

STAFF EVALUATION

To: City Council

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Case: ZOA 054-2013 Campus entrance signage for large institutions **Date:** 3/27/2013

General Information

Description

This is an amendment to the zoning ordinance section that regulates special situations for signs with respect to entrance sign regulations for large institutional uses. The proposal intends to create specific regulations for entrance signage for educational and medical campuses that are 50 acres or more in size. As proposed, campus entrance signs would be allowed up to 110 square feet and 12 feet in height. Walls that are integrated into the design of such signs shall be allowed up to 15 feet in height provided that no more than 25% of the wall is at the maximum height.

Status

Staff recognized the need for an ordinance amendment addressing campus entrance signage for larger institutional users when Hampton University applied to the Board of Zoning Appeals for variances for new signs in November 2012. The variance requests filed at that time involved two signs, one of which was proposed to be located on property zoned C-1 and the other on property zoned R-11. For ground-mounted, freestanding signs located on property zoned C-1, Residential, Public Land, or M5-C, the Zoning Ordinance permits up to 48 square feet and 8' in height. At that time, Hampton University proposed signs up to 120 square feet and 10'10". In addition, a 15' wall was incorporated into the design. The maximum height for walls and fences is currently 6'.

Plans and Policies

The Hampton Community Plan (2006, as amended) includes policies that promote the enhancement of the identity and scenic qualities of city corridors and gateways (LU-CD Policy 17) and cooperation and partnerships with Hampton University and other higher education institutions (CF Policy 23) as well as health and human service providers (CF Policy 47). This ordinance amendment achieves those policies by partnering with large educational and medical institutions to create design flexibility for signage that aesthetically augments and punctuates corridors leading to college and medical campuses.

Existing Regulations

Campus entrance signs are currently regulated as ground-mounted, freestanding signs. The maximum height and area permitted for ground-mounted, freestanding signs vary according to the zoning district in which the sign is located as well as the zoning of contiguous parcels. The Zoning Ordinance limits wall height to 6'.

Alternatives Analysis Staff examined surrounding localities where existing university and medical campuses are located to determine how campus entrance signage is regulated in the region. Surrounding municipalities regulate campus entrance signage using a wide variety of standards and restrictions.

The City of Newport News regulates campus entrance signs for Christopher Newport University under general commercial sign regulations. Walls in Newport News are allowed up to 10' in height with a 20' setback that may be reduced.

The City of Norfolk permits campus entrance signs based on the zone district in which they are located. Old Dominion University is zoned IN-2 (an institutional designation) and is therefore permitted one double-faced sign per principal entrance with each face not to exceed 48 square feet. The City of Norfolk also allows applicants to apply for a Localized Alternative Sign Overlay District in which an overall signage scheme appropriate for a particular development or neighborhood would be adopted by the City Council.

The draft amendment incorporates standards from surrounding municipalities. In particular, the proposed provision on maximum sign area draws from municipalities that apply commercial sign regulations to campus situations which typically allows for larger signs.

If no action is taken to amend the zoning ordinance, a proposal for a campus entrance sign that is larger than currently allowed by the Zoning Ordinance will not be permitted unless the Board of Zoning Appeals approves a variance request.

Next Steps Planning Commission and staff recommend approval of this Zoning Ordinance Amendment.