



BEAUFORT COUNTY
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD (DRB) MINUTES
June 5, 2025, Grace Coastal Church, 15 Williams Drive, Okatie, SC

Members Present: Eric Walsnovich, Kris Feldmann, Denise Procida and John Teter

Members Absent: James Atkins

Staff Present: Nancy Moss, Beaufort County Community Development Department

Guests: Mercedes-Benz Expansion Project: Cord McLean, JMX Design; and, Chad Chastain, Ayer Design Group; and Brad Johnson, Group 1 Automotive (via telephone)

No members of the public were in attendance.

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Vice-Chairman Walsnovich called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m.
2. **FOIA:** Vice-Chairman Walsnovich said that “public notification of this meeting has been published, posted, and distributed in compliance with the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act”.
3. **MINUTES:** Vice-Chairman Walsnovich asked if there were comments on the May 1, 2025, meeting minutes. Mr. Feldmann motioned to approve the minutes as prepared. Ms. Procida seconded to approve. Motion carried unanimously.
4. **PUBLIC COMMENT ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS:** There was no public comment.

ACTION ITEMS

5. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Mercedes-Benz Building Additions and Parking Lot Expansion Project, 155 Fording Island Road – Bluffton - Conceptual:

The Board had a brief discussion and asked Ms. Moss to provide the staff comments. Mr. Walsnovich asked for public comment, but no comments were made. Mr. Walsnovich read the Design Review Board comments from the Mercedes-Benz informal discussion held at the January 9, 2025, meeting. Cord McLean, the architect, and Chad Chastain, the Landscape Architect made the presentation for the project. Mr. McLean said that the original building design that was presented informally earlier in the year was driven by Mercedes’ brand image with a curtain wall across the showroom. He said that the building design has been revised, and they incorporated the Design Review Board comments. Mr. McLean said that full view high speed overhead doors were proposed at the new service drive canopy & the side doors, that the front facade was broken up with plasters and a louvered canopy was added over the storefront windows and the service drive overhead doors, that the tops of the RTUs show in the front elevation but would not be visible to

the highway, and that the west roof parapet would have to be raised to conceal the new RTUs from Graves Road. Mr. Chastain stated that the existing parking bays and buffer in front of the building contained a mixture of mature evergreen and deciduous trees, that 8' foundation buffers were proposed around the building and that the front buffer would be extended along Highway 278 and a new buffer would be added along Graves Road.

Ms. Procida commented on the front trellis element and said that the eyebrow appeared as a solid element and that it would help if it had some texture. She said that she was not sold on the EIFS bend and suggested that the service drive parapet get lowered to place more emphasis on the showroom portion of the building and to add brackets at the mansard roofs for better detailing.

Mr. Feldmann stated that there was a huge improvement with the building design from a massing and articulation standpoint. He said that he realized that the "swoosh" element was placed on the corner to indicate where the main entry was located but stated that there was no hierarchy in terms of entrances. He suggested that something additional, such as a parapet height adjustment or covering, would better help indicate the entrance. He stated he had no problem with the "swoosh" mark. Mr. Feldmann asked if the overhead-speed doors were a combination of metal & glass. Mr. McLean said that he would send a photograph of the overhead doors but that the glass sections were narrow with aluminum framing. Mr. Feldmann said that brackets and awnings would help break it down. He said that the design has come a long way.

Mr. Teter stated that the building design was an impressive change. He recommended that they narrow the "swoosh" mark by 10-15% so it does not appear as bulky and by reducing the widths, it may make it look sleek. He said that at nighttime the glass doors at the service drive with the lights on may be an eyesore and asked why the doors were full view. Mr. McLean stated that the service drive addition does not contain equipment, it is just an area for customers to drop their vehicles off, he doubted whether the lights would be on within that portion of the building at nighttime and that the full glass was for safety purposes. Mr. Teter said that the overflow grass parking area between the building and Graves Road does not look as attractive as the original portion of the site.

Mr. Walsnovich said that they may want to add more parking spaces than are required to eliminate the need for grass parking. He complimented the architect for considering the January DRB comments. He said that the trellis' were something the Board wanted more of because they help bring the design down to a pedestrian scale. He stated that he liked the Bahama shutters on the west side of the building, but they looked out of scale and were too small. He said that he liked the color scheme and roofs, but that they should add brackets at the roofs to give the building Lowcountry appeal. He stated that if the rooftop units are visible from the streets at final, the building cannot get a CO. Mr. Walsnovich said the light pole heights looked good but to look at the footcandles being proposed because they exceed the levels in Division 5.7.40.A of the Code. He stated that gravel parking spaces were not considered pervious and asked if they would propose any stormwater BMPs in the parking medians. Mr. Chastain said that they would explore this option. Mr. Walsnovich stated that this project is located on one large site and that it was under the DRB's purview to look at the existing buffer to ensure it meets the required plant counts and

that the applicant must demonstrate that the new and existing buffers meet the required plant counts. He said that redbuds have a blight going on and should be avoided, that the summersweet and sweetspire shrubs may not work very well in our 9A climate zone, that shrubs are not available in 5-gallon containers and to specify 7-gallon container sizes, that the plantings in the bio-basin seem fine and to show how the existing tree removals around the building are being mitigated inch for inch within the disturbed areas. Mr. Walsnovich said to extend the trellis' out further to create more shade and show and that on the west elevation, the canopies above the overhead doors seemed to be placed too high and would not function properly. He stated that he appreciated the diversity with the ginkgo and elm trees proposed but recommended that they use Shumard oak, Nuttall oak or Trident maples in the buffers and parking islands and that groundcovers should be in a one-gallon container at the time of planting.

Mr. Feldmann made a motion to approve this project subject to the following conditions:

- Study the roof parapet heights to ensure the rooftop equipment is fully concealed from view to Highway 278 and Graves Road.
- Explore adding dimension and texture to the front trellis' and extending them out further, increasing the size of the west side Bahama shutters and lowering the height of the canopies above the overhead doors on the west side of the building.
- Establish better hierarchy between the main Mercedes entry and the AMG side of the building. Consider reducing the parapet height on the service drive portion of the building to place emphasis on the showroom.
- Study the "Swoop" dimension so it is sleeker.
- Provide the high-speed full view overhead door information.
- Document that the existing and proposed buffers meet the plant counts required per every 100 linear feet.
- Do not propose Ginko, Elm or redbud trees or the summersweet and sweetspire shrubs. Consider incorporating Shumard oak, Nuttall oak or Trident maples in the buffers and tree islands.
- Increase the 5-gallon container sizes for the shrubs to 7-gallon and groundcovers to 1-gallon containers.
- All tree removals must be mitigated inch-for-inch. If these trees are in healthy condition, it is preferred that they get relocated within the disturbed area of the site.
- Ensure the parking lot lighting does not exceed the maximum footcandles allowed per Code.

Mr. Teter seconded the motion.

Mr. Walsnovich asked the Board if a discussion was needed. There was no discussion.

The motion carried unanimously.

6. OLD BUSINESS: None

OTHER BUSINESS:

- 7. NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING:** Mr. Walsnovich stated that the next scheduled meeting would be held at 2:30 p.m. on Thursday, July 10, 2025, at Grace Coastal Church, 15 Williams Drive, Okatie, SC 29909.
- 8. ADJOURNMENT:** Mr. Walsnovich made a motion to close the meeting, and Mr. Feldmann seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m.