

**FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATION  
OFFICE OF PLANNING AND ZONING  
ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY, MARYLAND**

**APPLICANT:** Microsoft Corporation

**ASSESSMENT DISTRICT:** 4<sup>th</sup>

**CASE NUMBER:** 2024-0095-V

**COUNCILMANIC DISTRICT:** 1<sup>st</sup>

**HEARING DATE:** August 15, 2024

**PREPARED BY:** Donnie Dyott Jr.  
Planner



**REQUEST**

The applicant is requesting variances to allow directional signs with greater area and height than allowed and to allow signage that is not located within the lot lines of the use to which it refers on property located on the south side of Dorsey Run Road in Annapolis Junction.

**LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION OF SITE**

The subject site comprises several parcels totaling approximately 103.2 acres with frontage on the south side of Dorsey Run Road. It is currently identified as 8201, 8211, 8231, 8241, 8251, 8223 and 8225 Dorsey Run Road of Parcel 195 in Block 20 on Tax Map 13 in the Annapolis Junction Business Park.

The property is zoned W2 – Light Industrial District, as adopted by the comprehensive zoning for Council District 1, effective July 10, 2011 and is being developed with a data center business park.

**PROPOSAL**

The applicant is proposing directional signage to accompany construction of a three story data center building with administrative office space and associated onsite circulation. The development is the second phase and will include additional buildings in the future. The directional signage consists of eleven directional signs, each with a height of 7 feet and an area of 24.5 square feet.

**REQUESTED VARIANCES**

§ 18-3-303(c) of the Anne Arundel County Zoning Ordinance provides that a sign shall be located within the lot lines of the use to which it refers, except that a directional sign may be located within a County right-of-way to the extent permitted by 18-3-305 and 18-3-306. The applicant is proposing a multitude of directional signs, some of which refer to buildings or areas of the property that are outside of the lot lines where the signs will be located, necessitating a variance to this provision.

§ 18-3-308(c) provides that a business complex may have directional signs as necessary. Each sign may not exceed six square feet in area or a height of five feet. The applicant is proposing

eleven directional signs that have a height of 7 feet and an area of 24.5 square feet. Necessitating a variance of 2 feet in height and 18.5 square feet in area for each directional sign.<sup>1</sup>

## **FINDINGS**

The applicant's letter explains that the variance for directional signage is being sought to meet the corporate signage standards which are used across all of their data center campuses. Maintaining these standards allows for employees and users visiting the site to efficiently navigate the secure campus which is complex and subject to end user security requirements. The directional signage will direct users to specific buildings, visitor areas, vehicle entry, onsite utility infrastructure and restricted areas of the site. The intended vehicular traffic will include both personal vehicles and large tractor trailers which require the larger signs for easier visibility. As the large campus is built out, the larger signage will also increase visibility for fire and rescue which would increase response times. As the development will be located on various parcels, placing directional signage on parcels relating to buildings and infrastructure that are located on different parcels is necessary.

The **Health Department** reviewed the proposal and has no objection.

The **Fire Marshal's Office**, the **Office of Planning and Zoning's Regional Team and Cultural Resources Division**, the **Department of Recreation and Parks** and the **Office of Transportation** took no position on the proposed variance and deferred to the Zoning Administration Section.

For the granting of a zoning variance, a determination must be made as to whether, because of certain unique physical conditions peculiar to or inherent in the particular lot or because of exceptional circumstances other than financial considerations, strict implementation of the Code would result in practical difficulties or an unnecessary hardship. The need sufficient to justify a variance must be substantial and urgent and not merely for the convenience of the applicant. The development is part of a restricted access campus that once completed will be complex and substantial in size. These factors contribute to the need for adequate directional signage to be placed on various parcels of the development to ensure accurate and timely navigation and as such some relief from the Code may be warranted.

With regard to the requirements for all variances, approval would not necessarily alter the essential character of the neighborhood, impair the appropriate use or development of adjacent properties, or be detrimental to the public welfare. The directional signs will be located far enough away from the public road and seven of the eleven signs will be within the secured perimeter of the development. The directional signs being placed on various parcels will direct vehicles within the entire development and require that some refer to buildings or infrastructure that are not located on the parcel where the sign is placed. Additionally, the height variance of 2 feet is relatively minor and can be considered the minimum necessary to afford relief.

However, this Office does not believe that the requested variances for sign area represent the minimum necessary to afford relief. The proposed directional sign area of 24.5 square feet is

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<sup>1</sup> The applicant has referenced needing a variance to signage regulations for both business complexes (18-3-308) and industrial districts (18-3-309). While the development appears to be part of a business complex, the regulations regarding directional signs are the same. Should the development not be considered as business complex, the variance tabulations would be the same but would be to section 18-3-309 instead of 18-3-308.

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more than four times the allowable six square feet. While this Office can appreciate the corporate signage standards and the need for consistency, there is nothing that unique about the site that would warrant such a large deviation from the Code. It appears that the sign area could be reduced while still accomplishing the intended purpose. Additionally, the directional sign allowances are standard Countywide and granting such a large variance request could set a precedence in allowing a company's standard signage to supersede County regulations.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Based upon the standards set forth in § 18-16-305 of the Code under which a variance may be granted, this Office recommends ***approval*** of zoning variances to § 18-3-303(c) to allow directional signs not located within the lot lines of the use to which it refers and to § 18-3-308(c) to allow the directional signs as proposed with a height of 7 feet. However, this Office recommends ***denial*** of the proposed zoning variance to § 18-3-308(c) to allow the directional signs as proposed with an area of 24.5 square feet.

DISCLAIMER: This recommendation does not constitute a building permit. In order for the applicant(s) to construct the structure(s) as proposed, the applicant(s) shall apply for and obtain the necessary building permits and obtain any other approvals required to perform the work described herein. This includes but is not limited to verifying the legal status of the lot, resolving adequacy of public facilities, and demonstrating compliance with environmental site design criteria.



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May 17, 2024

Anne Arundel County  
 Office of Planning and Zoning  
 2664 Riva Road  
 Annapolis, MD 21401

**Re: YEL – Annapolis Junction Business Park – Request for a Variance to Ordinance Section 18-3-303, 18-3-308 & 18-3-309**

Tax Map 0013, Grid 0020, P.0195 (Lots 9RR, 8RR, 13R, 14R)  
 8201, 8211, 8231, 8223, 8225, 8241, 8251 Dorsey Run Road, Annapolis Junction, MD

To Whom it may concern:

On behalf of our Client, please see the following Variance request to Anne Arundel County Code Sections 18-3-303.C, 18-3-308 & 18-3-309 as it relates to the total square footage and height for directional signage for business complexes and Industrial districts for the following lots:

Legal Description	Address	Tax #
8RRR	8201 Dorsey Run Road	400090221373
9RR	8211 Dorsey Run Road (Primary Address)	400090221374
12R	8231 Dorsey Run Road	400090221377
13R	8241 Dorsey Run Road	400090221378
14R	8251 Dorsey Run Road	400090221379
N/A	8223 Dorsey Run Road	N/A
N/A	8225 Dorsey Run Road	N/A

**Project Introduction:**

The proposed directional signage is intended to accompany the Site Development Plan (SDP) C-2023-0026-00-NC and forth coming grading and building permit which is to permit and construct one (1) three story data center building (approximately 171,726 SF), with administration office space (approximately 34,320 SF), and associated site circulation and extension of the secured perimeter infrastructure on Lots 9RR, 13RR, and 14R of the Annapolis Junction Business Park. In addition to these improvements, an onsite substation is being planned in parallel to service the site and any future builds (the Developer will bulk grade the substation pad while BGE will construct and operate the electrical equipment within the substation). The proposed vehicular site access is from Dorsey Run Road and will utilize the secured vehicular control point at Lot 9RR, constructed under Grading Permit G02018716 and Building Permit B02390726. All improvements are located outside of the critical area and there are no environmental permits associated with the above noted applications.

**Variance Request:**

The current Anne Arundel County Code specifies the following as it relates to directional signage:

18-3-303.C - Location. A sign shall be located within the lot lines of the use to which it refers, except that a directional sign may be located within a County right-of-way to the extent permitted by § 18-3-305 and § 18-3-306.

18-3-308-c – Directional Signs. “A business complex may have directional signs as necessary. Each sign may not exceed six square feet in area or a height of five feet”

18-3-309-d – Directional Signs. “An establishment may have directional signs as necessary. Each sign may not exceed six square feet in area or a height of five feet”

This Variance is being requested to allow for a directional sign to provide way finding to a destination on an adjacent parcel as well as to increase the maximum directional sign area to 24.5 square feet and to increase the height for directional signage to 7’ as defined by Article 18-3-304.

**Justification:**

The above Variance is being requested to allow for directional signs that exceed the current requirements of Article 18-308-c and 18-3-309-d to meet the Clients Corporate signage standards, which are used across all Client Data Center campuses. Maintaining these standards will allow for Client employees and users visiting the site to efficiently navigate through the proposed secured campus to the intended destination. It should be noted that the development noted within the project intro (above) is the second of multiple planned future buildings that will make up the campus. The complex is also subject to end user security requirements, which makes it imperative that all users are able to navigate the site in an efficient manner. The directional signage will direct users to specific buildings, visitor areas, vehicle entry, onsite utility infrastructure, as well as any restricted areas of the site. Due to the anticipated future buildings and to meet the Clients signage standards, the sign panel is required to exceed the minimum six square feet and five feet in height. It should also be considered that the intended vehicular traffic navigating the campus will include personal vehicles, as well as large tractor trailers. Therefore, the larger sign panels will be more easily viewed from the operator of a tractor trailer. Lastly, as the campus is built out in the future, the larger directional signage will offer better visibility for Fire and Rescue to navigate the site from the vehicle entry point, thus resulting in faster response times. In addition to the variance requesting the increased direction signage height and area, it is requested to allow signage to be placed on the subject parcels to direct users around the data center site to the existing Anne Arundel County sanitary sewer pump station located at 8241 Dorsey Run Road (Tax # 400090221376). Access is proposed to be relocated in accordance with SDP C2023-0026-00-NC and as coordinated with Anne Arundel County Department of Utilities. The signage will allow for faster response times in the event that immediate access is required at the pump station for operational or maintenance purposes.

As illustrated in the attached exhibits, the proposed signs are placed greater than 75’ from the existing Right-of-Way of Dorsey Run Road. Furthermore, seven of the eleven signs proposed with the above noted application will be within the secured perimeter of the proposed campus, which will provide additional screening of the signs from any public viewshed.

The Client fully understands the intent and purpose of the County code and is committed to being good stewards of the community, however the proposed Variance is requested to meet the required security requirements for a restricted access campus and wayfinding standards which are applied across all Client campuses.

We appreciate your consideration regarding this request. If you should have any questions related to this proposed Variance, please feel free to contact me.

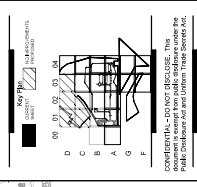
Respectfully Submitted,



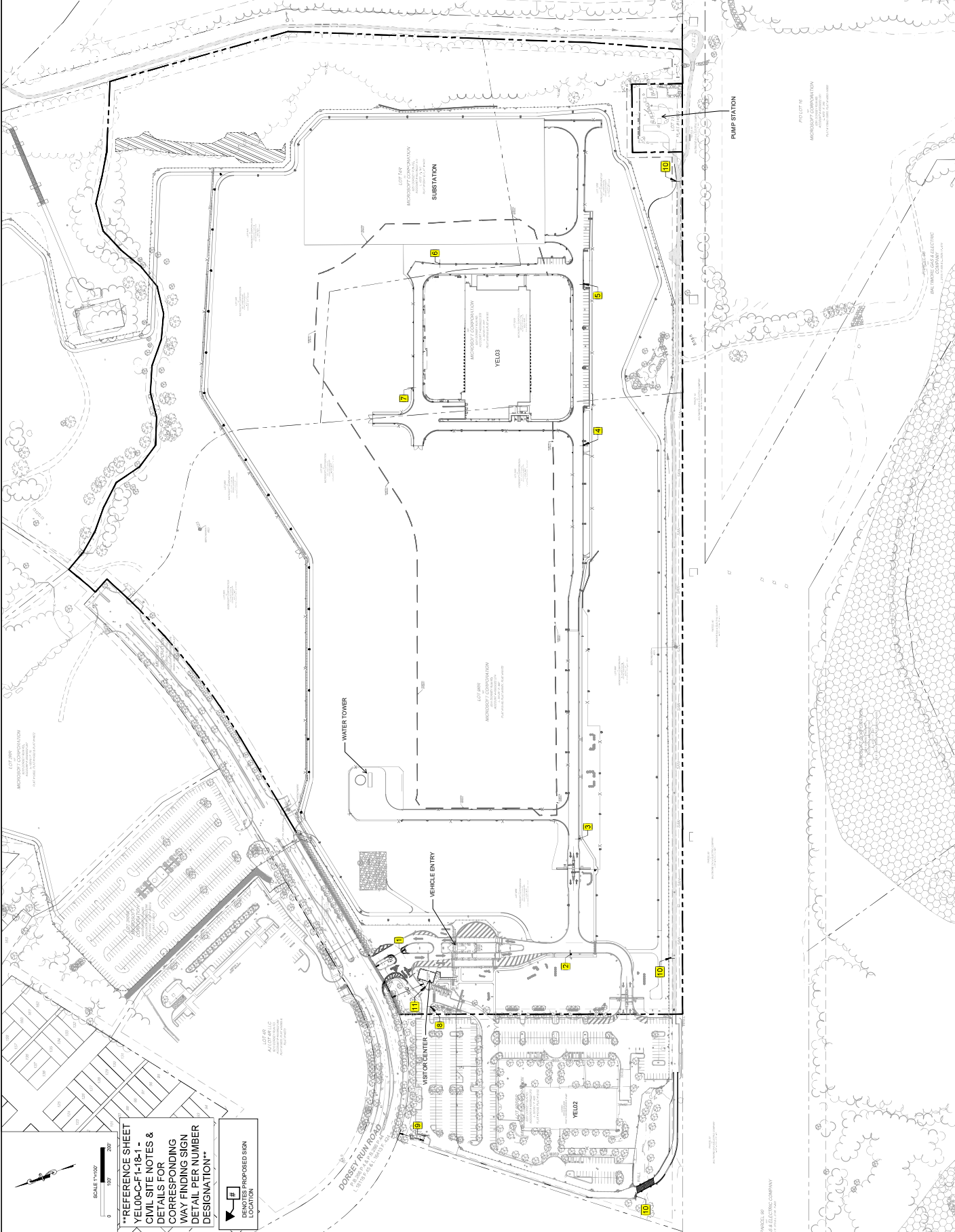
Luke Fetcho, PE, LEED AP  
Senior Project Manager

NO.	DESCRIPTION	DATE	BY	CHKD.
1	ISSUED FOR PERMITTING	08/14/18	JAC	JAC
2	REVISED PER COMMENTS	08/14/18	JAC	JAC
3	REVISED PER COMMENTS	08/14/18	JAC	JAC
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8	REVISED PER COMMENTS	08/14/18	JAC	JAC
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10	REVISED PER COMMENTS	08/14/18	JAC	JAC

**PRELIMINARY**



**DIRECTIONAL SIGN VARIANCE REQUEST EXHIBIT 1**



**\*\*REFERENCE SHEET YEL00-C-F-18-1 - CIVIL SITE NOTES & DETAILS FOR CORRESPONDING SIGN WAY FINDING SIGN DETAIL PER NUMBER DESIGNATION\*\***

**#** DENOTES PROPOSED SIGN LOCATION

MICROSOFT CONFIDENTIAL

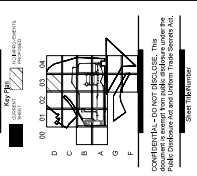
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PROJECT MANAGEMENT

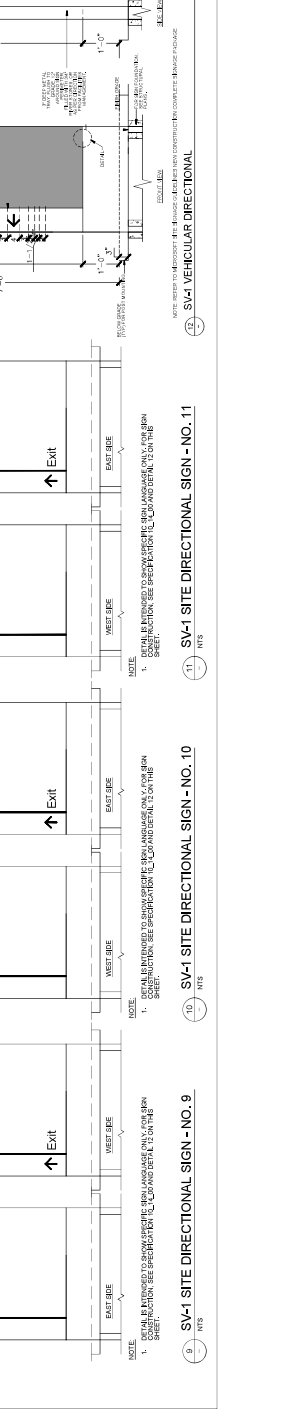
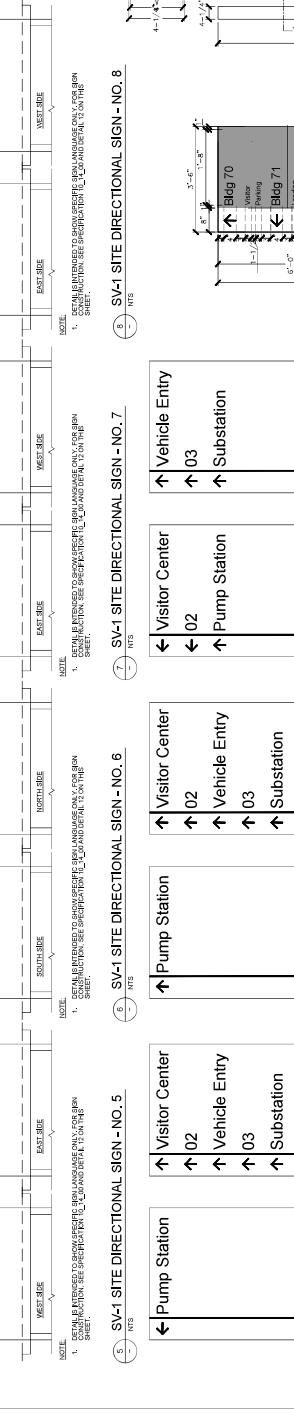
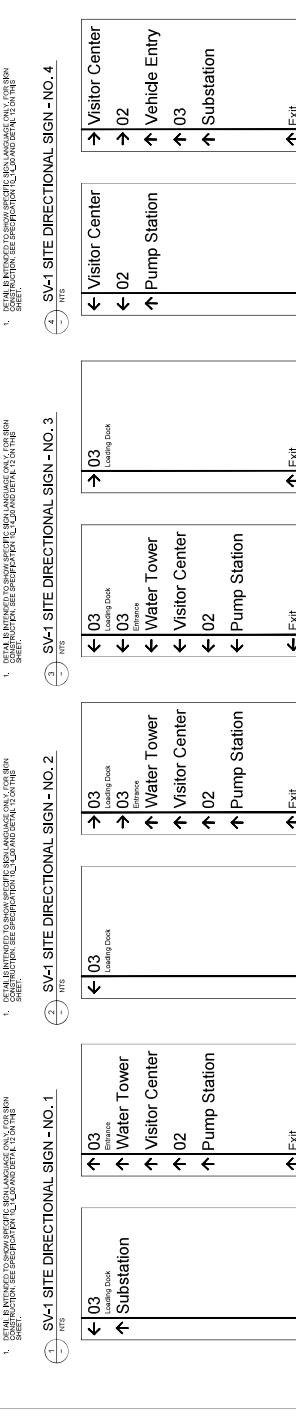
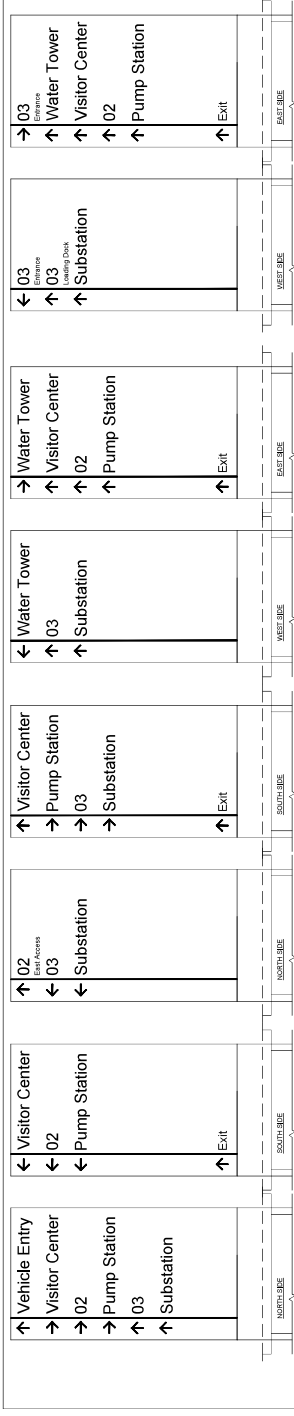
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PRELIMINARY



CIVIL SITE NOTES & DETAILS

YEL00-C-F1-18-1



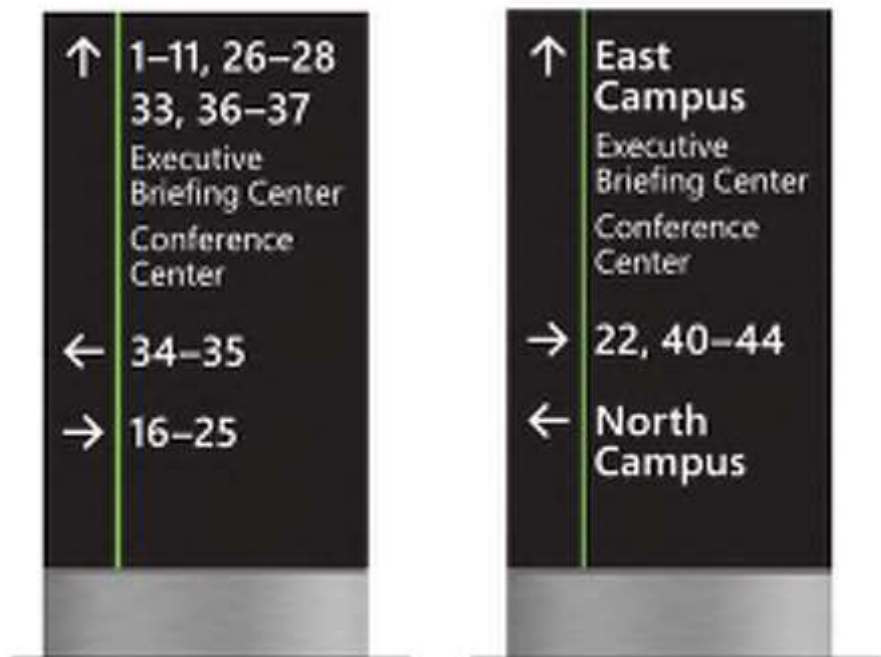
MICROSOFT CONFIDENTIAL

## SV-1

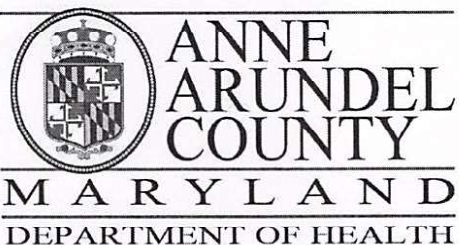
### Primary Vehicular Directional

Primary vehicular directional monument signs provide direction to Microsoft buildings and facilities along approach streets within a Microsoft site and help link neighborhoods or building groups together. They are intended to be the first directional signs a user encounters when entering a site. SV-1 are designed to accommodate primary directional information and are sized to carry the largest quantity of message lines. Orient the sign toward approaching traffic and in advance of major intersections.

- Fabricated aluminum sign cabinet, painted "graphite" with brushed stainless steel base and end returns.
- Reflective white vinyl lettering and arrows, non-illuminated.
- Single or double-sided.
- Site or building addresses should ONLY be used if required by local fire authorities or other agencies, who may also have regulations for copy heights that should be followed.








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3 Harry S. Truman Parkway  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
Phone: 410-222-7095 Fax: 410-222-7294  
Maryland Relay (TTY): 711  
www.aahealth.org

**Tonii Gedin, RN, DNP**  
Health Officer

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Sadé Medina, Zoning Applications  
Planning and Zoning Department, MS-6301

FROM: Brian Chew, Program Manager  
Bureau of Environmental Health 

DATE: June 24, 2024

RE: Microsoft Corporation  
8211 Dorsey Run Road  
Annapolid Junction, MD 20701

NUMBER: 2024-0095-V

SUBJECT: Variance/Special Exception/Rezoning

The Health Department has reviewed the above referenced variance to allow directional signs with greater area than allowed and to allow sinage that is not located within the lot lines of the use to which it refers.

The Health Department has no objection to the above referenced variance request.

If you have further questions or comments, please contact Brian Chew at 410-222-7413.

cc: Sterling Seay

# 2024-0095-V Aerial



**Legend**

- Foundation:
- Addressing:
- Parcels:
- Parcels - Annapolis City:



**Notes**

This map is a user generated static output from an Internet mapping site and is for reference only.  
 Data layers that appear on this map may or may not be accurate, current, or otherwise reliable.

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THIS MAP IS NOT TO BE USED FOR NAVIGATION