August 18, 2016

TECHNICAL STAFF REPORT

Planning Board Meeting on September 1, 2016

Case No./Petitioner: ZRA-169 – Warren H. Boyer, Petitioner

Request: Amend Section 103.0-Definitions of the Zoning Regulations to revise the definition for “Motor Vehicle” to make the term only applicable to motorized vehicles that are self-propelled, and to delete the requirement that motor vehicles, trailers, box trailers and cargo containers may not be used as shelters for on-site storage.

Amend Section 128.0.D – Temporary, Seasonal and Other Uses in Section 128.0 – Supplementary Zoning District Regulations to establish a new use category for “Non-temporary Use of Storage Trailers, Field or Sales Offices, Storage and Refuse Containers.”

I. BACKGROUND

The first definition for the term “Motor Vehicle” was created through a 1978 Zoning Board case, in which DPZ proposed a number of revisions and additions to the 1977 Zoning Regulations.

Motor Vehicle: A vehicle that is self-propelled and is not operated on rails. Motor vehicle does not include a motorcycle or a bicycle that is equipped with an assisting motor.

This definition remained unchanged until 1994, when a revision added regulations to restrict the parking of unregistered and inoperable motor vehicles in residential districts. The revised definition was:

Motor Vehicle: A vehicle that is self-propelled and is not operated on rails and which if driven on a public street or highway would be required by the Maryland Vehicle Law to be registered.

This definition was amended during the 2013 Comprehensive Zoning Plan to include trailers and to prohibit the use of motor vehicles, trailers, and cargo/shipping containers as storage shelters. The proposed definition was adopted as follows:

Motor Vehicle: Any self-propelled vehicle or trailer that is not operated on rails and which if designed to be driven, towed or used on a public street or highway would be required by the Maryland Vehicle Law to be registered and licensed. Motor vehicles, including trailers, box trailers and cargo containers may not be used as a shelter for on-site storage.

The 1954 Zoning Regulations contained a defined term “Trailer Coach” and supplementary regulations allowing the approval of permits for the use of trailer coaches for certain purposes:

Trailer Coach: A unit designed for human occupancy, which at any time was mobile.
1. The parking of a trailer coach or coaches and trailer coach parks shall be excluded from all but the T-2 District, provided, however, that:

(a) On application to the Zoning Commissioner, a permit may be issued, for the parking of one trailer coach on any lot upon which there is a dwelling, provided that such trailer coach is owned by a resident of the dwelling and shall not be occupied for dwelling or sleeping purposes and shall not be parked or stored within the front or side yards.

(b) On application to the Zoning Commissioner, a permit may be issued for the parking of one trailer coach on a bona fide farm for the use of farm help only, provided that such trailer coach is located within the main farm building area on such farm, but in no case shall any such trailer be parked within 300 ft. of a public road or an adjoining property line, and provided further such trailer shall first have approval of the Howard County Health Department as to water supply and sewerage disposal system.

(c) On application to the Zoning Commissioner, a permit may be issued for the parking of a trailer coach for use of a temporary field or sales office in connection with building construction, or new development.

(d) Any permits for the parking of trailer coaches issued by the Zoning Commissioner, under this section, shall be for a period not exceeding one-year, provided that such permit may be renewed on application to the Zoning Commissioner. Such permit shall be attached to the exterior of the trailer and shall be displayed at all times.

Trailer coach regulations and all supplementary zoning regulations were abolished in the original 1977 Zoning Regulations. The 1993 Zoning Regulations significantly expanded the section on Supplementary Zoning District Regulations. One section established a permit requirement for Temporary Field or Sales Offices that are associated with building development:

1. Temporary Field or Sales Offices

In all zoning districts, on application to the Department of Planning and Zoning, a permit may be issued for the use of a trailer or building as a temporary field or sales office in connection with building development. Neither the trailer nor the building shall be used for living or sleeping, unless for overnight security purposes. The use of a trailer for office or sales purposes shall be permitted only in accordance with this Section.

These regulations were amended in 1996 to add a provision that allowed such trailers to encroach into a front setback from a street not yet dedicated to the County and requiring removal prior to the dedication of the street:

1. Temporary Field or Sales Offices

In all zoning districts, on application to the Department of Planning and Zoning, a permit may be issued for the use of a trailer or building as a temporary field or sales office in connection with building development. Neither the trailer nor the building shall be used for living or sleeping, unless for overnight security purposes. A trailer approved under this section and accessory parking may encroach into a required front setback from a street that has not yet been dedicated to the County. The trailer and parking must be removed or relocated to comply with the front setback before the street is dedicated.
The use of a trailer for office or sales purposes shall be permitted only in accordance with this Section.

A 2004 amendment required that building development, associated with a field or sales office, have a recorded plat, an approved site development plan, or an approved building permit prior to approval of the office. Another provision clarified that in districts in which office uses are permitted, modular office buildings are allowed:

1. Temporary Field or Sales Offices

In all zoning districts, on application to the Department of Planning and Zoning, a permit may be issued for the use of a trailer or building as a temporary field or sales office in connection with building development for which a final plat has been recorded, a site development plan has been approved or a building permit has been issued. Neither the trailer nor the building shall be used for living or sleeping, unless for overnight security purposes. A trailer approved under this section and accessory parking may encroach into a required front setback from a street that has not yet been dedicated to the County. The trailer and parking must be removed or relocated to comply with the front setback before the street is dedicated.

The use of a trailer for office or sales purposes shall be permitted only in accordance with this Section. Modular office buildings, however, are allowed in zoning districts in which offices are a permitted use.

In the 2013 Comprehensive Zoning Plan (the “2013 CZP”) this section was revised to add provisions for the approval of temporary storage trailers related to ongoing construction, and a new subsection allowing the use of temporary storage containers or refuse containers that are not related to any construction activity. The new provisions for temporary storage containers or refuse containers were intended so that property owners could use POD storage units and similar storage units, and also refuse containers on a short term basis:

128.0.D. Temporary, Seasonal and Other Uses

1. Temporary Storage Trailers and Field or Sales Offices Related to Ongoing Construction

In all zoning districts, on application to the Department of Planning and Zoning, a permit may be issued for the use of storage trailers that are directly related to ongoing construction, or a trailer or building to be used as a temporary field or sales office in connection with development for which construction plans have been signed and all developer’s agreements have been executed, a final plat has been recorded, a Site Development Plan has been approved or a building permit has been issued. Neither the trailers nor the building shall be used for living or sleeping, unless for overnight security purposes. A trailer or building approved under this section may not remain on the site unless there are active permits for the project, and the trailer or building must be removed before the last active permit for the project receives its final inspection. A trailer approved under this section and accessory parking may encroach into a required front setback from a street that has not yet been dedicated to the County. The trailer and parking must be removed or relocated to comply with the front setback before the street is dedicated.
The use of a trailer for office or sales purposes shall be permitted only in accordance with this Section. Modular office buildings, however, are allowed in zoning districts in which offices are a permitted use.

2. Temporary Storage or Refuse Containers

a. In all zoning districts, a storage or refuse container not directly associated with construction activity for which a permit is required may be used on a temporary basis provided it complies with all applicable setbacks and bulk regulations for the zoning district in which it is located. Such a container may not exceed a maximum size of 8 feet in width by 16 feet in length by 8 feet in height and may not remain on the site for more than 60 days. No more than one storage container and one refuse container may be located on the property at any time.

b. Upon application, the Director of Planning and Zoning may extend the time permitted for no more than 30 days, upon a showing of need and no history of violations regarding this use.

c. For purposes of this section, the period of use is calculated from the first day of actual use and includes the time the application is pending and any appeal if the use continues during that time.

d. No more than one 90 day use of temporary storage or refuse containers may be permitted for a property in any calendar year.

e. The Director of Planning and Zoning may grant an exception only to the size of containers, but in no event may permit a use beyond the time period specified in this section.

II. DESCRIPTION AND EVALUATION OF PROPOSAL

This section contains DPZ's technical evaluation of ZRA-169. The Petitioner’s proposed amendment text is attached to this Technical Staff Report as Exhibit A, Petitioner’s Proposed Text.

A. SECTION 103.0: Definitions

Section 103.0 – Proposed revised definition for Motor Vehicle

Staff recommends denial of the amendment. However, staff recommends that the prohibition on using motor vehicles, trailers, box trailers and cargo containers as storage shelters, be removed from the motor vehicle definition and relocated to a more appropriate location.

The Petitioner proposes to amend the Motor Vehicle definition in order to eliminate the inclusion of trailers and to delete the prohibition on the use of motor vehicles, trailers, box trailers and cargo containers as storage shelters. The definition of Motor Vehicle was revised in the 2013 CZP to add trailers and to prohibit storage shelters, so the Petitioner’s request is to return to the pre-2013 CZP definition. This prohibition was established during 2013 CZP to address the growing number of shipping and other storage containers on properties, especially those adversely impacting the character of commercial and residential districts.
DPZ concurs with the Petitioner's request to remove the prohibition on the use of motor vehicles, trailers, box trailers and cargo containers as storage shelters from the definition for Motor Vehicle since it is misplaced within this definition. However, DPZ does not agree that this prohibition should be entirely removed from the Zoning Regulations, as the Department receives numerous zoning complaints about the excessive and highly visible use of them for outdoor storage. Accordingly, DPZ recommends that the last sentence of this definition be deleted, new definitions be created and a new subsection be established in the Supplementary Zoning District Regulation. The new subsection applies approval criteria to the use of accessory storage structures.

DPZ does not support the deletion of trailers from this definition as it is appropriately defined.

B. SECTION 128.0: - Supplementary Zoning District Regulations

Section 128.0.D.3 - Proposed new use category for the Non-Temporary Use of Storage Trailers, Field or Sales Offices, Storage and Refuse Containers.

Staff recommends denial of the amendment.

The Petitioner proposes to establish a new Section, 128.0.D.3, to allow the permanent use of storage trailers, field or sales offices, storage and refuse containers, provided they are screened and not visible from adjoining property lines or from the public street right-of-way and provided that they comply with all applicable setbacks and bulk regulations.

In Section 128.0.D.3.a., the Petitioner proposes that storage trailers and sales offices that comply with the proposed screening and bulk regulations may be used on a continuous basis in zoning districts that permit office uses and when approved by the Hearing Authority on a Conditional Use plan. In Section 128.0.D.3.b., the Petitioner proposes that the storage and refuse containers may be used on a continuous basis in all zoning districts if in compliance with the proposed screening and bulk regulations.

In Section 128.0.D.3.c., the Petitioner proposes that modular office buildings be permitted in zoning districts that permit office uses or when approved by the Hearing Authority on a Conditional Use plan, but it does not state that such modular office buildings must comply with the proposed screening and bulk regulations. Section 12.0.D.3.d. permits the conversion of storage trailers and field or sales office trailers into modular office buildings, if the modular office building complies with the building code.

DPZ does not concur with the Petitioner's proposal to allow the permanent use of storage and refuse containers in all zoning districts by right, including all residential districts. This type of storage container is not compatible with the character of many business/residential areas and may degrade the quality of life for citizens in these areas. Additionally, parts of the amendment completely contradict the regulations for the temporary use of these same items in the existing Section 128.0.D.1 and Section 128.0.D.2.

DPZ supports allowing shipping containers that are appropriately located and screened as accessory uses in industrial areas. Therefore, DPZ recommends adding regulations to allow the accessory use of shipping containers as storage shelters in the M-1 and M-2 Districts, subject to screening requirements. Zoning Permit approval will be required to evaluate the placement and screening of containers.

The use of the storage containers, trailers, and offices can serve the needs of many non-profit/government organizations and small businesses. Various Conditional Use categories, such as religious facilities and private schools, may have a need to use shipping containers for storage and modular buildings for offices/classrooms as a cost saving measure. Therefore DPZ proposes amendments to Section 131.0: Conditional Uses to establish a site-specific evaluation process to ensure compatibility with adjacent
properties. These proposed amendments are described below in the Section III. DPZ RECOMMENDED AMENDMENTS.

III. DPZ RECOMMENDED AMENDMENTS

This section describes DPZ’s proposed amendments, which are attached to this Technical Staff Report as Exhibit B, DPZ’s Proposed Text.

Section 103.0 - Definition for Commercial Vehicle

In addition to amending the Motor Vehicle definition, detailed in Section II.A. of this report, DPZ also recommends revising the Commercial Vehicle definition for consistency with the Motor Vehicle definition. The Commercial Vehicle definition also includes a prohibition on using commercial vehicles as storage shelters, which will be deleted and addressed in the new Section 128.0.D.3. - Accessory Storage Buildings and Other Accessory Storage Structures.

Section 103.0 - New Terms and Definitions for “Shipping Container” and “Accessory Storage Building”.

DPZ recommends establishing definitions for “Shipping Container”, and “Storage Building, Accessory” in order to differentiate actual storage buildings from shipping containers.

Shipping Container: An intermodal container or similar boxlike container designed and built for the purpose of freight transport.

Storage Building, Accessory: A prefabricated or site-constructed building built for storage purposes and used for the accessory storage of items and materials for a principal use.

SECTION 128.0: - Supplementary Zoning District Regulations

DPZ recommends establishing a new Section 128.0.D.3. for Accessory Storage Buildings and Other Accessory Storage Structures to specify that only accessory storage buildings can be used for accessory storage purposes and to allow shipping containers as accessory storage structures in the M-1 and M-2 Districts, subject to setback and screening requirements.

This section also clarifies that shipping containers and various other types of storage facilities are allowed on farms for storage of farming related goods and materials. DPZ currently interprets the Zoning Regulations to permit storage structures on farms because they are accessory and incidental to a Principle Farming Use. However, this interpretation is not explicit and should be included in the regulations.

SECTIONS 122.0 and 123.0: - References to Sec. 128.0.D.3 in the M-1 District and M-2 Districts

DPZ recommends including a reference to Sec. 128.0.D.3 in the Accessory Uses section of M-1 and M-2 Districts for the requirements related to use of accessory storage buildings and shipping containers as accessory storage structures. This reference serves as a cross reference to facilitate user navigation.
SECTION 131.0: Conditional Uses

SECTION 131.0.O. New Conditional Use Categories

Staff recommends establishing a new Section 131.0.O.2 for the “Storage/use of Trailers, Modular Offices, Shipping Containers, or Refuse Containers” in the RC and RR Districts, subject to compatibility criteria. This Section would also give the Hearing Authority the ability to approve the use of shipping containers as accessory storage structures in association with an approved Conditional Use.

IV. GENERAL PLAN

The Petitioner asserts that ZRA-169 is in harmony with Policy 12.3 of the PlanHoward 2030 (General Plan).

Policy 12.3

"Increase currently successful, collaborative efforts between residents, businesses, nonprofit groups, and the County to continue implementing state-of-the-art, cost-effective, sustainability practices and techniques."

Implementing Action d. Ongoing Advancement.

“Revise regulations, such as Green Building Legislation, and implement new cost effective requirements in order to maintain cutting-edge sustainability standards.”

DPZ concurs with the Petitioner’s assertion that the re-use of office trailers and storage containers are sustainable practices that provide a cost effective option for non-profit/government organizations, and businesses. Therefore, ZRA-169 is in harmony with the sustainability goals set forth in PlanHoward 2030.

V. AGENCY COMMENTS

1. The Bureau of Environmental Health issued the following comment:

“The Health Department will require all permanent trailers utilizing plumbing to be connected to the public water and sewer system or, in areas outside the metro district, to a private onsite well and sewage disposal system meeting all applicable regulations. All temporary trailers must receive Health approval during building permit review prior to utilizing sewage holding tanks.”

2. The Department of Fire and Rescue Services had no objections provided that any unit does not block a fire exit. The Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits and the Department of Recreation and Parks and had no comments on ZRA-169.
VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

ZRA-169

DPZ RECOMMENDED AMENDMENTS

For the reasons noted above, the Department of Planning and Zoning recommends that ZRA-169 as proposed be DENIED and modified, as stated in Exhibit B – DPZ’s Recommended Text, be APPROVED.

Approved by:

Valdis Lazdins, Director

Date

NOTE: The file is available for public review at the Department of Planning and Zoning Public Information Counter.
Exhibit A - Petitioner’s Proposed Text

(CAPITALS indicate text to be added; [[brackets indicate text to be deleted]].)

SECTION 103.0: - Definitions

Motor Vehicle: Any self-propelled vehicle [[or trailer]] that is not operated on rails and which if designed to be driven [[, towed]] or used on a public street or highway would be required by the Maryland Vehicle Law to be registered and licensed. [[Motor vehicles, including trailers, box trailers and cargo containers may not be used as a shelter for on-site storage.]]

SECTION 128.0: - Supplementary Zoning District Regulations

D. Temporary, Seasonal and Other Uses

1. Temporary Storage Trailers and Field or Sales Offices Related to Ongoing Construction

   In all zoning districts, on application to the Department of Planning and Zoning, a permit may be issued for the use of storage trailers that are directly related to ongoing construction, or a trailer or building to be used as a temporary field or sales office in connection with development for which construction plans have been signed and all developer's agreements have been executed, a final plat has been recorded, a Site Development Plan has been approved or a building permit has been issued. Neither the trailers nor the building shall be used for living or sleeping, unless for overnight security purposes. A trailer or building approved under this section may not remain on the site unless there are active permits for the project, and the trailer or building must be removed before the last active permit for the project receives its final inspection. A trailer approved under this section and accessory parking may encroach into a required front setback from a street that has not yet been dedicated to the County. The trailer and parking must be removed or relocated to comply with the front setback before the street is dedicated.

   The temporary use of a trailer for office or sales purposes shall be permitted only in accordance with this Section. Modular office buildings, however, are allowed in zoning districts in which offices are a permitted use.

2. Temporary Storage or Refuse Containers

   a. In all zoning districts, a storage or refuse container not directly associated with construction activity for which a permit is required may be used on a temporary basis provided it complies with all applicable setbacks and bulk regulations for the zoning district in which it is located. Such a container may not exceed a maximum size of 3 feet in width by 16 feet in length by 8 feet in height and may not remain on the site for more than 60 days. No more than one storage container and one refuse container may be located on the property at any time.

   b. Upon application, the Director of Planning and Zoning may extend the time permitted for no more than 30 days, upon a showing of need and no history of violations regarding this use.

   c. For purposes of this section, the period of use is calculated from the first day of actual use and includes the time the application is pending and any appeal if the use continues during that time.

   d. No more than one 90 day use of temporary storage or refuse containers may be permitted for a property in any calendar year.
e. The Director of Planning and Zoning may grant an exception only to the size of containers, but in no event may permit a use beyond the time period specified in this section.

3. NON-TEMPORARY USE OF STORAGE TRAILERS, FIELD OR SALES OFFICES, STORAGE AND REFUSE CONTAINERS.

A. In zoning districts in which offices are a permitted use or where approved by the hearing authority on a conditional use plan, a storage trailer, field and sales office may be used provided it is screened and not visible from adjoining property lines or from the public street right-of-way; and provided it complies with all applicable setbacks and bulk regulations for the zoning district in which it is located.

B. In all zoning districts, a storage and refuse container may be used provided it is screened and not visible from adjoining property lines or from the public street right-of-way; and provided it complies with all applicable setbacks and bulk regulations for the zoning district in which it is located.

C. The non-temporary use of a trailer for office or sales purposes shall be permitted only in accordance with this section. Modular office buildings, however, are allowed in zoning districts in which offices are a permitted use or where approved by the hearing authority on a conditional use plan.

D. The physical conversion of a storage trailer, field or sales office trailer into a modular office building is expressly permitted provided, however, that the converted structure complies with the requirements of the building code.

Re-number balance of section as appropriate.
Exhibit B – DPZ’s Recommended Text

(CAPITALS indicate text to be added; [[brackets and strikethrough indicate text to be deleted]].)

SECTION 103.0: - Definitions

Commercial Vehicle: Every motor vehicle and trailer licensed by the State, designed or used for transporting goods or equipment in the furtherance of any commercial enterprise; a motor vehicle that is designed and used to carry people for compensation, including school buses but excluding taxicabs. [[Commercial vehicles, including trailers, box trailers and cargo containers, may not be used as a shelter for on-site storage.]]

Motor Vehicle: Any self-propelled vehicle or trailer that is not operated on rails and which if designed to be driven, towed or used on a public street or highway would be required by the Maryland Vehicle Law to be registered and licensed. [[Motor vehicles, including trailers, box trailers and cargo containers may not be used as a shelter for on-site storage.]]

SHIPPING CONTAINER: AN INTERMODAL CONTAINER OR SIMILAR BOXLIKE CONTAINER DESIGNED AND BUILT FOR THE PURPOSE OF FREIGHT TRANSPORT.

STORAGE BUILDING, ACCESSORY: A PREFABRICATED OR SITE-CONSTRUCTED BUILDING BUILT FOR STORAGE PURPOSES AND USED FOR THE ACCESSORY STORAGE OF ITEMS AND MATERIALS FOR A PRINCIPAL USE.

Section 122.0: - M-1 (Manufacturing: Light)

C. Accessory Uses

7. ACCESSORY STORAGE BUILDINGS AND SHIPPING CONTAINERS, AS ACCESSORY STORAGE STRUCTURES, SUBJECT TO THE REQUIREMENTS IN SECTION 128.0.

Section 123.0: - M-2 (Manufacturing: Heavy)

C. Accessory Uses

10. ACCESSORY STORAGE BUILDINGS AND SHIPPING CONTAINERS, AS ACCESSORY STORAGE STRUCTURES, SUBJECT TO THE REQUIREMENTS IN SECTION 128.0.

Section 128.0: - Supplementary Zoning District Regulations

3. ACCESSORY STORAGE BUILDINGS AND OTHER ACCESSORY STORAGE STRUCTURES.

A. EXCEPT AS PROVIDED BELOW, OR OTHERWISE PROVIDED IN THE REGULATIONS, ONLY ACCESSORY STORAGE BUILDINGS ARE PERMITTED TO BE USED AS SHELTERS FOR ACCESSORY STORAGE PURPOSES, AND CONVERTED OR REPURPOSED STRUCTURES SUCH AS SHIPPING CONTAINERS OR TRAILERS SHALL NOT BE USED FOR ACCESSORY STORAGE.
B. In the M-1 and M-2 districts, but not in other districts that permit M-1 uses, the use of shipping containers as accessory storage structures may be permitted if granted zoning permit approval based upon compliance with the following criteria:

1. The shipping containers shall not be located in the setback from a public street right-of-way.

2. The shipping containers shall be located or screened so that they are not visible from the public street right-of-way or from any existing residential uses in the vicinity.

C. In the RC, RR, and R-ED districts, the use of storage bins, shipping containers, trailers and similar storage facilities may be permitted as accessory storage structures to a principal farming use.

Section 131.0: Conditional Uses

Section 131.0.O. – New Conditional Use Categories

2. Storage/Use of Trailers, Modular Offices, Shipping Containers, or Refuse Containers.

A conditional use, or an enlargement or alteration of an existing conditional use, may be granted for the storage/use of trailers, modular offices, shipping containers, or refuse containers in the RC or RR districts, provided that:

A. The use is located on a lot or parcel that is three acres or larger.

B. The use shall be screened and not visible from adjoining property lines or from the public street right-of-way.

C. The use shall comply with the structure and use setbacks.

D. The access to the property on which the use is located shall not be on a driveway or private road shared with other uses.