

POLK COUNTY DEVELOPMENT REVIEW COMMITTEE STAFF REPORT

DRC Date:	May 29, 2025	Level of Review:	Level 3 Review
PC Date:	August 6, 2025	Type:	Sign Plan
BoCC Date:	N/A	Case Numbers:	LDSP-2025-1
Applicant:	Randy Hodge Kimley Horn	Case Name:	Cottonwood Sign Plan
		Case Planner:	Andrew Grohowski, Planner II
Request:	Sign Plan for the proposed Cottonwood Corner retail plaza that will include one (1) 260 sq.ft. plaza sign 30 feet high, six (6) 80 sq.ft. monument signs 10 feet high, and one (1) monument sign listing all outparcels 10 feet high, all other sign types will be in accordance to Code.		
Location:	The subject property is located east of U.S. Highway 27, south of Cottonwood Drive and I-4, north of Ridgewood Lakes Boulevard, east and north of the City of Haines City in Section 29, Township 26, Range 27.		
Property Owners:	Cottonwood 27 Development LLC		
Parcel Numbers (Size):	272629-706500-030010 (± 6.34 acres); 272629-706500-030151 (± 3.96 acres); 272629-706500-030152 (± 2.51 acres)		
Future Land Use:	Professional Institutional-X (PIX) North Ridge Selected Area Plan (SAP)		
Development Area:	Transit Supportive Development Area (TSDA)		
Nearest Municipality:	Haines City (±0.37 miles)		
DRC Recommendation:	Approval		
Planning Commission Vote:	Pending Hearing		

Location Map



2025 Satellite Photo



Summary:

This is a request for a Sign Plan for the proposed development, Cottonwood Corner, located on the eastern side of U.S. Highway 27 and south of Victor Posner City Center. Cottonwood Corner is a proposed ±12.81-acre multi-use development that includes a mixture of high volume/high visibility uses on outparcels with drive-thru restaurants and a gas station, and lower volume/ low visibility retail uses such as offices. This is a heavily traveled throughfare in northeast Polk County. The sign code in Section 760 of the Land Development Code (LDC), in addition to the sign reductions in the North Ridge Selected Area Plan (SAP), are somewhat rigid in this type of development scenario. But through the Sign Plan process in Section 760.J, necessary flexibility can be afforded for mixed-use developments provided certain design criteria are met. They provide for a unified plan of aesthetically pleasing signage that encompasses the entire mixed-use development, and not just individual parcels.

The applicant is asking for a sign plan designed in a consistent theme for the following:

- one (1) 20'x30' plaza sign, (80 sq.ft.)
- one (1) 8'x10' multi-tenant monument sign, (45 sq.ft.)
- six (6) 13.6'x10' monument signs, (270 sq.ft.)

The proposed plan has a total sign area of 785 square feet cumulatively. Staff is recommending approval because the plan achieves a higher standard for signage than would be permitted by right on an individual, lot by lot, basis. While the plan will permit signage for outparcels on monument and plaza signs, typically in lieu of one another under Section 760.G.3, the net potential signage will be reduced. Under the current code, seven parcels, including six outparcels, in this shopping village would each be allotted a ground (pole) sign of 127.5 square feet (*see Table 1*). The one large tract can have a 255 square foot ground sign and 68 square foot monument sign. This equates to 1,088 square feet of total sign face along each lot's frontage. The applicant's sign plan equates to 785 square feet of total signage, which is an overall 303 square foot reduction from what the current standards in the LDC will allow by right. In addition to the overall signage reduction, the public is getting a consistent and aesthetically enhanced form of signage throughout the development. The signage plan also reduces the potential for visual clutter, while also providing aesthetically pleasing signage with a common design theme.

Findings of Fact

- *The request is for a Sign Plan for the proposed Cottonwood Development and applies to approximately 12.81 acres. The proposed Sign Plan as requested includes one (1) 20'x30' plaza sign, one (1) 8'x10' multi-tenant monument sign, and six (6) 13.6'x10' monument signs.*
- *The plaza sign will be the tallest sign at no more than 30 feet tall with a sign area of 260 square feet per face. The other interior signage proposed will not exceed 10 feet in height.*
- *According to Chapter 10 of the Polk County Land Development Code, plaza signs are defined as "A freestanding sign used to advertise businesses that occupy a shopping center or complex with multiple tenants."*
- *According to Chapter 10 of the Polk County Land Development Code, monument signs are defined as "Any sign, other than a Pole sign, which is placed upon or supported by structures or supports in or upon the ground and independent of support from any building."*
- *The proposed Walmart and Sam's Club directly to the west received an approved Sign Plan with a total sign area of 1,337 square feet, or 552 square feet larger area than the current request (LDCU-2024-25).*
- *According to Chapter 7, Section 760 J. 3. of the Polk County Land Development Code, "Signage plans shall be subject to the Polk County Level 3 Review process."*
- *The subject property is located within the North U.S. Highway 27 Selected Area Plan (SAP). The Future Land Use Map designations of the property Professional Institutional-X (PIX).*
- *Per Chapter 4, Section 401.06.P, on-premises signs in the Professional Institutional (PIX) district shall be consistent with the community Activity Center (CACX) standards per Section 760.*
- *The subject property has direct ingress/egress onto US Highway 27 (Link # 5112 N/S), a principal arterial road. This link is currently operating at Level-of-Service (LOS) standard "F" with an adopted LOS standard of "C" (See Table 3 of this report for details).*
- *The site is located in the Transit Supportive Development Area (TSDA), which is the area "where the availability of infrastructure and other community facilities and services, including, but not limited to mass transit and other transportation alternatives, utilities, public safety, recreational and educational services," according to POLICY 2.104-A1 of the Comprehensive Plan.*
- *The subject site is not located in a flood hazard area, wetland area or located within a one mile radius of endangered species.*
- *The subject site is not located in any Airport Flight Visual Interference and Height Notification Zone.*
- *According to the 1985 Soil Survey of Polk County, the subject property contains Candler Sand Soils, 0 to 5 percent slopes.*
- *The request has been reviewed for consistency with Section 760J, Signage Plans.*

The Development Review Committee, based on submitted information, the findings of fact and analysis conducted as part of this staff report, and a recent site visit, finds that the proposed request **IS COMPATIBLE** with the surrounding land uses and general character of the area; **IS CONSISTENT** with the Polk County Land Development Code and the Polk County Comprehensive Plan; and recommends **APPROVAL of LDSP-2025-1** with the following conditions:

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL

1. LDSP-2025-1 shall allow one (1) 20'x30' plaza sign, one (1) 8'x10' multi-tenant monument sign, and six (6) 13.6'x10' monument signs and applies to approximately 12.81 acres as shown in the Sign Plan in Exhibit 4. [PLG]
2. Deviation beyond the specified height limits may be a minor modification if less than 10% and within the same or less sign area. [PLG]
3. Sign locations shown in the Sign Plan are generalized and may deviate so long as they pertain to the same road frontage and within the identified parcel boundary. [PLG]
4. Paint colors and masonry veneers shown in the sign exhibits are not binding. [PLG]
5. There shall be no variance or waiver to the requirements of clear intersection visibility in Section 711 of the Land Development Code. [PLG]
6. This sign plan is vested in its entirety once the plaza sign or a multi-tenant monument sign are permitted. This sign plan approval is valid until August 6, 2028 (three years) for completion of the first plaza or multi-tenant sign. If no plaza sign or multi-tenant monument sign is completed by December 5, 2029, then this sign plan approval shall be null and void. [PLG]

GENERAL NOTES

NOTE: This staff report was prepared without the benefit of testimony and evidence submitted by the public and other parties at a public hearing.

NOTE: Approval of this request shall not constitute a waiver or variance from any applicable development requirement unless specifically noted in the conditions of approval and consistent with the LDC.

NOTE: All written comments made in the application and subsequent submissions of information made during the application review process, which are on file with the Land Development Division, shall be considered to be binding upon the applicant, provided such comments are not at variance with the Comprehensive Plan, LDC or other development regulations in effect at the time of development.

NOTE: Approval of this request is only for Level 3 Review and only for those development decisions within the Planning Commission's jurisdiction. A Level 2 Review (engineered plans) will be required reflecting the standard conditions listed in Section 303 of the Land Development Code and the development standards listed in Chapter 7 of the Land Development Code. Upon completion of the Level 2 Process, building permits will be required for all structures in accordance with Chapter 553 of the Florida Statutes.

NOTE: Issuance of a development permit by the county does not in any way create any rights on the part of the applicant to obtain a permit from a state or federal agency and does not create any liability on the part of the county for issuance of the permit if the applicant fails to obtain requisite approvals or fulfill the obligations imposed by a state or federal agency or undertakes actions that result in a violation of state or federal law.

Comparison of Permitted and Proposed Request

The LDC requires Plaza Sign area and height to be reduced by 15%, if the subject site is located in a Selected Area Plan (SAP). Table 1 below identifies how the request deviates from the sign requirements outlined in Section 760 of the LDC.

Table 1

	Permitted per Code		Proposed Request
<i>± 12.81 acres PIX 1 parcel > 5 acres 2 parcels <5 acres</i>	Permitted Countywide	North Ridge SAP 15% reduction Area and Height for all Signs	Proposed Request
Plaza Sign (on parcels >5 acres)	1 per parcel with multiple tenants	1 per parcel with multiple tenants	Two (1) Plaza Sign
Height	30'	25.5'	30'
Face Area	300 square feet	255 square feet	260 square feet
Setback	12.5'	12.5'	12.5'
Monument Signs (on outparcels)	Total Per Parcel No Multi-tenant	Total Per Parcel No Multi-tenant	Six (6) Monument Signs <i>(Individual)</i>
Height	5' (max. base 3')	5'	10'
Face Area	80 square feet	68 square feet	80 square feet
Setback	5'	5'	5'
Monument Sign (internal)	Total Per Parcel No Individual	Total Per Parcel No Individual	One (1) Monument Sign <i>(Multi-tenant)</i>
Height	5' (max. base 3')	5'	10'
Face Area	80 square feet	68 square feet	45 square feet
Width	20'	17'	8'
Free Standing Signs (on parcels >5 acres)	1 per parcel	1 per parcel	Zero (0) Free Standing Signs
Height	30'	25½'	
Face Area	250 square feet	212½ square feet	
Width	20'	17'	
Free Standing Signs (on parcels <5 acres)	1 per parcel	1 per parcel	Zero (0) Free Standing Signs
Height	20'	17'	
Face Area	150 square feet	127½ square feet	
Width	20'	17'	

The proposed request will not include Ground Mounted, or Free Standing, Signs that could be permitted under normal circumstances. Each parcel above five acres, for which the current plan shows one, could have a 250 square foot pole sign elsewhere in the County or 212.5 square feet in an SAP. The other parcels smaller than five acres, for which there are seven, could have a 150 square foot pole sign or one of 127.5 square feet in an SAP and 68 square foot monument sign. By opting out of these entitlements for their innovative sign plan, the applicant is forgoing 1,088 square feet of potential signage along the roadway for 785 square feet of total signage. The only signage fronting U.S. Highway 27 are the six (6) outparcel monument signs (480 sq. ft.). Just under a year ago, the proposed Walmart and Sam's Club received an approved Sign Plan with a total sign area of 1,337 square feet, or 552 square feet larger sign area, than the current request (LDCU-2024-25). Staff finds it is consistent with Section 760.K because it provides a "*A balance of sign size to the overall environment*" as the intent describes.

Surrounding Land Use Designations and Current Land Use Activity:

The subject property has been cleared of vegetation after Level 2 grading approval (LDNON-2023-67). An array of County services is in the immediate area including a Northeast Regional water production facility and Polk County Fire Rescue Station 38 to the east and west respectively. Further east lies single-family residences and short-term rentals that have been in existence since the 1990s. The US Highway 27 corridor south of Interstate-4 has undergone a lot of transformation in the past few years. While vacant today, a Walmart and Sams Club fronting US Highway 27 to the west are currently undergoing Level 2 Review (LDNON-2025-41). The site at the northwest intersection of Holly Hill Grove Road 2 and US Highway 27 received Planned Development approval for a mixture of commercial uses including a gas station/convenience market (LDPD-2023-7). The subject property has a Murphys Convenience Store and Gas Station proposed on the southeasternmost corner (LDNON-2025-32). The residential properties surrounding the perimeter of the area requested in this sign plan are completely developed. The only undeveloped properties are commercial. This intersection of Cottonwood Drive and U.S. Highway 27 is ripe for commercial development because it connects thousands of nearby residents to the major transportation corridors. It is only a matter of time before travel patterns solidify for these residents, and this intersection becomes associated with daily, weekly and monthly commercial needs.

Table 2

Northwest: ECX Proposed mixed commercial retail	North: PIX, RMX Equipment Sales, Fire Rescue Station 38	Northeast: RMX, Royal Ridge PUD 90-15
West: ECX US Hwy 27, proposed commercial retail	Subject Property: PIX Cleared, graded land	East: RMX Four Corners Baptist Church, Single-family residences
Southwest: ECX US Hwy 27, proposed commercial retail	South: INST-1X Champions Church, proposed drive thru restaurant	Southeast: PIX, RMX Veterinary clinic under construction

Compatibility with the Surrounding Land Uses:

Based on the proposed location of the signs, the development will allow for marketing of the site and provide easier identification with passing vehicular traffic. The signs located at both intersections will meet the clear visibility triangle requirement as outlined in Section 711 of the LDC. This requirement will ensure no structure is erected to impede vision of intersecting roadways. The plaza sign, multi-tenant monument sign, and six outparcel monument signs will not impede vehicular or pedestrian traffic nor be located within the Clear Visibility Triangle per Section 711.A of the LDC.

Roadway/Transportation Network Analysis:

The subject property has direct ingress/egress onto Cottonwood Drive and onto US Highway 27, which is a principal arterial road. U.S. Highway 27 is the only measured transportation link directly accessed by the development. There are approximately 3,383 northbound and 3,250 southbound vehicles passing thorough during the PM peak hour, but the estimated capacity is only 3,020 in either direction. Table 3, to follow, provides a good snapshot in time of the capacity on the surrounding road network. I-4 and U.S. Highway 27 are constrained facilities. I-4 is scheduled for improvements. U.S. Highway 27 is being reassessed for its predicted capacity. It is likely that this link (5110) will be split at Citrus Ridge Drive/Minute Maid Ramp Road #2 and the counts will be redistributed. This may

improve the generalized capacity for a short period of time. But the current rate of growth will soon consume any surplus.

Table 3

Link #	Road Name	Current Level of Service (LOS)	Available PM Peak Hour Capacity	Minimum LOS Standard
5110N	U.S. Highway 27 From: CR 547 (Ronald Reagan Parkway) To: Interstate-4	F	-363	D
5110S	U.S. Highway 27 From: Interstate-4 To: CR 547 (Ronald Reagan Parkway)	F	-230	D
5113N	U.S. Highway 27 From: Sand Mine Road To: U.S. Highway 192	C	312	D
5113S	U.S. Highway 27 From: U.S. Highway 192 To: Sand Mine Road	C	418	D

Source: Polk County Transportation Planning Organization, Concurrency Roadway Network Database January 17, 2025

Environmental Conditions:

The subject property was previously orange groves since at least 1941. It has since remained vacant since the 1990s. Potential impacts to the environment created by this request are limited.

A. Surface Water:

No surface water is found onsite, and no natural lakes are within three miles of the site.

B. Wetlands/Floodplains:

There are no wetlands and floodplains on the site or within the immediate area. A large unnamed forested wetland flanks the development to the east.

C. Soils:

The entire site is comprised of Candler Sand according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, Polk County Survey. Candler has few limitations but often needs amendments like clay and/or lime to stabilize for foundations and road base. The granules are so round and large that they shift.

Table 4

Soil Name	Septic Tank Absorption Field Limitations	Limitations to Dwellings w/o Basements	% of Site (approximate)
Candler Sand	Slight	Slight	100%

Source: Soil Survey of Polk County, Florida, USDA, Soil Conservation Service

D. Protected Species

According to the Florida Natural Areas Inventory Biodiversity Matrix (Matrix Units 41418 and 41419), the site is not located within a one-mile radius of a recent endangered animal species sighting.

E. Archeological Resources:

There are no protected archeological resources in Section 29, Township 26, and Range 27, according to the Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources.

F. Wells (Public/Private)

There is a public use well approximately 0.14 miles to the east, separated by vacant land and a Religious Institution. This facility is owned and maintained by Polk County.

G. Airports:

The site is not within any public airport flight paths or buffer zones. The closest aviation facility is a Helipad at the Advent Health Hospital 1 mile to the south along US 27. The future buildings will not exceed the district height maximum of 50 feet and should not have any effect on air traffic.

Consistent with the Land Development Code:

The request is consistent with the Land Development Code. The table below emphasizes the key policies directly related to the request.

Table 5

Land Development Code Policy	Consistency Analysis
<i>Section 760 of the Land Development Code (LDC)</i> <i>3. Signage plans shall be subject to the Polk County Level 3 review process.</i>	A sufficient application has been submitted by the applicant, and has been analyzed by staff. Staff recommends approval to the Planning Commission for the following reasons: signs will not impede vision of roadways, provide a safer environment within the development for vehicular traffic. Lastly, it provides uniformity within the development.
<i>Section 711 A. Clear Visibility Triangle (LDC)</i> <i>The triangle shall be formed by extending the rights-of-way lines to a point where the lines intersect each other (point A); and from point (A), measuring to a point 30 feet along both rights-of-way lines points (B and C). See Figure 7.2a.</i>	Signs will not be located in the Clear Visibility Triangle, and signs will not impede vision of intersecting roadway. There is a condition of approval to note this.

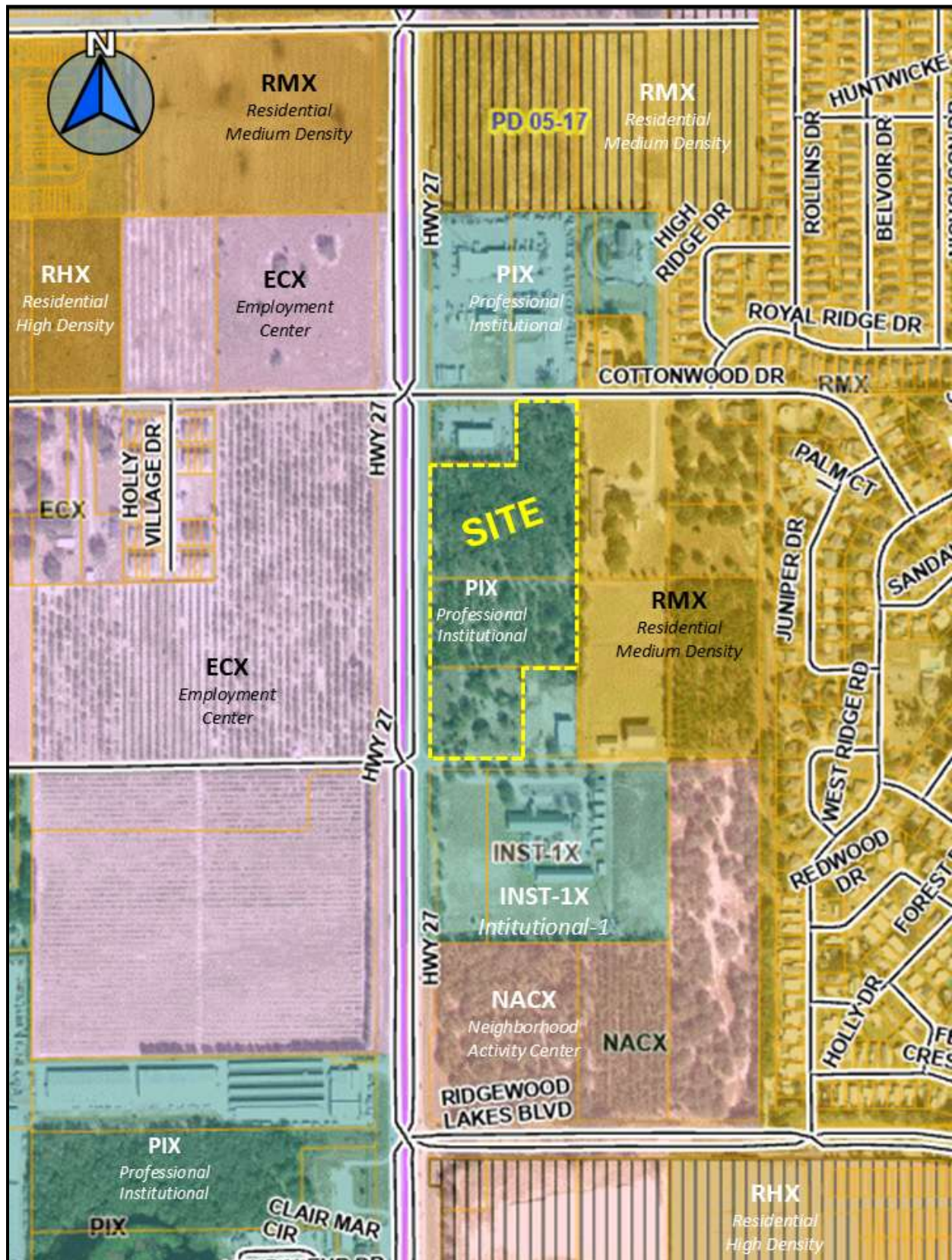
Comments from other Agencies: None

Exhibits

- Exhibit – 1 Location Map
- Exhibit – 2 Future Land Uses
- Exhibit – 3 2025 Satellite Image (Context)
- Exhibit – 4 2023 Aerial Image with Sign Plan (Close-up)
- Exhibit – 5 Sign Renderings



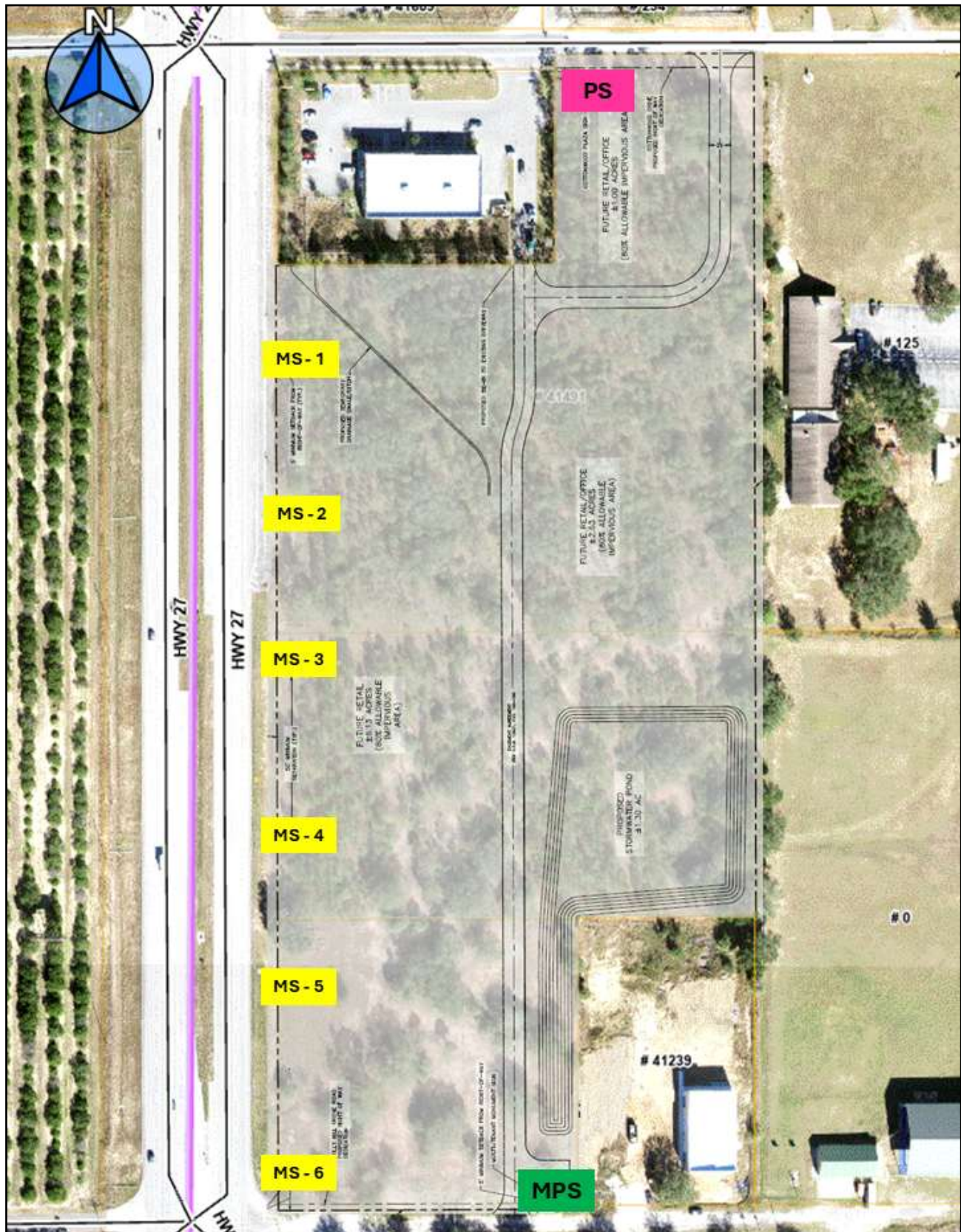
Location Map



Future Land Use Map

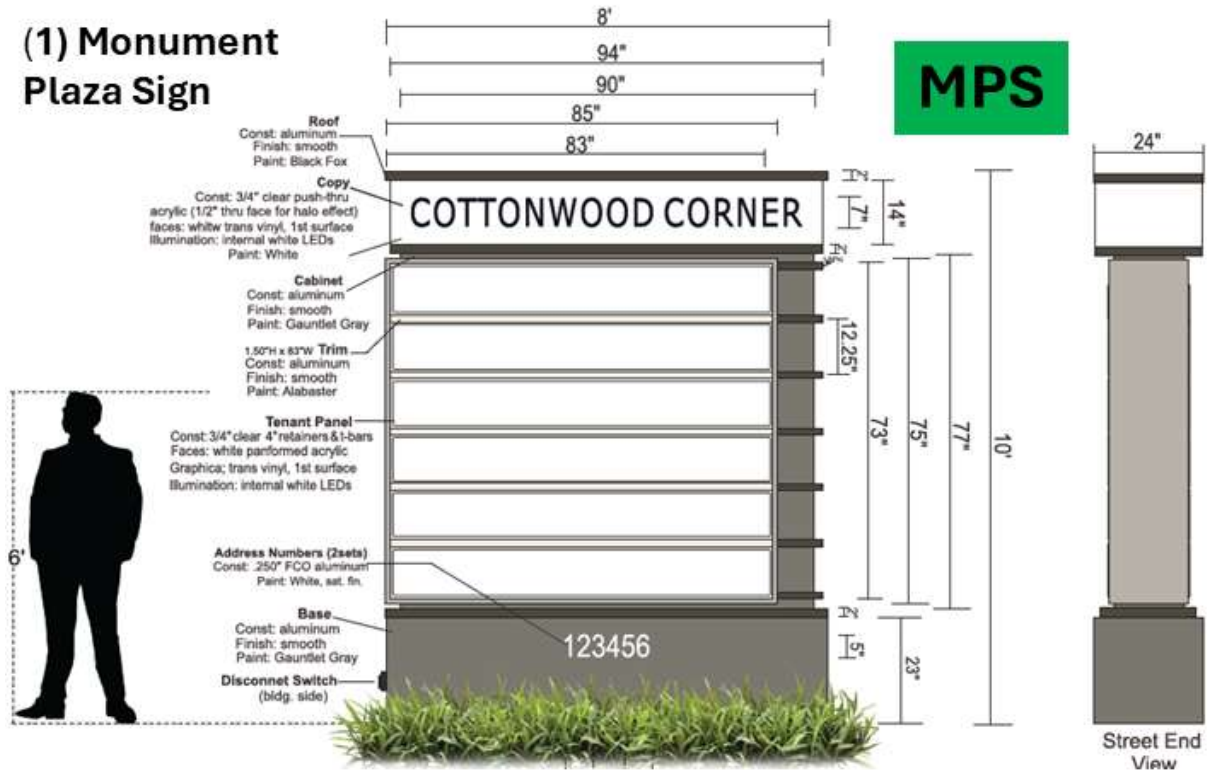


2025 Satellite Image (Context)

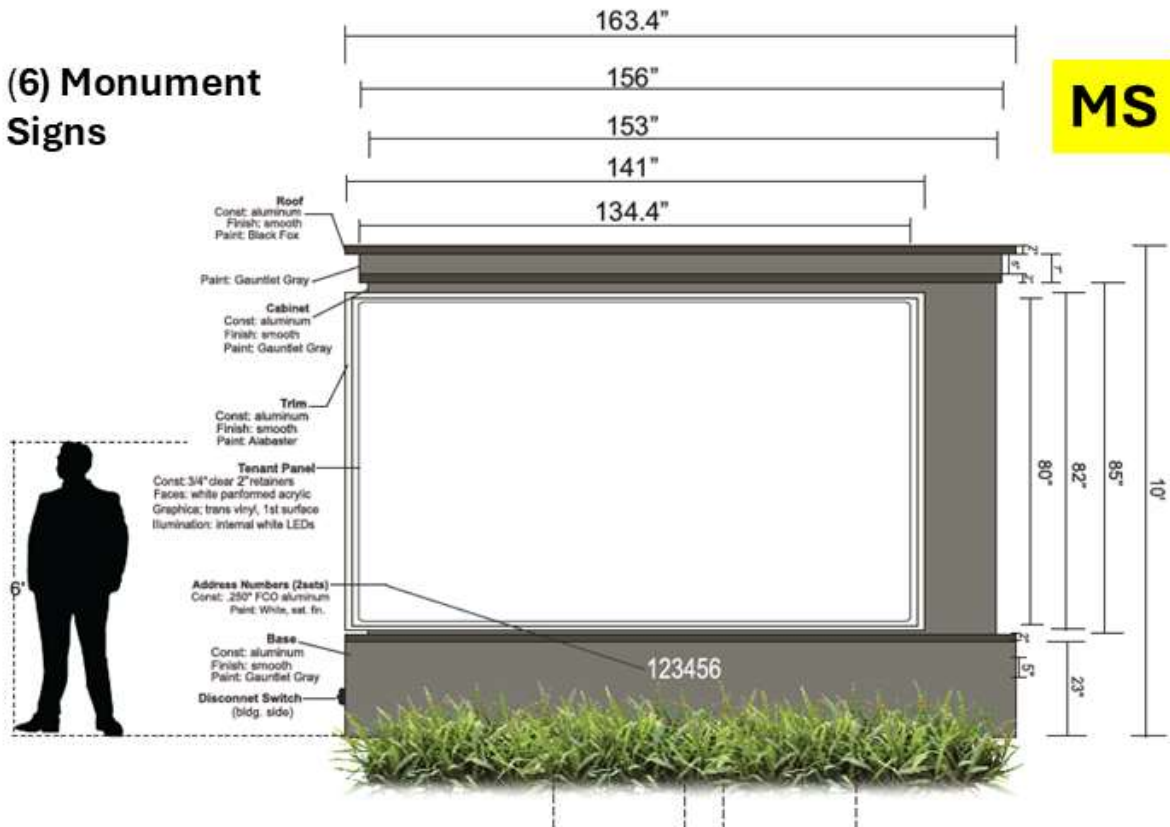


2023 Aerial Image with Sign Plan (Close-up)

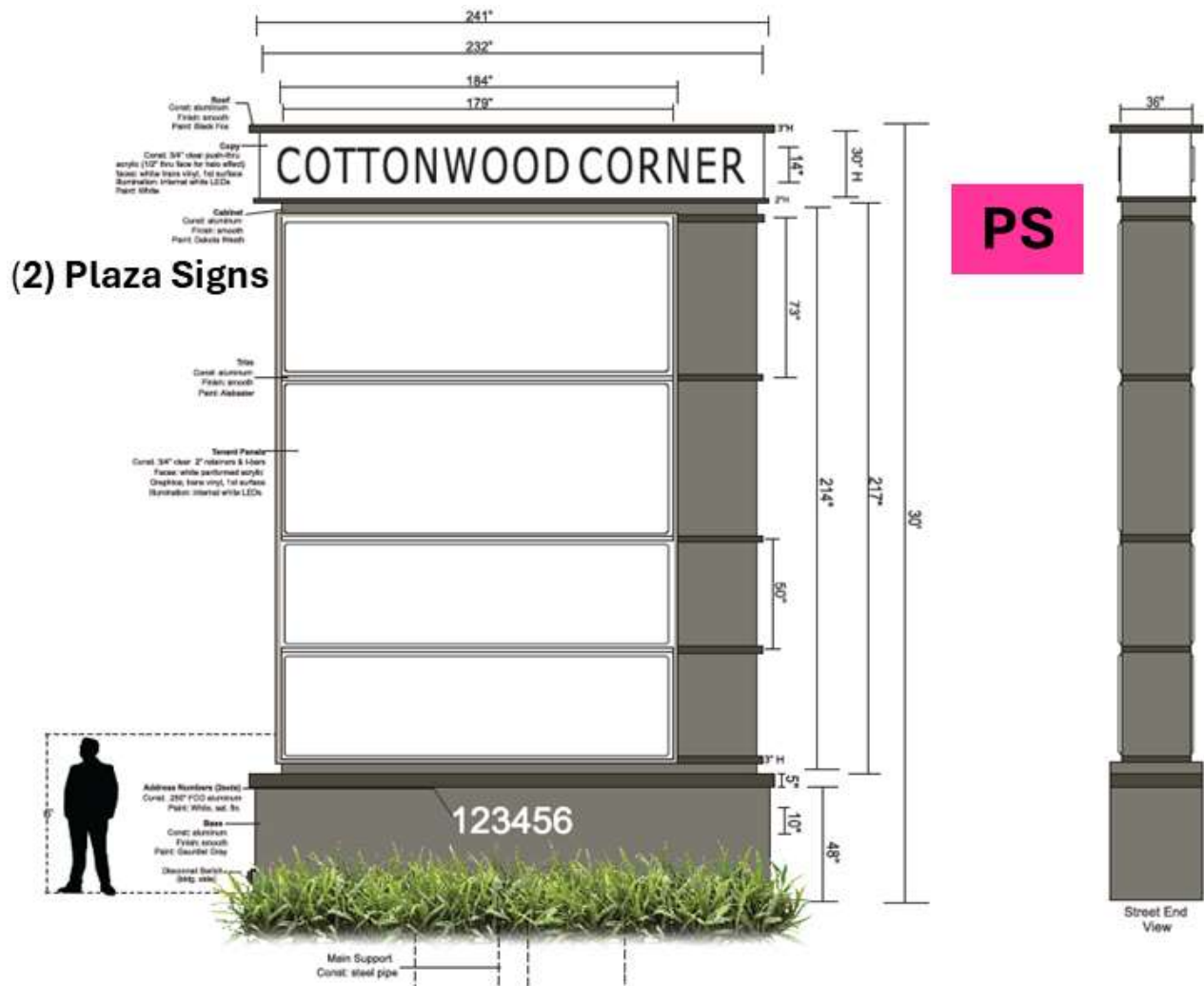
(1) Monument Plaza Sign



(6) Monument Signs



Sign Renderings



Sign Renderings