



CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA

A COAST GUARD CITY

Planning and Community Development Department

AGENDA ITEM

Case No: VAR 25-07
Proposal: Variance for sign size
Applicant: Jeremy Serka
Owner: Starwest Alaska, LLC
Location: 4500 Sawmill Creek Road
Legal: Lot Five (5), Sawmill Cove Industrial Park Subdivision #1
Zone: GP - Gary Paxton Special District
Size: 130,680 sf
Parcel ID: 6-6000-000
Existing Use: Manufacturing/Industrial
Adjacent Use: Commercial/Industrial
Utilities: Existing
Access: Sawmill Creek Road

KEY POINTS AND CONCERNS

- Proposal is for a 340 square-foot sign
- Sign size will promote wayfinding
- Sign will be directly lit

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Aerial
Attachment B: Plat
Attachment C: Site Plan
Attachment D: Photos
Attachment E: Applicant Materials and Narrative

BACKGROUND/PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The applicant is requesting a minor variance to increase the allowable sign size of a wall-mounted sign at 4500 Sawmill Creek Road in the GP Gary Paxton special district. The proposed sign will be 20 by 17 feet, with an area of 340 square feet (sf). The sign will be backlit by LED bulbs. The applicant has proposed mounting the sign to the south wall of the existing building at 4500 Sawmill Creek Road, which is within an industrial district. No houses abut the roadway from which the sign is viewable, and the curvature of the roadway—along with the steep topography upland of the road—obscures the sign from residential properties. The sign will be directed down Sawmill Creek Road and viewable on the approach from town into the Gary Paxton Industrial Park.

ANALYSIS

The Sitka General Code 22.20.090 E.5. states, “*Permitted signs on business buildings may be a total combined size no larger than 10 percent of the area of the wall upon which they are to be mounted, or 100 square feet, which is less.*” This provision speaks to the intent of the regulations regarding sign size to minimize the visual impact of signage while allowing prominent demarcation of businesses.

Alaska Statute 29.40.040(b)(3) states that a variance may not be granted solely to relieve financial hardship or inconvenience; the applicant must demonstrate that the variance is warranted due to a unique need/circumstance surrounding the request. This development is unique in its location: it is part of the Gary Paxton Industrial Park and south of Sawmill Creek Road, east of Silver Bay Seafoods, and north of Silver Bay. As demonstrated by site plans provided by the applicant, the building is visible from the road but the wall on which the sign will be mounted is at an angle that makes the sign hard to read from a close distance. The applicant has stated the size of the sign will promote wayfinding for customers.

The request is consistent with a 2004 variance request by False Island Lodge to increase the maximum size of a permitted sign on a building (airplane hangar) at 609 Airport Road from 100 sf to 172 sf. This variance request was described in meeting minutes as a measure to “identify the hangar to incoming aircraft and clients.” The False Island Lodge sign as proposed was a little over 42 feet in length (over twice as long as the proposed sign at 4500 Sawmill Creek Road) and four feet tall (less than a quarter the height of the 4500 SMC sign) and included lettering only. Approximately 92 sf of the 4500 SMC sign will be devoted to lettering; the other 248 sf will provide room for display of the company’s logo.

The wall-mounted identification sign will have illumination limited to the borders of the lettering and logo, significantly reducing the potential for hazardous glare. Additionally, the lighting material selected by the applicant is dimmable, further reducing the potential for the sign to create undue light pollution. Direct illumination is permitted for signs in industrial zones, including the Gary Paxton special district.

Comprehensive Plan Guidance

While the Comprehensive Plan does not specifically address signs or sign size, it does support development for manufacturing businesses (ED 6.7) and ship building and vessel construction enterprises (ED 6.9).

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends approval of the variance to increase the allowable sign size from 100 sf to 340 sf for one wall-mounted sign at 4500 Sawmill Creek Road.

MOTIONS TO APPROVE THE ZONING VARIANCE

1. **“I move to approve the minor zoning variance to increase allowable sign size from 100 square feet to 340 square feet at 4500 Sawmill Creek Road in the GP – Gary Paxton special district subject to the attached conditions of approval. The property is also known as Lot Five (5), Sawmill Cove Industrial Park Subdivision #1. The request is filed by Jeremy Serka. The owner of record is Starwest Alaska, LLC.”**

Conditions of Approval

- a. One wall-mounted sign is approved to be 340 square feet.
 - b. The plans shall remain consistent with the narrative and plans provided by the applicant for this request. Any substantive changes to the plan will require additional Planning Commission review.
 - c. Permit and construction shall comply with building code, including obtaining any required building permits.
 - d. The Planning Commission, at its discretion, may schedule a public hearing at any time for the purpose of resolving issues with the request and mitigating adverse impacts on nearby properties upon receipt of meritorious complaint or evidence of violation of conditions of approval.
 - e. Substantial construction progress must be made on the project within one year of the date of the variance approval or the approval becomes void. In the event it can be documented that other substantial progress has been made, a one-year extension may be granted by the Planning Director if a request is filed within eleven months of the initial approval.
2. **“I move to adopt and approve the required findings for minor variances as listed in the report.”**

Before any variance is granted, it shall be shown¹:

- a. Required Findings for Minor Expansions, Small Structures, Fences, and Signs: The municipality finds that the necessary threshold for granting this variance should be lower than thresholds for variances involving major structures or major expansions *because signs are a minor improvement to a property, and the overall impact of the development was appropriately considered in the permitting process;*
- b. The granting of the variance is not injurious to nearby properties or improvements *because the design of the sign allows for better navigational outcomes by customers, and the design of the sign prevents glare into neighboring properties and right-of-way;*
- c. The granting of the variance furthers an appropriate use of the property *because it provides visible roadside signage located on the same property as the organization it is intended to serve.*

¹ Section 22.30.160(D)(2)—Required Findings for Minor Variances