

**HALL COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
RECOMMENDATION REPORT**

Applicant Highlands Residential, LLC
Request Amend conditions of a Planned Commercial Development (PCD, [17.180.080](#))
Proposed Use master sign plan
Size 1.14± acres
Zoning Planned Commercial Development (PCD, [17.180.080](#))
Location **1670 Friendship Road** | Tax Parcel 15041 000056
Commission District One
Planning Commission Date March 6, 2023
Staff Recommendation **Approval, with Conditions**

Planning Commission Recommendation..... **Approval, with conditions**
Vote: 5-0

Planning Commission Conditions:

- 1. Both wall signs submitted as part of this request shall meet the materials, dimensions, and placement as represented on the renderings (dated November 28, 2022) and narrative (dated January 23, 2023) as submitted.
- 2. Wall panel signs shall be subject to final review and approval by Building Inspections and the Fire Department.
- 3. Future signs requested for this property shall comply with underlying base Sign Code Requirements listed in Chapter 17.270.-Sign Standards and supplemental sign standards of the Gateway Overlay Requirements as outlined in Section 17.420.060.-Signs.
- 4. Monument signs shall not be constructed on sanitary sewer, drainage or utility easements.
- 5. All conditions of approval shall be recorded on any subsequent plats of this property.

Public Forum:

There were no comments in support or opposition.

Summary Analysis

The applicant seeks to mount two (2) wall sign panels upon the highly visible north and east façades of the three (3) story apartment building known as the Chateau Senior Living Apartments. The 152-unit apartment building is located at 1670 Friendship Road and was approved as part of a rezoning petition in May 2020. Its north façade faces Friendship Road and east façade faces a newly constructed access drive. Each wall sign panel measures ±61.36 square feet, is made of aluminum with a painted finish and acrylic lettering, and would project 1 foot 10-1/2 inches the wall upon it is to be mounted. The panels are designed to meet at the upper northeast corner of the building to create a “wrap around” effect that gives the appearance of being a single, nonilluminated wall sign totaling 122.87 SF. Only the panel upon the east façade is located above a primary pedestrian entrance (i.e., located above the entry to the clubhouse located in this portion of the building).

The applicant is required to bring this sign request to Planning Commission and County Commission for review because their proposed design is non-compliant with Gateway Standards. Under the Gateway regulations, wall signs are limited to one (1) sign per building and are required to be placed above primary entrances ([17.420.060.3.-Wall Signs and Marquee Signs](#) and [17.270.070.C3-Standards for Specific Zone Districts](#)); also, wall signs may project no further than one (1) foot from the façade itself ([17.270.030.P-Definitions](#) and [17.270.040.D.-General](#)). To build the proposed sign(s), relief from these specific sign design standards is required. Recognizing that planned developments may consist of construction with unique architectural features, materials or site layouts, the sign code requires applicants to submit master sign packages for Planning Commission and County Commission approval at the time of rezoning to support implementation of a well-coordinated and aesthetically compatible signage plan across the tract ([17.420.060.3.-Wall Signs](#), [17.270.070.C4.-Standards for specific zone districts](#), and [17.180.080.B.5.-Planned Commercial Development](#)). No master sign package was provided with the application documents for ZON2019-00114, the case which rezoned the property to PCD in 2021. To come into compliance with sign master plan requirements, the applicant has agreed to file this petition as an addendum to their original rezoning application rather than a variance.

Per Hall County Ordinance ([17.420.060.4.-Signs](#)), County review and approval of the signage master plan, “shall be based on the compatibility of the proposed signage with the siting and architecture of the subject building and the compatibility of the signage with surrounding land uses.” Review of architectural elevations filed with this application show the primary building is clad with stacked stone, brick, and fiber-cementitious siding; and, that the east façade offers storefront style glazing consisting of large panes divided by metal mullions. Metal is also used as canopies for residential patios on the ground floor. Due to the recurring use of metal across the façade and because each panel is smaller than the 64SF size allowed by current standards, staff finds the proposed aluminum wall sign panels to be compatible with the architecture of the subject building. Review of the surrounding area finds no other wall signs to which the current signs can be compared (adjacent land uses are single family detached homes); however, there are existing monument signs made of masonry at Willow Springs Road and Napa Ridge Road. To ensure compatibility these existing monuments, staff recommends upholding all existing sign standards to future signs proposed on the subject tract.

Staff recommends approval of this condition amendment application subject to the following conditions:

1. This letter is for the master sign package for the Chateau Senior Living Apartment complex.

- 2. Both wall signs submitted as part of this request shall meet the materials, dimensions, and placement as represented on the renderings (dated 11-28-2022) and narrative (dated 1-23-23) as submitted.
- 3. The wall panel signs are subject to final review and approval by Building Inspections and the Fire Department.
- 4. Future signs requested for this property shall comply with underlying base Sign Code Requirements listed in [Chapter 17.270.-Sign Standards](#) and supplemental sign standards of the Gateway Overlay Requirements as outlined in [Section 17.420.060.-Signs](#).
- 5. A legible copy of this letter shall be scanned onto all future recorded plats.
- 6. Monument signs shall not be constructed on sanitary sewer, drainage or utility easements.

Based on the future land-use plan, staff finds the requested master sign plan consistent with the [Comprehensive Plan](#).

Zoning Analysis

When considering a zoning amendment to the zoning maps, the following items must be considered:

- 1. Whether the zoning proposal will permit a use that is suitable in view of the use and development of adjacent and nearby property; **Approval of the zoning proposal will permit a use that is compatible with the principal building on-site and signage observed in the surrounding area.**
- 2. Whether the zoning proposal will adversely affect the existing use or usability of adjacent or nearby property; **Approval of the zoning proposal is not expected to adversely affect the existing use or usability of adjacent or nearby property. The portion of the building which is the subject of this zoning proposal (section 300, containing the clubhouse) has already been built out and received their final inspections. The wall sign on the east façade does partially obstruct a residential window opening. The Building Inspections Department indicated that a review of the signs in comparison to the architectural drawings will be required.**
- 3. Whether the property to be affected by the zoning proposal has reasonable economic use as currently zoned. **The subject property does have reasonable economic use as currently zoned. The development is being marketed online as “The Chateau by Highlands” and units are available for lease starting at \$1800 monthly (<https://thechateau.byhighlands.com/floor-plans/>).**
- 4. Whether the zoning proposal will result in a use which will or could cause an excessive or burdensome use of existing streets, transportation facilities, or utilities; **If the zoning proposal is approved, it would result in one more wall sign than is allowed by the current code (i.e., it would authorize the installation of the wall sign on the north façade facing Friendship Road). This additional wall sign is not expected to burden existing streets, transportation facilities, or utilities.**
- 5. Whether the zoning proposal is in conformity with the policy and intent of the land use plan; **Future land use classification(s) for this property is Residential and Revitalization Corridor. Though silent on desired signage types, the Comprehensive Plan supports opportunities for variations in housing size and types through the Planned Development District zoning classification. If approved,**

the zoning proposal is expected to draw more attention to this Planned Development – by attracting prospective tenants, the signage would support continuance of a desired land use in the area.

6. The extent to which property values are diminished by the existing zoning restrictions; **It cannot be determined based on information submitted how or if the approval or denial of the wall sign(s) as presented would affect area property values.**
7. The extent to which the destruction of the subject property's value under the existing zoning promotes the health, safety, morals or general welfare of the public; **Each wall sign panel is made of Gateway Corridor compatible materials and smaller than the current maximum allowed. The need for flexibility of sign design is implied for Planned Commercial Development application requirements. It is not expected that approval of this zoning request would negatively impact the health, safety, morals, or general welfare of the public.**
8. The relative gain to the public as compared to the hardship imposed upon the individual property owner; **If approved, the gain to the public includes improved marketing of a desired land use and tax revenue resulting from continued occupancy of units. If denied, the hardship imposed on the property owner would be the loss the wall panel on the north façade of the primary building.**
9. The length of time the property has been vacant as zoned considered in the context of land development in the area in the vicinity of the property; **Property is not vacant. Section 300 of the apartment, has been built out and received final inspections early February 2023.**

10. Whether there are other existing or changing conditions affecting the use or development of the property which give supporting grounds for either approval or disapproval of the zoning proposal;

The location of the wall sign on the north façade is intended to capture eyes of travelers driving eastbound on Friendship Road. The wall sign on the east façade is intended to capture eyes of travelers driving westbound on Friendship Road.

11. Whether the change would create an isolated district unrelated to the surrounding districts; **The change would not create an isolated zoning district. The zoning classification remains as is.**
12. Whether the present zoning district boundaries are illogically drawn in relation to existing conditions in the area; **The present zoning district is logically drawn.**
13. Whether the change requested is out of scale with the needs of the county as a whole or the immediate neighborhood; **The change requested is not out of scale with the needs of the county or neighborhood. It is the minimum relief required to allow equal sign visibility to travelers of both directions on Friendship Road.**
14. Whether it is impossible to find adequate sites for the proposed use in districts permitting such use and already appropriately zoned; **County Commission has determined PCD to be an appropriate zoning classification for this property and that senior living apartment is an appropriate land use for this property.**
15. Whether the need for rezoning could be handled instead by a variance request to the [Planning Commission]; **The applicant is providing the required master sign package and bringing the petition for consideration as a condition amendment to the past rezoning, as required by Hall County Code.**

Variances are not the pathway supported by the sign code for the current petition.

16. Whether there would be an ecological or pollution impact resulting from major modifications to the land if the request is granted; **No ecological or pollution impact is expected from the proposed wall signs. Neither wall sign is proposed to be either externally nor internally illuminated.**
17. Whether there is reasonable evidence based upon existing and anticipated land use that would indicate a mistake was made in the original zoning of the property; **This application does not seek to counter the County Commission approval of the senior living community or PCD rezoning from 2019; instead, it is adding to and clarifying the PCD standards in effect upon the property in regards to signage.**

The property is zoned Planned Commercial Development ([Section 17.180.080.-Planned Commercial Development](#)). This classification is appropriate for the proposed site as planned developments are listed as desired project types under the Residential District listed in the Comprehensive Plan. The future land use classification for this property is Residential District.

[17.380.050.](#) - Submission requirements for a rezoning request

- A. Any person or persons requesting a change in the official zoning map or use subject to approval of the county commission shall file an application with a plat or map of the property attached thereto, together with payment of such fees set forth in [chapter 17.30](#) to cover administrative and advertising costs, in the planning department office. Such person or persons or their authorized agent shall appear in person at the public hearing held to consider the district change. **Proposal meets the requirement. Applicant has paid the appropriate fees and understands that someone must be present at both the Hall County Planning Commission meeting and the voting meeting of the Hall County Board of Commissioners.**
- B. All applications for a change of zoning classification or use subject to approval of the county commission shall include:
 1. A narrative statement identifying the existing and proposed use of the property and addressing each of the criteria set forth in section 17.380.060.C of this section [chapter]. **The applicant has submitted a narrative and site plan but did not specifically address the criteria listed in [17.380.060.C](#).**
 2. A site plan drawn to scale designating the area covered by the application and identifying existing and proposed buildings and uses, adjacent existing land uses, zoning on contiguous parcels, including those across an abutting public right-of-way, and any other significant site improvements proposed to accommodate the proposed use or buffer adjacent uses, etc., or a plat of the subject property where no specific land use is proposed. In cases where only a plat or map is provided and no land use is proposed, the planning commission and county commission shall evaluate the application based on the most intense possible land use permitted in the proposed district. **The submitted documents are drawn to scale and include the necessary information as listed above.**
- C. For any application for a slow rate land treatment system (see [chapter 17.20](#)), the following additional requirements apply. **This standard is not applicable as the site will be served by a municipal sewer system.**
- D. For any application proposing the development of 100 or more residential dwelling units, a traffic impact study shall be submitted prior to consideration of the application by the planning

commission. At the applicant's expense, the traffic impact study shall be prepared by a professional engineer in accordance with requirements established by the Hall County Engineering Department. The engineering department shall review the traffic impact study and forward any comments to the Hall County Planning Commission. **This standard is not applicable as the underlying residential zoning classification has already been established.**

Development Support and Constraints – Departmental / Agency Comments

Hall County Environmental Health

In an email dated February 13, 2023, Emily McGahee states “No comment.”

Hall County Fire Marshal

An email dated February 16, 2023, John Hornick, NPQ Fire Inspector 1, Plans Review Lieutenant stated “The Hall County Fire Marshal’s Office has no comments as proposed.”

Hall County Public Works and Utilities

In a memo dated February 14, 2023, Srikanth Yamala, Director of Public Works and Utilities, provided the following comments:

Engineering:

No comment.

Traffic:

Proposed signage shall not obstruct or contradict approved traffic control signage.

Utilities

Signs shall not be constructed on sanitary sewer or utilities easement.

Georgia Department of Transportation

In email dated February 14, 2023 from Parker Niebauer, D1TO Traffic Operations Supervisor, confirmed this project will require GDOT coordination.

➤ **Excerpts from the minutes of the March 6, 2023 meeting**

Applicant’s Presentation:

Randi Doveton, Planning Director, presented a summary of the request.

Hunter Holiday, 400 Brookfield Drive, Sandy Springs, presented the request.

Public Forum:

There were no comments in support or opposition.

Planning Commission Comments:

Mr. Braswell stated for the record that there was a letter received in opposition from Ms. Phyllis Mercer from Hoschton. Mr. Braswell asked the applicant if he had any questions regarding staff conditions. The applicant stated he did not.

***Motion: A motion to approve, with conditions was made by Mr. Sosebee and seconded by Ms. Pilcher.
Vote: 5-0***

Conditions:

1. This letter is for the master sign package for the Chateau Senior Living Apartment complex.
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