



ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

**County Board Agenda Item
Meeting of March 17, 2007**

DATE: March 6, 2007

SUBJECT: SP#89 SITE PLAN AMENDMENT to permit one temporary banner sign of approximately 240 square feet; located at 1101 Wilson Blvd. (The Bodies Exhibit) (RPC # 16-039-002).

Applicant:

Arland Towers 1101, LLC

By:

Nan E. Walsh, Agent/Attorney
Walsh, Colucci, Lubeley, Emrich and Walsh
2200 Clarendon Blvd, Suite 1300
Arlington, Virginia 22201

C. M. RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the site plan amendment for a temporary banner sign, subject to all previous conditions of the site plan and one new condition pertaining solely to the temporary banner. (SP #89)

ISSUES: Should the County Board permit a large temporary banner sign for a site plan building in order to promote the required cultural use?

SUMMARY: County staff is working jointly with the landowner to secure a long term tenant for the former Newseum space of a nature that will satisfy the Museum/Cultural attraction requirement of the existing site plan conditions. The upcoming exhibit, *Bodies...The Exhibition*, a complying use, will call current attention to the space and validate the location as one that can support these types of activities and draw a large audience. This exhibit expects to draw between 350,000-500,000 people in attendance. In addition to the permitted signs for this space, the applicant has requested approval of a 240 square foot, large format, four-color banner in order to provide the exposure required for the success of this attraction. This banner would be attached to the building facade and window areas of the former Newseum and would feature images and text to promote the activities inside the tenanted premise. The banner should be in place at the time of opening (estimated April 14, 2007) to attract interest and create a successful exhibit. Therefore, staff recommends that the County Board approve the site plan amendment for a

County Manager: _____

County Attorney: _____

Staff: T. Holzheimer, AED

temporary banner sign, subject to all previous conditions and one new condition pertaining solely to the temporary banner sign.

BACKGROUND: The Freedom Forum, a nonpartisan foundation, which was headquartered at 1101 Wilson Boulevard and is in the process of moving, focuses on three priorities: the Newseum; the First Amendment; and newsroom diversity. In 1992, the Freedom Forum announced that it would build the Newseum, a museum of news, in Arlington. From 1993 through 1999, the County Board approved several site plan amendments for the subject site, granting bonus floor area to facilitate the construction and operations of the Newseum. In seeking the approval of additional density for the Newseum, the applicant agreed to conditions which limited the use of the space to a museum or cultural use.

The Newseum, an interactive museum of news, opened in Arlington in 1997. This facility closed in March 2002, after hosting more than 2.25 million visitors, to permit Newseum staff to focus exclusively on planning and developing a new museum to be located in Washington, DC. Since the departure of the Newseum, the space has been vacant for several years and has not contributed to the activity and vibrancy of Rosslyn. It is in the interest of both the county and the landowner to secure an appropriate tenant that will bring suitable activity and amenities to the space. At this time, the owners of the space have signed a short term lease – six months with two three month options (a maximum of one year) – for the exhibit “Bodies...The Exhibition” a traveling museum exhibit. Both the county and landowner are aware of the competitive nature of such facilities and want to make signs available to this temporary tenant as an important a feature as the interior of the space. It will be critical to this temporary tenant to help establish the opening of a new activity in this long empty space and create visual excitement and the invitation to approach and enter the building. It is anticipated that this temporary exhibit will ultimately encourage a long term museum or cultural tenant to lease the space, however, it is not expected that a subsequent tenant would need such signage.

The following provides additional information about the site and location:

Site: The site is located on the north side of Wilson Boulevard, east of its intersection with North Lynn Street. Freedom Park, an outdoor museum, is immediately east of the Newseum space. Further east is North Kent Street and Rosslyn Plaza, an 11-story office building constructed in 1966. To the north of the site is Plaza East, a 12-story office building, at 1800 North Kent Street. To the south of the site, across Wilson Boulevard, are the Arland Towers (East and West) office buildings at 1000 and 1100 Wilson Boulevard. To the east of the site is International Place, a 12-story office building built in 1967.

Zoning: “C-O” Commercial Office Building, Hotel and Multiple-Family Dwelling Districts.

Land Use: “High” Office-Apartment-Hotel (3.8 FAR office; 4.8 FAR residential; and 3.8 FAR hotel). The site is within the boundaries of the “Rosslyn Coordinated Redevelopment District” on the General Land Use Plan.

Civic Association: North Rosslyn

Public-Private Partnership: Rosslyn Renaissance

DISCUSSION: The total frontage of the former Newseum space is approximately 129 linear feet. Using the *Sign Guidelines for Site Plan Buildings*, the applicant would be permitted a total of 129 square feet for signs. The applicant has two signs, which replace the former Newseum signs, which total 56 square feet. Seventy-three square feet of sign area remain. The applicant has proposed, in addition to these two permitted signs, a 240 square foot, large format, four-color banner attached to the façade of the building. Temporary banners of this nature are not permitted through the Zoning Ordinance or by the *Sign Guidelines for Site Plan Buildings*. Further, the sign area would exceed what is typically permitted by 167 square feet.

The *Sign Guidelines for Site Plan Buildings* serve as a basis for staff recommendations to the County Board on sign requests for site plan buildings. However, these guidelines were written expressly for permanent signs and the subject proposal is for temporary signs. Comprehensive sign plans for site plan buildings often permit modifications to the Zoning Ordinance within the parameters of the *Sign Guidelines for Site Plan Buildings*. This proposal is a temporary element of a comprehensive sign plan for the site plan.

The purpose of the proposed temporary banner is to call out the location, use of the space, and to inform the public and is considered by the tenant/exhibitor to be an essential part of the overall marketing. The proposed temporary banner will contribute positively to the viability of a museum/cultural use on the museum site.

The proposed sign would be considered a banner per the Zoning Ordinance and as such should only be supported on a limited basis. Although staff supports allowing this temporary, non-traditional, banner sign, that promotes the temporary exhibit, limits should be placed on its use. Further, such temporary, non-traditional, banner signs should be allowed only for a limited time period. Therefore, specific criteria should be established if the County Board wishes to approve such a sign. These criteria would include:

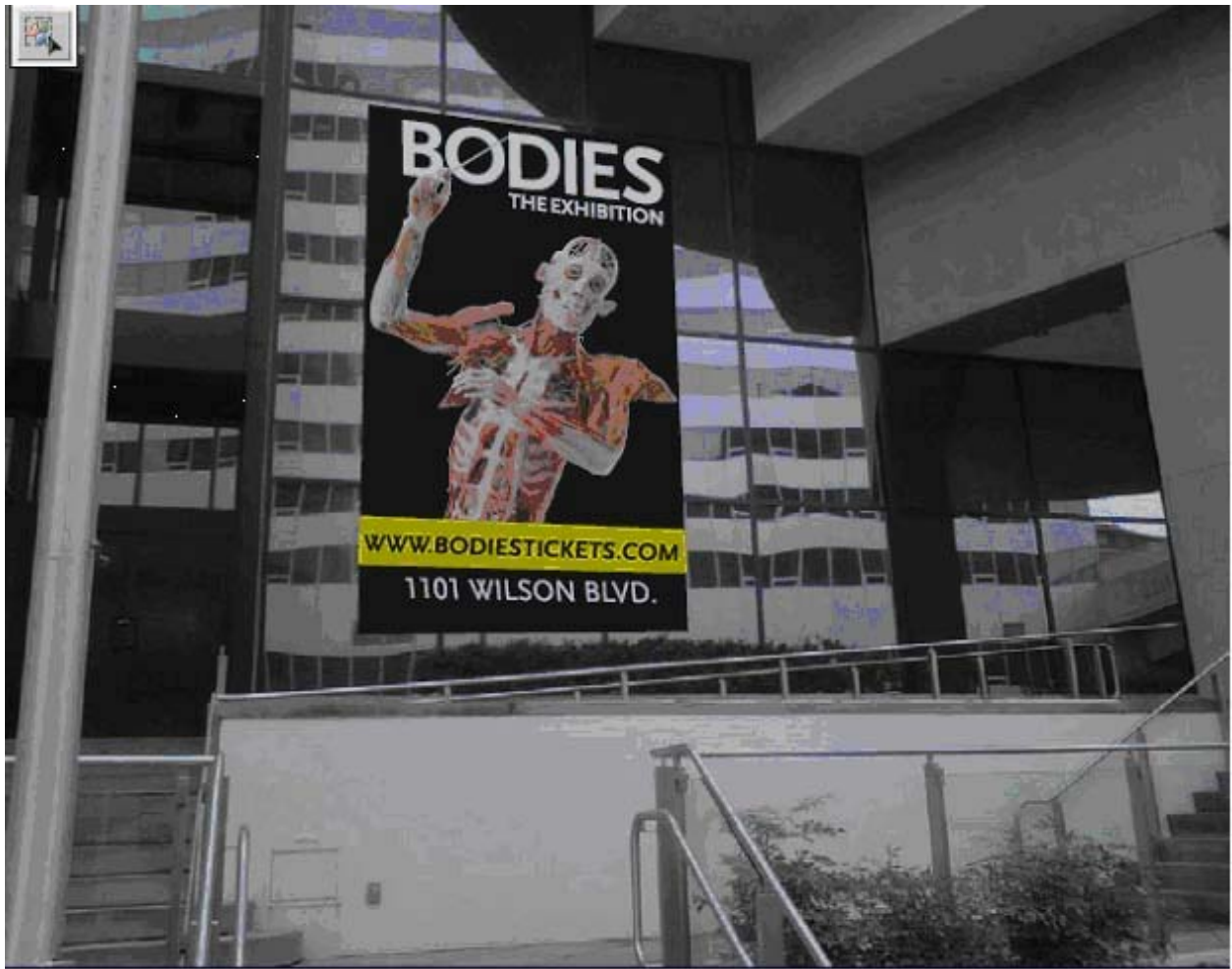
- Special exception use permit or site plan amendment approval by the County Board.
- The location and content of signs will not adversely impact public safety.
- The signs will be for uses of a cultural or museum-type nature, where required by special exception.
- The signs are a temporary installation permitted only between two weeks prior to the opening of a temporary exhibit through one week following the closing of said exhibit. However, in no instance shall this type of sign be permitted for more than two years.
- The sign proposal includes a commitment to a maintenance plan that will ensure the sign will not have an undue adverse impact on the area.

The Location of this banner will be east of (downhill from) the intersection of Wilson Boulevard and North Lynn Street, facing Wilson Boulevard. Although Wilson Boulevard is a principal arterial to North Lynn Street, at this location, it is not highly trafficked, nor is it congested. Most traffic has either turned south toward Route 50 at Fort Myer Drive or east toward the District of Columbia along North Lynn Street. Therefore, this particular banner location is expected to have a limited effect on traffic congestion and public safety.

CONCLUSION: Based on current policies and procedures, staff would not normally recommend approval of such a sign. However, there is a unique opportunity at this location for such a sign promoting the temporary museum/cultural use. A temporary banner sign of this nature enhances the one-of-a-kind museum façade and the pedestrian activity of the area. In addition, the county is engaged in promoting and attracting a longer term tenant to this space and the overall success of this temporary exhibit is important. Staff concludes that such a temporary banner is appropriate and will not present a traffic hazard, diminish the effectiveness of public traffic signs and signals, does not impact the value of surrounding property, will provide an attractive visual environment, and assists tourists and other members of the community. Staff recommends that the County Board approve the site plan amendment subject to all previous conditions and one new condition.

New Condition

1. The developer agrees that one temporary 12'x 20' (240 square feet) unlit banner may be permitted for the tenant producing the *Bodies...The Exhibition* and the developer further agrees that approval of a sign maintenance plan will be obtained from the Zoning Administrator and to implement the plan throughout the time of the sign display. The maintenance plan will at a minimum, make the sign safe and keep it firmly attached as located in Exhibit B of the County Board report dated March 5, 2007, and keep it so as not to unduly adversely affect the neighborhood. The developer agrees that no part of the sign shall be more than 35 feet above the average street level of the tenant frontage. The developer agrees that the duration of the sign installation shall be from no more than two weeks prior to the exhibit opening for public viewing, (estimated April 14, 2007) through a date that is no more than one week after the expiration of the tenants lease for the space, or sooner if the public viewing ceases, but in no case later than April 30, 2008. For the duration of the installation, the developer will maintain the sign in safe and good order. The developer agrees to obtain all appropriate permits prior to the installation of the sign which would include the design, scale drawings of the location, height of sign, dimensions of sign, materials and fasteners.



Temporary Banner – Placement