

**Smithfield Board of Adjustment
Minutes
Thursday, February 27, 2020
6:00 P.M.,
Town Hall, Council Chambers**

Members Present:

Stephen Upton, Chairman
Mark Lane, Vice Chairman
David Johnson
Sarah Edwards

Members Absent:

Staff Present:

Michael Scott, Town Manager
Travis Scott, Town Councilman
Stephen Wensman, Planning Director
Mark Helmer, Senior Planner
Julie Edmonds, Administrative Support Specialist

Staff Absent:

CALL TO ORDER

Approval of minutes from January 30, 2020

Sarah Edwards made a motion, seconded by David Johnson to approve the minutes as written.
Unanimously approved

Public Hearing

Mark Lane made a motion to open BA-20-02; seconded by Sarah Edwards. Unanimously approved

BA-20-02 Johnston Regional Airport Authority

Mr. Wensman stated that Johnston Regional Airport has requested a variance which is in 5 parts. It's a 19 ft high variance from the maximum height for a ground sign. It's 82.19 sq. foot variance from the maximum monument sign area. It's a variance from the maximum number of signs allowed, which is only 1. It's a 59.44 sq. ft variance from the maximum electronic sign area. Also, an 87.44 sq. ft variance from the maximum sq. ft of all signs for the airport. Their current airport sign is on Swift Creek Road by their entrance. The airport is located on 673 acres, they have one sign on a vast amount of land area.

The proposed sign is supposed to go on top of the hill across from OPW on US Hwy 70. It will be 25 feet tall with 182.19 sq. feet. The sign has two parts, one with the airport name and the other will be an electronic messaging sign. The upper sign is 92.75 sq. ft and the lower part is 89.44 sq.

ft. He asked the applicant to supply staff with a scaled sign so they would be able to visualize what they were looking at. The existing sign on site includes the monument sign. They are allowed one ground sign 6 foot tall. The current sign is 8 feet wide, so they have 36 sq. feet of sign area. They have two wall signs each being 35.25 sq. feet and 34 sq. feet each. In total, there are 105.25 sq. feet of sign area utilized by the airport today. They are allowed 200 sq. feet total. The ordinance allows for one ground mounted sign. The proposed variance would allow a second sign. The maximum height of a ground sign is 6 feet and the applicant are asking for 25 feet; that's a 19-foot variance and that's a 75% increase. The maximum ground sign area allowed is 100 sq. feet. This proposed sign would have 182.19 sq. feet., therefore this sign would be an 82.19 variance from the ground sign height with an 82% increase in ground sign area. The maximum sign area for electronic signs or digital signs is 30 sq. foot and the applicant are asking for 89.44 sq. feet. That is a 59.44 sq. foot variance and 198% increase in area for that sign. The maximum square foot for all signs in the ordinance is 200 sq. feet. They would have 287.44 sq. feet with this new sign which is an 87.44 sq. foot variance for a total of a 44% increase in sign area total across all signs.

Mr. Wensman believes the airport is unique given its size given the variety of uses and events that take place on the site. It is a multi-use site and the current signage may not be meeting their needs. He feels there is a merit for a second ground mounted sign. He does feel that the sign height is warranted given the need to raise the sign above the existing 8-foot-high fence to be seen. However, he believes the 19-foot variance potentially is more than what's needed. The entire proposed sign would be located on top of the hill. Mr. Wensman suggested another option might be to move the fence, so a shorter sign could be installed in that location. Staff doesn't believe the amount of variance for the electronic messaging sign is warranted. They are more visible at a greater distance than traditional signs.

Staff recommends the Board of Adjustment consider this request. If all four finding of facts can't be met by the board, you could deny the variance citing those four finding of facts the staff has written. If you're interested in approving the variance because you believe the additional evidence supports the finding of fact you can approve the variance and provide that specific justification. Lastly, you could give the applicant an option to table to request and come to some compromise situation which could be presented at the next BOA meeting.

Mr. Upton suggested the board take the issue statements one at a time instead of jumping all around.

Mr. Lane said the applicant needs to understand that one denial vote is a denial, it must be unanimous.

Mr. Wensman said they have been informed of that already.

Mr. David Johnson stated in his opinion by looking at the illustration before him, the setback off the road and the fence and investment put into this sign it needs to be to the height and the size

requested. It's providing public good to the community by notifying every one of the airport and providing messages advertising any events or businesses leasing space.

Mr. Lane said the area that the proposed sign would be sitting on is very big. Therefore, the sign needs to be large; to be visible for passing traffic.

Mr. Lane asked if this variance is denied tonight, what would the applicant's position be at that point.

Mr. Wensman said they could come back to this board but with a different sign and hopefully not need a variance or a lesser variance.

Phil Lanier, the airport director came forward to answer any questions the board may have. Mr. David Johnson asked how far the Smithfield city limits were from Johnston Regional Airport.

Mr. Wensman said approximately 1 mile.

Ms. Edwards asked why the sign was within the fence.

Engineer Dixon said the fence is placed essentially along the right of way of Hwy 70.

Ms. Edwards asked Mr. Wensman based on the wayfinding signs that just went up, wouldn't the same setback requirement apply to those as far as distances.

Mr. Wensman said the towns ordinance doesn't require government signs to be 10 feet off the right of way.

Ms. Edwards said not setbacks but regarding the DOT's right of way.

Mr. Wensman said yes, anything in the right of way must have a breakaway sign. So, this sign couldn't be in the right of way.

Ms. Edwards asked if there was a map showing where the right of way was.

Mr. Wensman said the right of way is close to the fence and the telephone poles are a good indicator where the property line is.

Bruce Johnson of 1214 S. Vermont Street came forward to speak. He is on the board at the airport and in those two years he has served, a new sign has been topic of discussions. He wanted to express the great need for this new sign.

Ms. Edwards asked what the total dimensions of the proposed sign are.

Jason Honeycutt of Sign and Awning Systems spoke and said the dimensions of the sign are 60 ½ inches tall, 238 inches wide. The display is 50 inches tall by 110. This sign would advertise amber and silver alerts.

Ms. Edwards asked if businesses would be allowed to advertise on the digital area of the sign.

Mr. Bruce Johnson said they would promote businesses that lease space from the airport but no outside advertising.

Councilmen Travis Scott of 109 Parkway Drive attended the meeting. He wanted to express his opinion of the proposed sign and what a great addition the sign would be to the airport. He stated the airport houses our economic development for the County. A sign is often a first impression of a business. This new sign would bring awareness that an airport is even there. General aviation is a dying thing, it's expensive to be able to maintain an aircraft and give flying lessons. For us to have something like this in our community it's a huge asset.

Ms. Edwards made a motion to close BA-20-02; seconded by David Johnson. Unanimously approved

Mrs. Edwards stated that she was aware the airport was different from other projects and properties. Her concern is the precedence it sets in granting a variance like this. The idea that a similar sign could be accomplished without needing a variance. If a request for a variance was made that was less significant it would be easier to support. As far as the digital sign being as large as it is and the taller sign and a comparable sign for the airport section that would be approximately 161 sq. feet which is scientifically different than the variance requested. She stated knowing there is a 400-acre industrial site down the road. When that is built, she is concerned this same sign situation will arise again.

David Johnson said if a sign keeps someone from developing that 400 plus acre site, then he encourages them to put up a sign and bring in the development and the jobs. It would be providing economic value to the community.

Mr. Lane said this is a unique situation because it's not a development it's an open space. He feels the sign is warranted.

Mr. Upton personally agreed, he stated it had many positives for the community.

Mr. Lane made a motion to approve BA-20-02; seconded by David Johnson. Unanimously approved

Old Business

None

New Business
None

Sarah Edwards made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Mark Lane. Unanimously Approved

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Edmonds". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Julie Edmonds
Administrative Support Specialist
Town of Smithfield Planning Department