

**BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT  
STAFF REPORT****Date: July 6, 2015****CASE NUMBER**

5981/4384/4357

**APPLICANT NAME**

Alabama Hotels, LLC

**LOCATION**251 Government Street  
(Southwest corner of Government Street and South  
Joachim Street)**VARIANCE REQUEST****SIGN:** Sign Variance to allow a non-painted wall sign, a corner wall sign, a wall plaque, and a vertical sign on a balcony in a T5.2 Sub-District in the Downtown Development District.**ZONING ORDINANCE  
REQUIREMENT****SIGN:** The Zoning Ordinance allows painted wall signs; however, corner signs, wall plaques, or vertical signs on a balcony are not allowed in a T5.2 Sub-District in the Downtown Development District.**ZONING**

T5.2

**AREA OF PROPERTY**

0.74± Acres

**TRAFFIC ENGINEERING  
COMMENTS**

No Comments

**CITY COUNCIL  
DISTRICT**

District 2

**ANALYSIS**

The applicant is requesting a Sign Variance to allow a non-painted wall sign, a corner wall sign, a wall plaque, and a vertical sign on a balcony in a T5.2 Sub-District in the Downtown Development District; the Zoning Ordinance allows painted wall signs; however, corner signs, wall plaques, or vertical signs on a balcony are not allowed in a T5.2 Sub-District in the Downtown Development District.

The applicant has submitted a sign package illustrating a 450 square foot back-lit aluminum sign on the South elevation facing Interstate 10, a wall sign that wraps around the Northeast corner of the building, a 4.7 square foot wall plaque, and a 21 square foot vertical sign on a balcony on what appears to be the East elevation.

As the site is located in the Church Street East Historic District, the applicant submitted their sign package to the Architectural Review Board (ARB) for review at its March 4, 2015 meeting. The ARB decided to approve the submitted sign package subject to the site obtaining the necessary variances from the Board of Zoning Adjustment, however, it should be noted that the sign package submitted to the ARB is somewhat different than what has been submitted for the variance application.

The sign package submitted to the ARB consisted of: a 311 square foot back-lit aluminum sign on the South elevation facing Interstate 10, a 15.6 square foot wall sign that wraps around the Northeast corner of the building, and two 20 square foot vertical signs attached to balconies on the North and East galleries. The substantial difference in the sizes of some of these signs may need to be reviewed by the ARB, and the discrepancy in the number of signs makes it difficult for staff to conduct a thorough review of the proposal. It should also be noted that the applicant has expressed to staff the desire to have window decal signage, however no information has been submitted to determine if this is still the applicant's desire, or if it will meet the Downtown Development District regulations for window decals.

The Zoning Ordinance states that no variance shall be granted where economics are the basis for the application; and, unless the Board is presented with sufficient evidence to find that the variance will not be contrary to the public interest, and that special conditions exist such that a literal enforcement of the Ordinance will result in an unnecessary hardship. The Ordinance also states that a variance should not be approved unless the spirit and intent of the Ordinance is observed and substantial justice done to the applicant and the surrounding neighborhood.

Variances are not intended to be granted frequently. The applicant must clearly show the Board that the request is due to very unusual characteristics of the property and that it satisfies the variance standards. What constitutes unnecessary hardship and substantial justice is a matter to be determined from the facts and circumstances of each application.

The applicant states:

*Alabama Hotels, LLC is applying for a sign variance in order to obtain approval for a plaque, a vertical sign on the back of the building, a vertical sign on the balcony, & a sign for our bar "The Corner".*

*The existing building was constructed in 1940 with one main facade. That facade is now overshadowed by the government plaza on the Joachim Street elevation. The Government Street elevation is mainly blocked above the first level by large Spanish oaks that line the street. The architect and designer struggled to develop signage that could clearly identify the hotel. In doing so, they opted to have the large signage face I-10. It would not be identifiable from the interstate if it were not large scale. The building is historic (and in the historic district) so the blade signage at the balconies is designed to blend better with the building—yet still identify the building as a hotel to passersby on Government St. This signage package has been reviewed by the Hilton franchise as the hotel will be a Hilton upon grand opening.*

*As described above, the typical viewing angles of the building are obstructed by the government plaza building on one side and the Spanish oaks on the other.*

*Finally, the hotel is different from neighboring properties because is attached to a county owned parking garage.*

The applicant has submitted two different sign packages for review to the ARB and the Board of Zoning Adjustment making it difficult to consider the merits of their variance requests. Based on the information submitted with this application, there does not appear to be a hardship, and most of the signs could be re-designed to comply with sign regulations for a T5.2 Sub-District in the Downtown Development District.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends to the Board the following findings of fact for Denial:

- 1) approving the variance will be contrary to the public interest in that the proposed signage could be modified to comply with the Downtown Development District;
- 2) special conditions do not exist and there are no hardships which exist that prevent the applicant from providing signage in compliance with the Downtown Development District; and
- 3) the spirit of the chapter shall not be observed and substantial justice shall not be done to the surrounding neighborhood by granting the variance because the intent on the prohibition of the various proposed signs is to encourage the use of the types of signs now allowed by the Downtown Development District.

***Revised for the August 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting:***

*The Board of Zoning Adjustment heldover the application from the July 6<sup>th</sup> meeting to allow the applicant time to clarify differences between the sign packet submitted to the Architectural Review Board (ARB) and the packet submitted to the Board of Zoning Adjustment. The applicant has provided some revisions of the sign package, as well as a revised narrative further explaining the sign package requested.*

*The applicant states:*

*When developing The Admiral Semmes Hotel signage package, we took into account several conditions and challenges.*

*Blade signs mounted on the balconies (Qty 2):*

1. *We wanted to create pedestrian scale signage for the Government St. and Joachim St. facades of the building. This was in consideration for the surrounding buildings and the relationship of this historic structure with these streets.*
2. *The large Spanish Oaks that line Government St. preclude passing traffic from identifying traditional plaque signage that would be mounted on the building.*

3. *There was a precedent in the signage ordinance that allowed for a corner-mounted 3' x 15' blade sign. A true corner location would not work with sightlines; we did not feel it was excessive to ask for 2 signs considering the corner location of the building. Most importantly, the location of the Joachim St. sign shows drivers-by on Government St. the location of the valet entrance to hotel.*

*Corner 251 sign:*

1. *The entrance to the Corner food and beverage outlet is visibly blocked by a large column that stands center of the double-door outside access to the establishment. We felt that wrapping a sign on the outside corner of the column was tasteful and subtle.*
2. *The success of this food and beverage outlet is mainly dependent on outside business. In times past, the hotel treated this outlet more as a service for the hotel than a standalone business. Therefore, the signage was not imperative at the outside access point. That practice is not sustainable with current hotel trends in food and beverage.*

*"The Admiral" vertical sign:*

1. *The calculation for the square footage of the sign was not done by our office. However, the height and width determined were accurate to the original design for signage. However, it has been modified slightly to achieve the proper font scale.*
2. *The Owners expressed a concern that the signage needed to be visible from the interstate. We approached the building from several angles by car to determine the proper sign height and scale. A smaller sign simply isn't legible from a safe driving distance.*

*The size of the signage has been altered from the previous submission to either match what was submitted to the ARB, or slightly smaller. The large rear wall sign was approved by ARB as a 311 square foot sign, and the revised information submitted illustrates a 306 square foot sign. The wall sign that wraps around the Northeast corner of the building was approved by the ARB as a 15.6 square foot sign (per face), and is currently illustrated as 13.43 square feet. The applicant clarified that they wish to have two vertical balcony signs at 20 square feet per face which matches what was approved by ARB. The applicant further clarified that they are requesting two wall plaques which will be 4.7 square feet. It does not appear the wall plaques were reviewed by the ARB.*

*While the applicant has provided clarification as to the size and number of signs requested which more closely match what the ARB reviewed, they have still not provided sufficient justification as to the existence of a hardship associated with the site that prevents any kind of compliant signage allowed within the Downtown Development District. Regarding the large wall sign, there is no mention made of why the sign could not be painted on the wall with lights directed at the sign to allow night visibility which would be allowed by right. The proposed wall sign around the Northeast corner of the building could be reconfigured as a diagonal corner sign with up to 45 square feet per face and would allow for visibility by traffic from both*

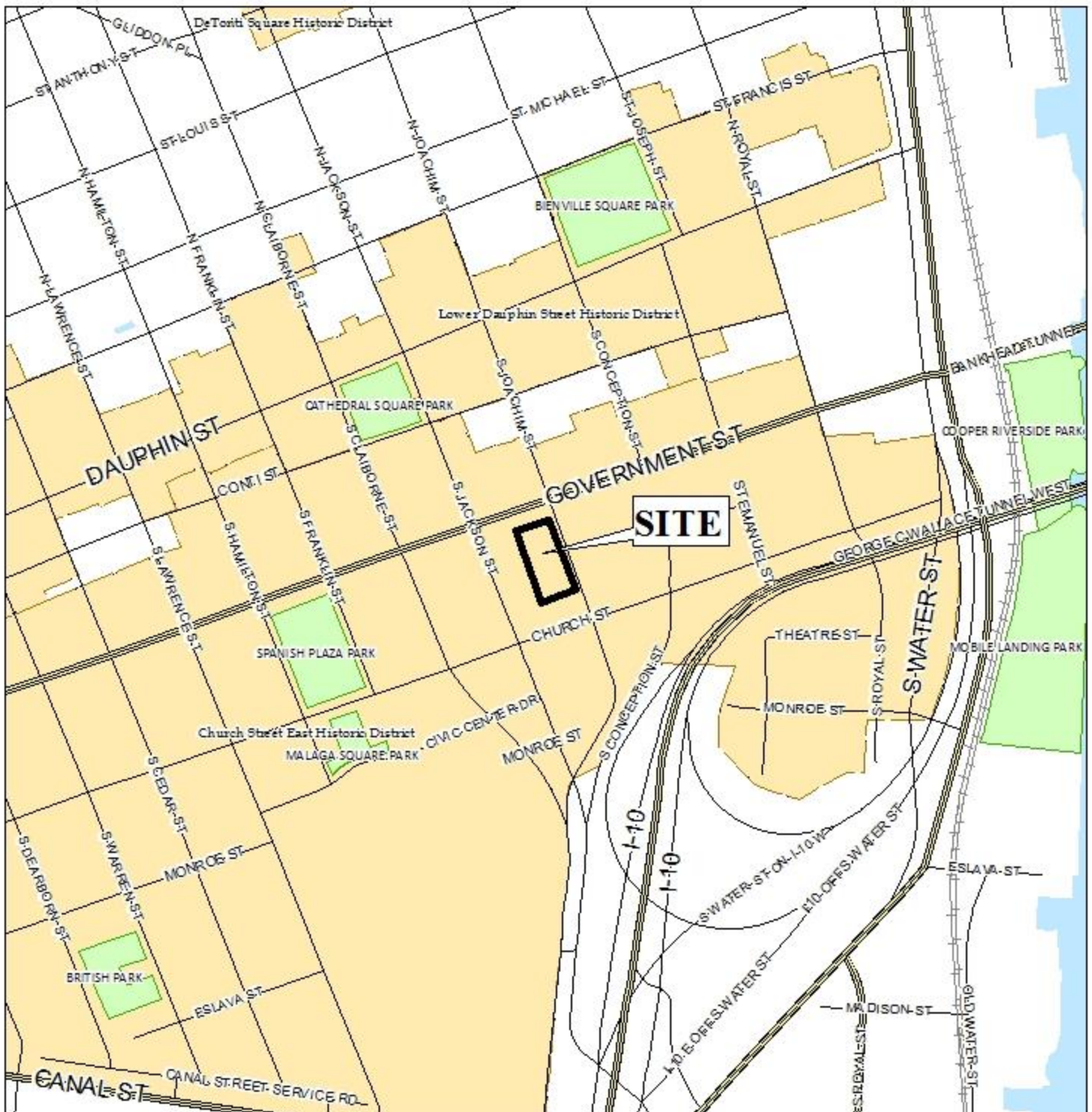
*directions as well as pedestrians. The vertical balcony signs proposed are discussed as being preferred versus wall plaque signage due to visibility concerns for traffic and pedestrians; however, there is no mention as to why a traditional hanging blade sign could not be successfully utilized. Finally, the wall plaques could possibly be redesigned to convey the same message as window decals depending on the proposed location of the signs on the building.*

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*Staff recommends to the Board the following findings of fact for Denial:*

- 1) approving the variance will be contrary to the public interest in that the proposed signage could be modified to comply with the Downtown Development District;*
- 2) special conditions do not exist and there are no hardships which exist that prevent the applicant from providing signage in compliance with the Downtown Development District; and*
- 3) the spirit of the chapter shall not be observed and substantial justice shall not be done to the surrounding neighborhood by granting the variance because the intent on the prohibition of the various proposed signs is to encourage the use of the types of signs allowed by the Downtown Development District.*

# LOCATOR MAP



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APPLICANT Alabama Hotels, LLC.

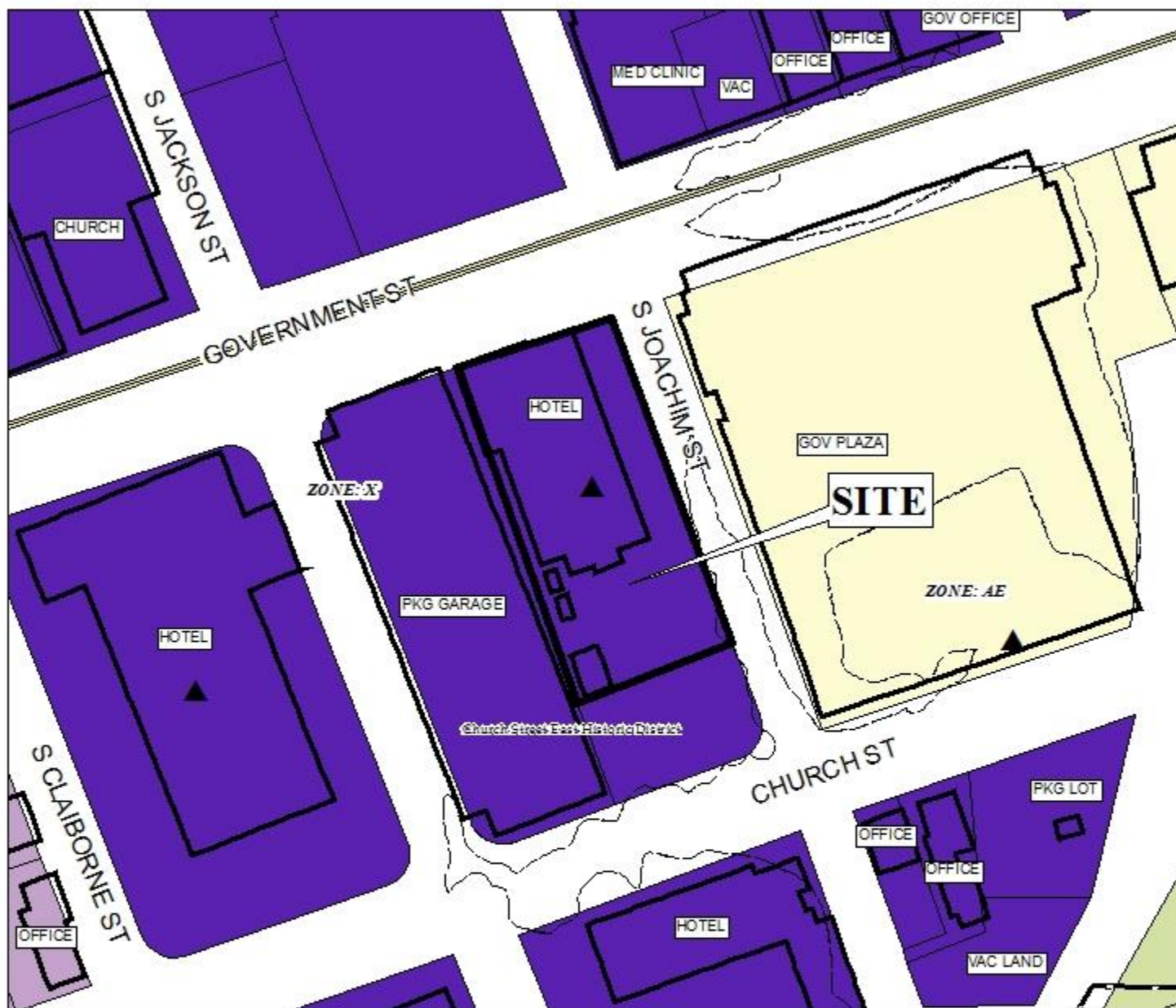
REQUEST Sign Variance





# BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT

## VICINITY MAP - EXISTING ZONING



The site is surrounded by commercial units.

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REQUEST Sign Variance

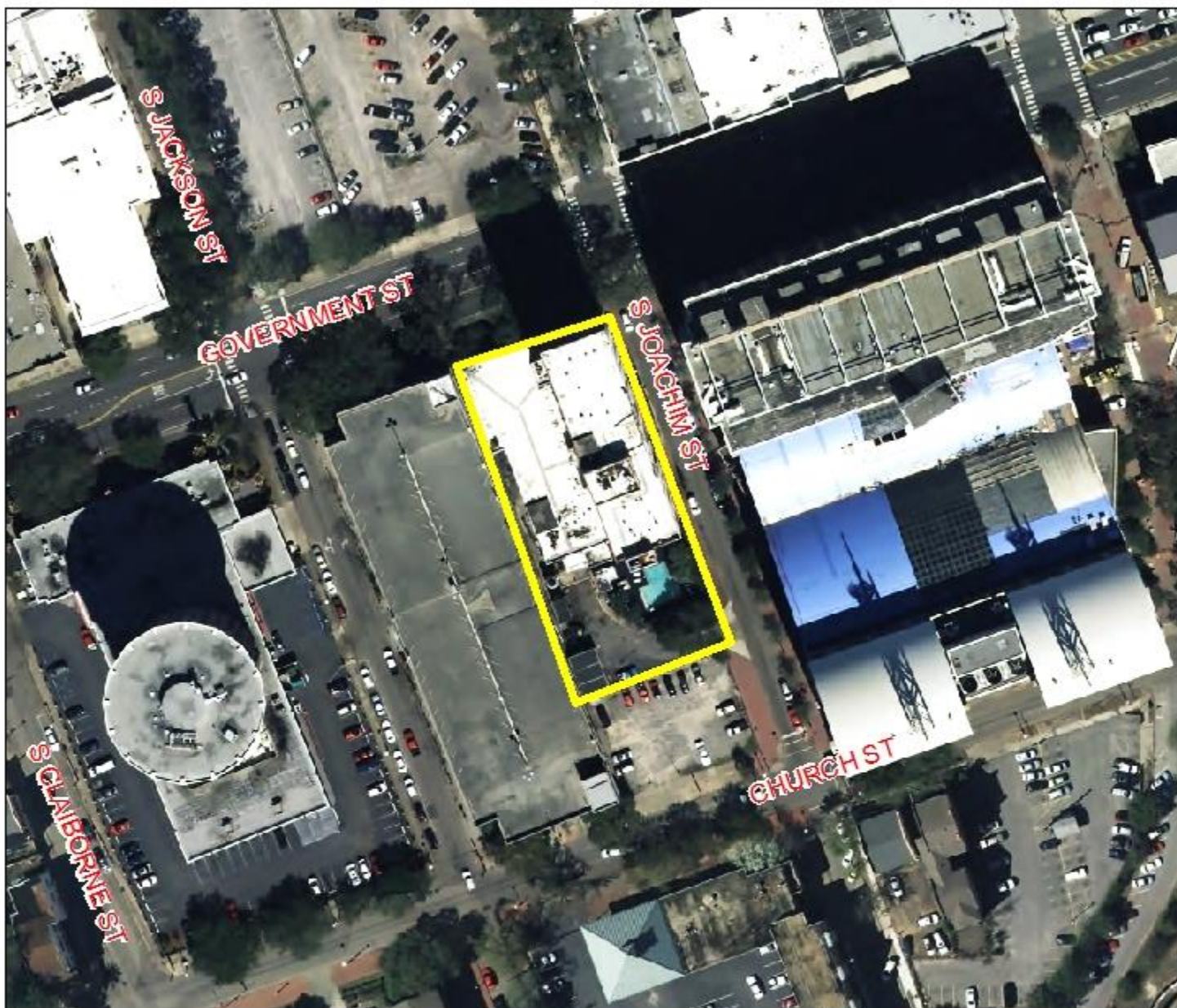
<span style="background-color: cyan; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> R-A	<span style="background-color: green; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> R-3	<span style="background-color: brown; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> T-B	<span style="background-color: orange; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> B-2	<span style="background-color: blue; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> B-5	<span style="background-color: yellow; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> MUN	<span style="background-color: red; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> SD-WH	<span style="background-color: purple; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> T5.1
<span style="background-color: white; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> R-1	<span style="background-color: pink; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> R-B	<span style="background-color: cyan; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> B-1	<span style="background-color: red; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> B-3	<span style="background-color: lightblue; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> I-1	<span style="background-color: lightgreen; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> OPEN	<span style="background-color: lightpink; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> T3	<span style="background-color: darkpurple; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> T5.2
<span style="background-color: yellow; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> R-2	<span style="background-color: peachpuff; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> H-B	<span style="background-color: magenta; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> LB-2	<span style="background-color: brown; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> B-4	<span style="background-color: grey; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> I-2	<span style="background-color: orange; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> SD	<span style="background-color: lightpurple; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> T4	<span style="background-color: darkblue; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> T6





# BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT

## VICINITY MAP - EXISTING ZONING



The site is surrounded by commercial units.

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# DETAIL SITE PLAN



## DESCRIPTION

"THE ADMIRAL" channel letters

TYPEFACE: Montra Riche (modified)

QUANTITY: 1

SQUARE FOOTAGE: 311.65

TYPE: Reverse Illumination channel letters

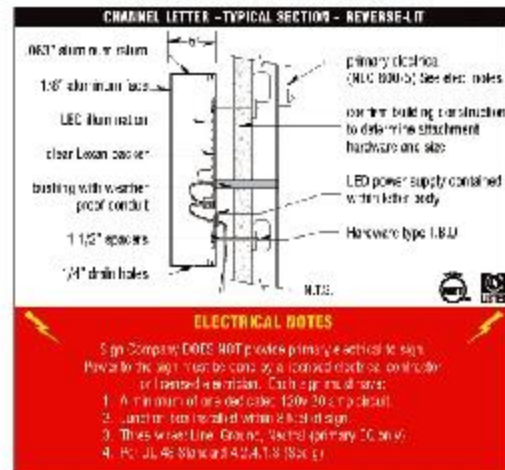
SIZE: 72" x 70.5" x 4'-2" O.A.

COLOR: Mahogany dark bronze

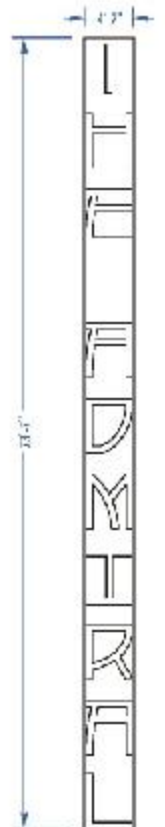
LIGHTING: Internal white LED lighting w/ internal power supply

MOUNTING: 3"x3" aluminum slotted rail receiver tubes. Mounting to brick facade with non-corrosive hardware - Hilti U-Bolt-Claw

ELECTRICAL: Tubes carry 120v AC to letters. One primary penetration required on building facade.



CL primary building ID  
SCALE: 3/32\"/>



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# DETAIL SITE PLAN



decorative bands  
standard aluminum finish

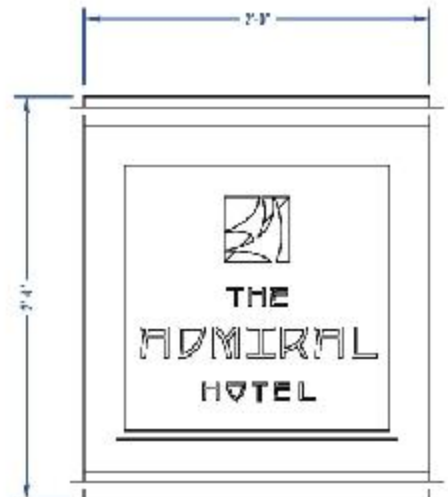
aluminum bars and  
cabinet

dimensional logo  
metal and painted finish

soft white LED  
cove lighting around  
perimeter

dimensional copy  
finished metal

inset aluminum border  
standard finish



SP.2

(2) hotel wall ID signs

SCALE: 1/4" = 1'

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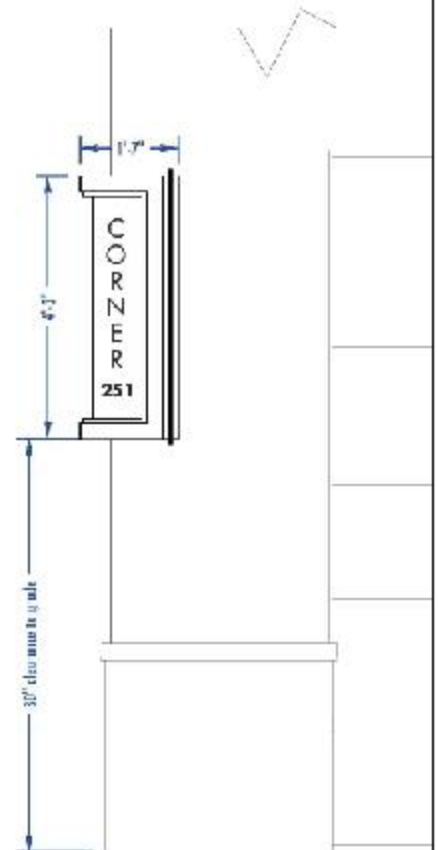
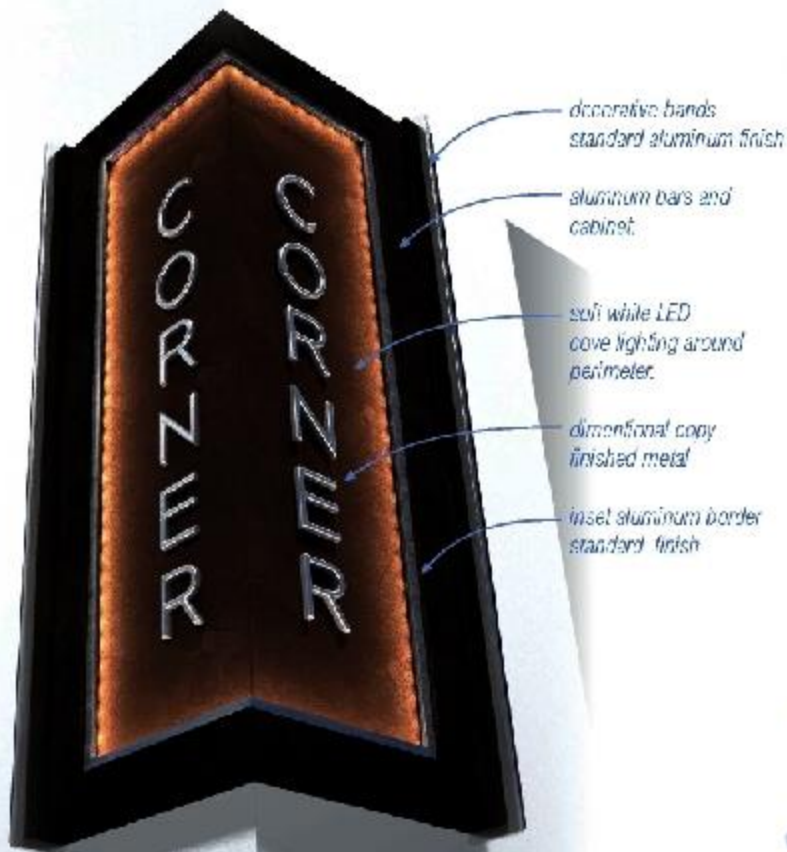
APPLICANT Alabama Hotels, LLC.

REQUEST Sign Variance



NTS

# DETAIL SITE PLAN



SP3

2 sided wall sign to wrap corner

SCALE: 1/2" = 1'

quantity = 2

square footage = 13.5

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

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NTS

# DETAIL SITE PLAN



**SP.1.1**

*projecting sign (to existing post)*

SCALE: 1/4"=1'  
quantity = 2

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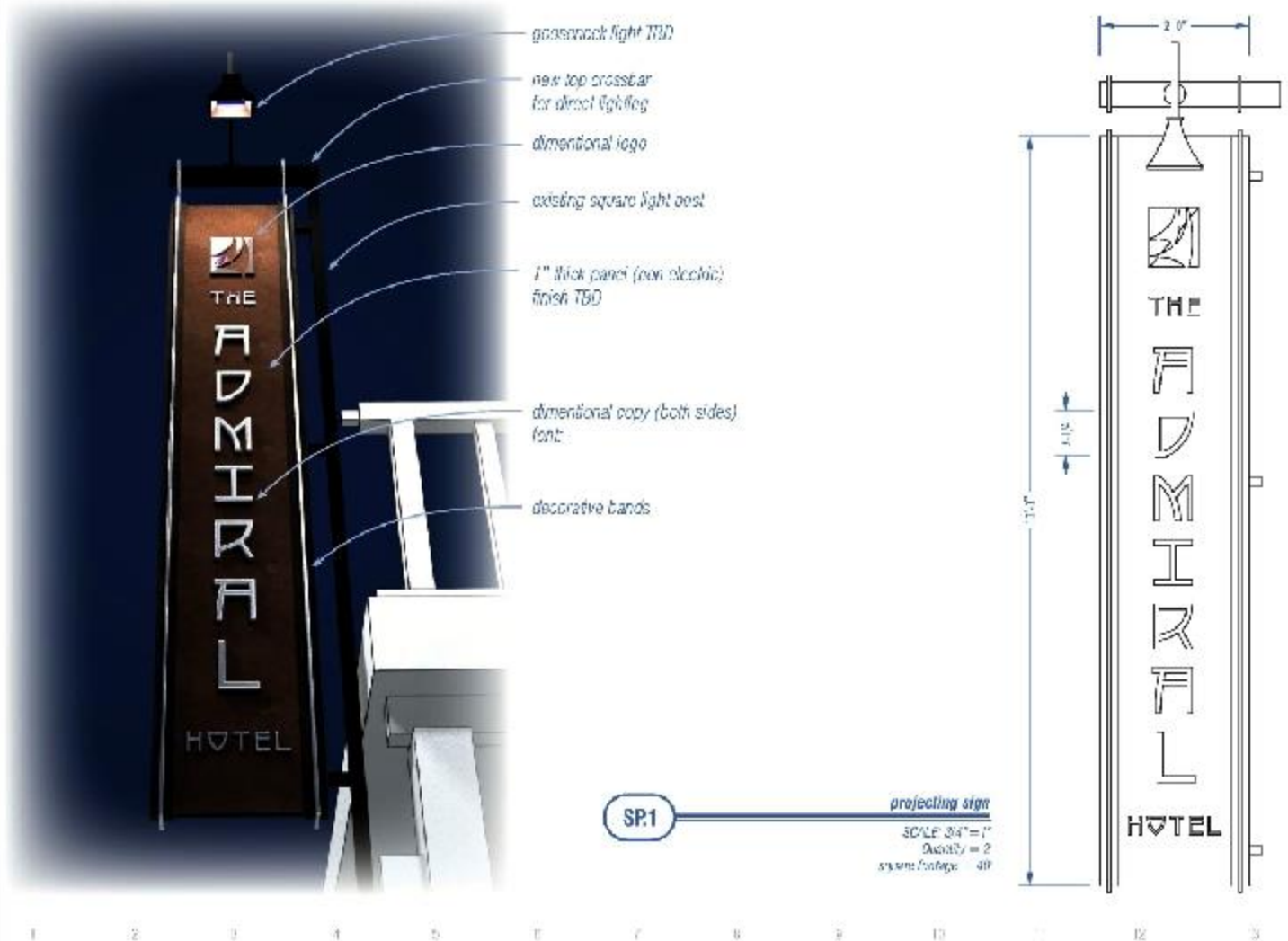
APPLICANT Alabama Hotels, LLC.

REQUEST Sign Variance





# DETAIL SITE PLAN



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