

February 2, 2015

Mr. Eugene Vurgaftman
Baltimore County Public Schools
Department of Physical Facilities
Office of Engineering and Construction
9610 Pulaski Park Drive, Suite 204
Baltimore, Maryland 21220

Re: Seven Oaks Elementary School
Parking Lot Improvements
Forest Conservation Variance
Tracking #05-15-1914

Dear Mr. Vurgaftman:

A request for a variance from the Baltimore County Code Article 33, Title 6 Forest Conservation was received by this Department of Environmental Protection and Sustainability (EPS) on January 9, 2015. This request proposes to base afforestation calculations on the 0.9 acre limits of disturbance rather than the entire 25.1 acre site, for expansion of an existing parking lot to alleviate traffic safety concerns and construction of an associated stormwater management facility.

The Director of EPS may grant a special variance to the Forest Conservation Law in accordance with criteria outlined in Section 33-6-116(d)(1) of the Code. There are six (6) criteria listed in Subsection 33-6-116(d) and (e) that shall be used to evaluate the variance request. One (1) of the criteria under Subsection 33-6-116(d) must be met, and all three (3) of the criteria under Subsection 33-6-116(e) must be met, in order to approve the variance.

The first criterion (Subsection 33-6-116(d)(1) of the Code) requires the petitioner show the land in question cannot yield a reasonable return if the requirement from which the special variance is requested is imposed and will deprive the petitioner of beneficial use of his property. The applicant is seeking to provide additional parking at an existing County elementary school and to treat stormwater from the additional parking lot. No disturbance of existing forest is proposed. Full application of the law to the entire property would not result in unwarranted hardship to the applicant, and we find that this criterion has not been met.

The second criterion (Subsection 33-6-116 (d)(2) of the Code) requires that the petitioner show that his/her plight is due to unique circumstances and not the general conditions of the neighborhood. The site contains an existing elementary school with sports fields and limited parking. The parking and stormwater management facility are proposed in a mowed field. The neighborhood is already developed and, therefore, the circumstances here are unique and not related to the conditions of the neighborhood. Therefore, we find the second criterion has been met.

The third criterion (Subsection 33-6-116(d)(3) of the Code) requires that the petitioner show that the special variance requested will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood. The property is surrounded by residential development and is currently used as an elementary school and recreational fields. The proposal to add more parking and provide stormwater management will not change the character of the neighborhood. Therefore, we find that this criterion has been met.

The fourth criterion (Subsection 33-6-116(e)(1) of the Code) requires that the granting of the special variance will not adversely affect water quality. The grading and paving will meet all sediment and erosion control techniques during and after construction. Therefore, we find that granting of the special variance will not adversely affect water quality, and that this criterion has been met.

The fifth criterion (Subsection 33-6-116(e)(2) of the Code) requires that the special variance request does not arise from a condition or circumstance that is the result of actions taken by the petitioner. The petitioner has not started construction. Therefore, this criterion has been met.

The sixth criterion (Subsection 33-6-116(e)(3) of the Code) requires that the Director of EPS find that the special variance, as granted, would be consistent with the spirit and intent of Article 33 of the Baltimore County Code. Allowing an existing school to create additional parking to help improve traffic safety with students and buses is consistent. Therefore, this criterion has been met.

Based on our review, this Department finds that all of the required criteria have been met. Therefore, the variance request is hereby approved, in accordance with Section 33-6-116 of the Baltimore County Code.

This variance approval does not exempt future redevelopment of this site from complying with Baltimore County's Forest Conservation Law. It is the intent of this Department to approve this variance. Any changes to site layout may require submittal of revised plans and an amended variance request.

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If you have any questions regarding this correspondence, please call Ms. Regina Esslinger at (410) 887-3980.

Sincerely yours,

Vincent J. Gardina
Director

VJG/rae