



Meeting Summary
March 23, 2022

Attendance

Panel Members: Robert Gorman, Chair
Ethan Marchant, Vice Chair
Dan Lovette
Larry Quarrick
Vivian Stone

DPZ Staff: Anthony Cataldo, Nicholas Haines and Melissa Maloney

1. **Call to Order** – DAP Chair Robert Gorman opened the meeting at 7:03 p.m.
2. **Review of Plan No. No. 22-08 Auto Spa Express, 8528 Baltimore National Pike**
Applicants and Presenters:
Developer: Chad Bohn (The Auto Spa Express)
Engineers: Brandon Rowe, Emily Pate (Bohler Engineering)
Landscape Architect: Eric McWilliams (Bohler Engineering)

Background.

The property is approximately 3.6 acres and is comprised of Parcel 158, zoned Business General (B-2). B-2 zoning was established near Route 40 to provide for commercial sales and services that directly serve the general public. Car wash facilities are specifically listed on the list of uses permitted in B-2 Zoned Properties. The site is currently used for parking to support the existing car sales business. The existing automobile sales and repair center will remain on site. The project borders a stream that is part of the Sucker Branch channel. The associated 75-foot stream buffer does encroach into the property. Access to the property is currently provided from both Baltimore National Pike and Normandy Center Drive.

Applicant Presentation

This project is to develop an Auto Express car wash facility located at 8528 Baltimore National Pike at the corner of Normandy Center Drive (east side) and Rt 40 (south side) with the Normandy Shopping Center to the north. The B-2 zoned subject property is made up of 2 lots for a combined 4.1 acres with a stream and associated buffer that straddles the property line to the east. The site is currently accessed at 4 locations with 4 curb cuts along Normandy Center Drive and 3 curb cuts along Rt 40. The site is currently developed as a car sales and service center with associated parking. There are currently no pedestrian improvements along this section of Rt 40. There is excess pavement in the right of way that the applicant proposes to mitigate and remove.

The applicant is proposing a 5,216 square foot car wash facility with a 130-foot-long single lane tunnel for washing cars. The 4 curb cuts along Normandy Center Drive will remain in use as well as the existing buildings for car sales and service. Along Rt. 40, the applicants will consolidate 3 access points to 2. Full circulation around the existing building will be maintained in both directions with access

to 3 pay lanes and room for 15 queuing spaces. Once customers pay, they will circulate around and enter a single lane to go through the tunnel by conveyor belt system and exit on the east side. The vacuum spaces will be along the front. There will be standard parking spaces out front and in the rear for employees.

Internal sidewalks are proposed for pedestrians to walk from the vacuum spaces to the building as well as a connection to Rt 40 and 6' wide sidewalk improvements will also be added along the frontage of the subject property on Route 40. There is approximately 12' of elevation change across the site with the high side on the east and dropping off to the west side towards the stream. In order to create a level area, the applicant is proposing retaining walls along the west and north side of the car wash building. The applicant will be providing additional buffer to the stream area. Another retaining wall will be internal to the site between the sales lot and the proposed access. The site is part of the Sucker Branch watershed and therefore has water quality requirements and not water quantity requirements are required for SWM. The water quality will be handled by MDE approved proprietary filtration devices.

Auto Spa Express has a standard prototype for their buildings with distinct branding including bright blue and yellow stripes. In response to the Rt 40 manual the façade has been changed to be a neutral gray color instead of bright blue. A neutral colored solid masonry structure is proposed for around the dumpster enclosure. The vacuum spaces will have some bright blue accent colors with canopies. The site signage includes way finding (directional) and operational (hours, pricing, etc.) signs in the Auto Spa Express color palette. A 20' high double-sided free-standing sign is proposed with the Auto Spa branding to be located along Rt 40. Site lights will be integrated with the building mounted lights and will meet the Howard County lighting regulations that are required in the corridor.

Trees are proposed along the frontage with shrubs to soften the slope along the retaining wall. BGE required that the proposed street trees be changed from shade trees to ornamental trees (10 Eastern Redbud - *Cercis canadensis*) due to overhead wires.

Staff Presentation

The panel is very familiar with this B-2 zoned, 3.6-acre site that is proposing to support a car wash on Rt 40. Part of the site is an environmentally protected area with a tributary of the Sucker Branch on the western portion of the site which will place a lot of the existing vegetation inside the stream buffer area. DPZ would like DAP to touch on some issues such as landscaping and sidewalks since this site fronts Rt. 40 and is subject to the Rt. 40 guidelines. Given the onsite conditions including the overhead wires, it would be appreciated if the panel can make recommendations regarding landscaping to improve visibility, but address street tree requirements. DPZ would also like DAP to make recommendations regarding the orientation layout of the property or to improve pedestrian and vehicular circulation and to ensure the design meets the intent of the Rt 40 guidelines.

DAP Questions and Comments

Site Design

Sidewalks\Grade Changes

DAP inquired if the car wash was being developed by the owner of the car sales and service center onsite.

The applicant advised that these are 2 separate business entities. The owner of the car sales and service center will lease the property to Auto Spa Express.

DAP commented that this site will have a section of sidewalk that starts and ends nowhere, which is the case up and down Rt. 40. DAP inquired what the grade change will be coming out of the driveway and

if it would be possible for someone to put a sidewalk out in front of the car sales and service center and if steps would be needed.

The applicant advised that there is a consistent slope along Rt 40 and there is a proposed retaining wall along the upper sales lot and the proposed car wash. The developer does not control the car sales lot frontage. The owner does own the 2 lots for a total of 4.1 acres.

DAP recommended that to approve the lease of the primary owner that Zoning require that the owner take out the driveway and do some landscaping along that edge that will be compatible with the new proposed site.

DAP commented that there is a lot of grading in the front and inquired if there will be any issues with power poles or fiber optic lines.

The applicant commented that the utility poles will be at the base of the slope so there will not be an issue. There will not be any cutting out in the right of way on any of the underground electric or signal lines.

DAP commented that they were not understanding the need for the retaining wall east of the site where the retaining wall abuts the existing parking area.

The applicant advised there is a significant change in grade and the proposed retaining wall will be 5' tall. The height of the wall diminishes in both directions.

Site Layout/Vacuum Stations

DAP commented that there is a challenge with the intent of the Rt 40 design guidelines to create a Boulevard feel in the midst of the existing suburban sprawl. The guidelines are very clear about putting the buildings close to the front and not putting parking lots in the front of the site and this is compounded by the brightly colored vacuum structures. DAP inquired if there are architectural treatments that could be done or other configurations of the site that could address this issue. This design is creating a very infrastructure forward identity of this site on the street as opposed to the intention of the guidelines.

The applicant advised they looked at many layout options including pulling the building forward and how that worked from an operational standpoint. It was important to maintain circulation around the existing car sales and service center and allow integrated access with multiple uses and avoid any pinch points. The applicant confirmed they are within the 100' maximum set back requirement. The guidelines do allow for one row of parking in between the building and the road.

DAP inquired if a 3' knee wall could be installed and obscured by bushes to hide the vacuums from the street.

The applicant advised that they are planning to move the bushes to the top of the slope to help buffer the vacuum stations.

DAP noted that the applicant would need to have bushes tall enough to conceal the vacuums and asked how tall the vacuum stations are. DAP commented that the design team will need to get a perspective from the street to determine how tall the bushes need to be to camouflage the vacuums. They noted that the proposed evergreen bushes would likely need to be 3-4' in height.

The applicant advised that the vacuums will be approximately 8 feet tall.

DAP commented that the blue canopies for the vacuum stations are fun but is not sure they comply with the design guidelines. A lot of commercial branding must conform to the design guidelines and

this was done with the color of the building and if the applicant would reconsider the styling of the canopies as well.

DAP referred the design team to page 14 of the manual which sets forth the goals of the TNC district and challenge the applicants to think about how this will play into those guidelines.

DAP confirmed that the spaces along Rt 40 area all vacuum stations and the dumpster will be on the left side. DAP inquired how many vacuum spaces there will be in total at the site.

The applicant advised there will be 21 vacuum spaces.

DAP stated that the number of vacuum stations seems like overkill and inquired if a few vacuum spaces should be eliminated to have a turnaround for customers or trucks.

The applicant advised they do not have room for a turnaround or a cul-de-sac, but drivers can back into the striped area and turn around. The #1 customer complaint is that there are not enough vacuum spaces.

Storm Water Management

DAP inquired what the applicants will be using for water quality.

The applicant advised they will be using Filterra Stormwater Biofiltration units which are proprietary MDE approved devices.

Signage

DAP commented that the stand-alone signage perched on top of the hill that is proposed should reference back to the manual. DAP understands the requirements for freestanding signs and noted there is a lot of Auto Spa branding that is carried through the site, but they don't meet the intent of the guidelines.

The applicant responded that 4' enter and exit signs will be out along Rt 40 and the other signs are internal to the site. There is also the free standing 20' sign.

DPZ inquired if the site is in the TNC (Traditional Neighborhood Center Concept) area which would make this sign prohibited.

The applicant advised that the site is not within the TNC and these would be recommendations, but not requirements.

Landscape

DAP asked if the applicant was taking down significant vegetation to get down to the stream valley.

The applicant advised they were not disturbing the stream buffer at all and that it is just misrepresented on the rendering.

DAP inquired if the evergreen shrubbery will be on the hillside or at the top of the hillside along Rt. 40.

The applicant advised that they will be on the hillside and if possible, they would like to have 2 varieties including Blue Girl Hollies up on the bench and then something smaller in front of it where the slope starts. The slope itself will be difficult to place ornamental shrubs.

DAP commented that they would prefer the shrubs be at the top of the slope to provide screening.

Regarding the upright trees DAP inquired if there were some suitable trees that would not interfere with the overhead wires and would have a longer life span.

The applicant agreed with this approach and they initially were looking at the Armstrong Maple, but BGE has a 40-foot separation requirement and they had to switch to ornamentals, which unfortunately have a shorter life span than shade trees.

DAP commended the applicants on going above and beyond to study the landscape buffers.

DAP inquired if there is an opportunity at the top of the slope for shade trees.

The applicant commented that will be the right of way for the utility company. The trees are currently going in between the sidewalk and the right of way.

DAP commented there are some upright trees such as the Columnar Maple.

The applicant responded that BGE has the list of trees that are permitted and not permitted. There are 3 tree options including Crepe Myrtle, Redbud or Hawthorn that can be utilized within 40 feet of overhead powerlines. The County requires a letter from BGE approving the landscape plan.

DAP commended the applicants for using 90% native species in their landscape design.

DAP Motions for Recommendations

1. DAP Chair Robert Gorman made the following motion:

That DPZ not approve the plan unless the leasing company closes the existing [eastern] driveways, extend the curb, and landscape the area.

DAP Vice Chair Ethan Marchant seconded.

Vote: 5-0

2. DAP Chair Robert Gorman made the following motion:

That the landscape architect considers moving the shrubbery to the top of the hill along Rt 40 to further screen the vacuum area.

DAP Vice Chair Ethan Marchant seconded.

Vote: 5-0

3. DAP Vice Chair Ethan Marchant made the following motion:

That the design team look at the design manual for Rt 40 Traditional Neighborhoods – Center District and proposes a solution for the front bay area that meets the intent of the street facing aspects of the project, including possible elimination of the blue overhead vacuum cleaners in that location or additional screening.

DAP Chair Robert Gorman seconded.

Vote: 5-0

4. DAP Vice Chair Ethan Marchant made the following motion:

That the signage on site complies with the Route 40 Design Manual requirements and intent.

DAP Chair Robert Gorman seconded.

Vote: 5-0

3. Other Business and Informational Items

a. The next DAP meeting will be April 13, 2022.

4. Call to Adjourn

DAP Chair Robert Gorman adjourned the meeting at 7:58 PM