along with certain terms and conditions. If the Urbana Zoning Board of Appeals elects to add conditions they should articulate findings accordingly; or
- c. The Zoning Board of Appeals may recommend denial of the variance request. If the Zoning Board of Appeals elects to do so, the Board should articulate findings supporting its recommendation of denial.

Staff Recommendation

Based on the findings outlined herein, and without the benefit of considering additional evidence that may be presented at the public hearing, staff recommends that the Zoning Board of Appeals forward Case ZBA 2007-MAJ-09 to the Urbana City Council with a recommendation of **APPROVAL** with the following conditions:

1. That the variance shall allow the frequency of message changes to no more than once every ten seconds.
2. That the monument sign with electronic message board be constructed in substantial conformity with the submitted site plan illustrating the design and location.
3. That the variance shall not extend to any other signs on the property, nor to any replacement freestanding sign(s).
4. That the sign shall otherwise conform to Article IX, Comprehensive Sign Regulations, of the Urbana Zoning Ordinance, including other requirements for electronic message boards provided in Section IX-4 of the Ordinance.

Attachments:

- Exhibit A: Location Map
- Exhibit B: Zoning Map
- Exhibit C: Existing Land Use Map w/ Aerial Photo
- Exhibit D: Future Land Use Map
- Exhibit E: Application
- Exhibit F: Sign Illustrations

Cc:

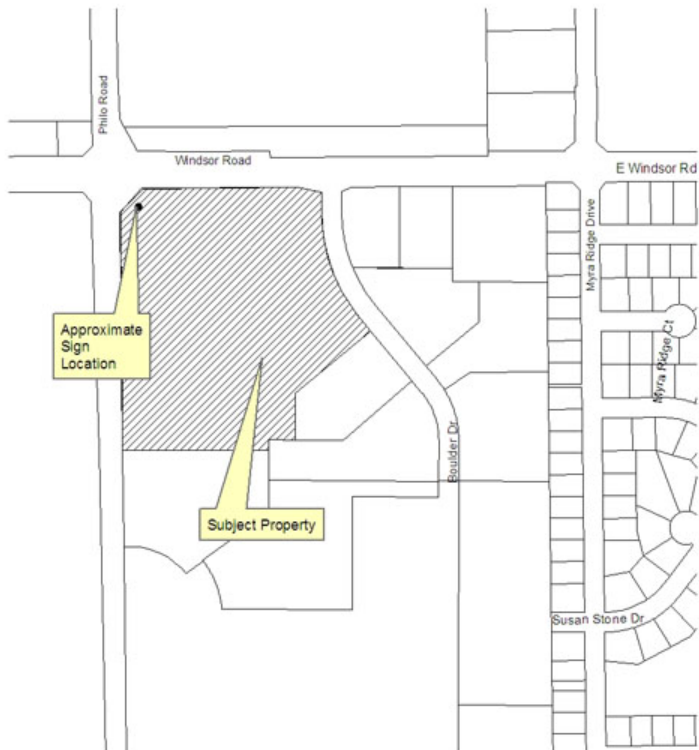
The Atkins Group, Inc.
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201 W. Springfield Ave., Suite 300
Champaign, IL 61824-0140

Smith-Burgett Architects
102-A W. Main Street
Urbana, IL 61801

Location Map

EXHIBIT "A"



ZBA Case: 2007-MAJ-09

Subject: A request for a Major Variance to allow an Electronic Message Board (LED) Sign to increase the frequency of message changes from once per three minutes to six times per minute.

Location: 2710 S. Philo Road

Zoning District: B-3, General Business

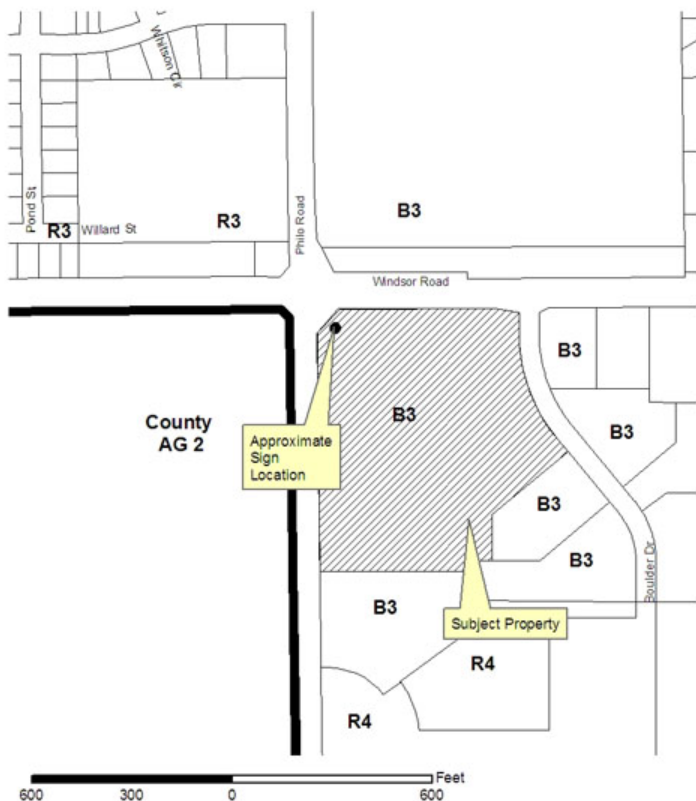
Petitioner: The Atkins Group

PIN: A part of 93-21-28-200-033

Prepared 10/29/07 by Community Development Services -pal

Zoning Map

EXHIBIT "B"



ZBA Case: 2007-MAJ-09

Subject: A request for a Major Variance to allow an Electronic Message Board (LED) Sign to increase the frequency of message changes from once per three minutes to six times per minute.

Location: 2710 S. Philo Road

Zoning District: B-3, General Business

Petitioner: The Atkins Group

PIN: A part of 93-21-28-200-033

Prepared 10/29/07 by Community Development Services -pal

 Subject Property

B-3, General Business

R-3, Single and Two-Family Residential

R-4, Medium Density Multiple Family Residential

AG-2, Agriculture (Champaign County)

Existing Land Use w Aerial Photo

EXHIBIT "C"



600 300 0 600 Feet



ZBA Case: 2007-MAJ-09

Subject: A request for a Major Variance to allow an Electronic Message Board (LED) Sign to increase the frequency of message changes from once per three minutes to six times per minute.

Location: 2710 S. Philo Road

Zoning District: B-3, General Business

Petitioner: The Atkins Group

PIN: A part of 93-21-28-200-033

Prepared 10/29/07 by Community Development Services -pal

Future Land Use Map

EXHIBIT "D"

Source: Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use
Text Adapted from Maps # 13 and 14, pp. 84-85



600 300 0 600 Feet



ZBA Case: 2007-MAJ-09

Subject: A request for a Major Variance to allow an Electronic Message Board (LED) Sign to increase the frequency of message changes from once per three minutes to six times per minute.

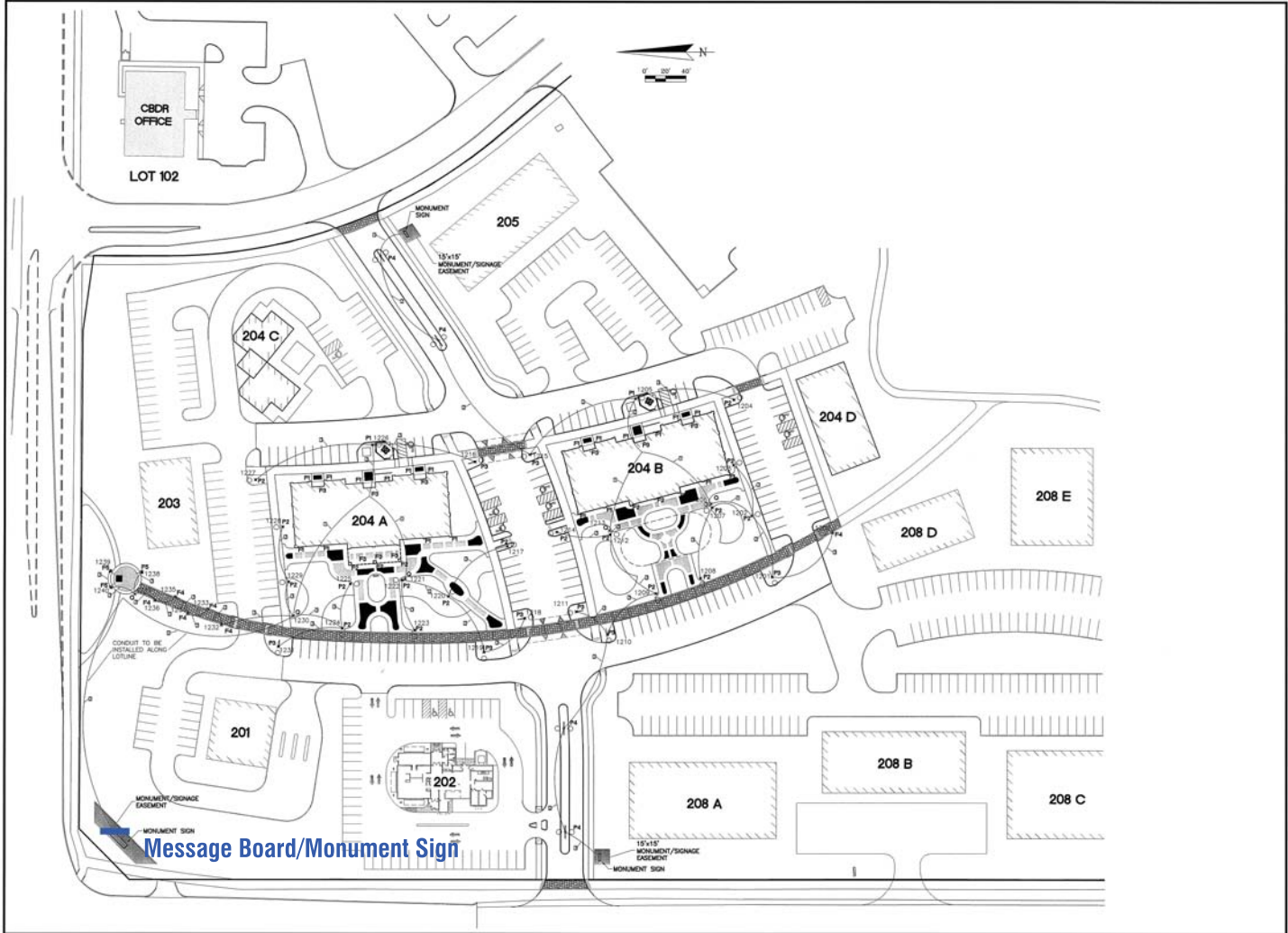
Location: 2710 S. Philo Road

Zoning District: B-3, General Business

Petitioner: The Atkins Group

PIN: A part of 93-21-28-200-033

Prepared 10/29/07 by Community Development Services -pal



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SIGNAGE PLAN
THE PINES
URBANA, ILLINOIS

PROJECT NO.	202500	DATE:	07/2017
DRAWN BY:	JL	CHECKED BY:	JL
SCALE:	AS SHOWN	DATE:	07/2017
PROJECT:	SIGNAGE PLAN		
DESCRIPTION:	SIGNAGE PLAN		
REVISIONS:			

OPTION 1 - MONUMENT LOCATION

