

March 11, 2025

Knoxville-Knox County Planning  
City-County Building  
400 Main Street, Suite 403  
Knoxville, Tennessee 37902 USA

RE: Request for Place-type Change and Rezoning

Dear Knox County Planning Commission and Knox County Commission:

I am writing on behalf of the Grace Seventh-day Adventist Church (henceforth "Church") to request formal consideration of the attached "Development Request" and "Amendment Request." Our Church is requesting to have (1) the place type for our land parcel, located at 9123 S Northshore Drive, Knoxville, TN 37922 USA (Parcel ID 155 00302), changed from SR Suburban Residential to CC Corridor Commercial and (2) the parcel itself rezoned from an A Agricultural Zone to a CA General Business Zone.

#### **(1) Place Type Change to CC Corridor Commercial**

According to the attached "Place Type and Zoning Correspondence Matrix" for Knox County, our Church's current zoning for its land parcel (i.e., A Agricultural) is not related to or appropriate for its current place type (i.e., SR Suburban Residential). We are requesting this change to correct this discrepancy. Changing our place type to CC Corridor Commercial and our zoning to CA General Business Zone (see below) will align our land parcel with the aforementioned matrix and zoning ordinances in the Code of Knox County, Tennessee.

Furthermore, neither our current place type nor zoning appropriately fits our Church's historic (for over one hundred years) and present (for the last more than forty years) land use. Our land parcel has not been and is not now being used for agricultural purposes. Neither are there any future plans to change our present land use. Additionally, our current place type and zoning do not allow for our goals for future development of our land parcel as specified in the section below and in our "Development Request."

#### **(2) Rezoning to CA General Business Zone**

We believe our current A Agricultural Zone is inappropriate and places unnecessary and unwanted planning and development limitations on our property's established land use. We also think this is a reasonable request because, according to Appendix A-Zoning, Code 5.31.01.F in the Code of Knox County, Tennessee, the CA General Business Zone (our requested rezoning) is an acceptable zoning for land parcels owned by churches.

Our Church has been a vital part of the Bluegrass community of Knox County for over forty years (being first organized as a church on September 12, 1981). Our current facilities (completed and occupied on May 11, 1991) and campus have served as a place of worship and a



community center for various events, services, and outreach programs. Additionally, it's important to note that the land parcel on which our Church is situated has been designated by land usage as a general business zone in the form of a church for over one hundred years, contributing to the community's heritage and continuity. However, our present zoning of A Agricultural Zone does not reflect this history of land use.

Furthermore, our primary purpose for pursuing rezoning at this time is to designate appropriate zoning that matches our parcel's historical and actual land use and will permit us to carry out our plans for future development. Our desire is to install a new illuminated church sign with an electronic messaging center (EMC) on our property. I have attached the production rendering of the proposed illuminated sign and EMC design along with a KGIS Map of our land parcel, highlighting the proposed placement of the new illuminated church sign.

The need for a new church sign arose in 2021 when First Utility District of Knox County (hereafter FUD) required the removal of our old illuminated church sign due to its recent Ebenezer Sewer Basin Improvement Project along our side of S. Northshore Drive. We made a "Temporary Construction Easement" agreement with FUD (see attached) that included the required removal of our old illuminated church sign with a changeable letterboard. Our understanding was that we would be allowed to install a new illuminated church sign that is, at minimum, comparable to the previous one; however, according to Appendix A–Zoning 3.90.06.A in the Code of Knox County, Tennessee, our current A Agricultural Zone does not allow us to permit and install a comparable sign since the old sign was illuminated and included a changeable letterboard. FUD did not disclose any zoning requirements that might complicate the fulfillment of their promise. We may have proceeded differently with FUD if we understood this when making the temporary easement agreement with them. Because of the above, FUD's project along S. Northshore Drive has placed undue financial and developmental hardship upon us.

There are significant grounds that merit your approval of our "Development Request" to rezone our land parcel as a CA General Business Zone.

- **Fulfillment of Agreement with FUD of Knox County:** As stated above, to fulfill the promises made to us by FUD and Knox County, Tennessee, regarding the permitting and installation of a new illuminated church sign with a messaging board after the completion of the Ebenezer Sewer Basin Improvement Project, our church's land parcel must be rezoned as a CA General Business Zone that permits such signage.
- **Historical Presence and Community Service:** Our Church has been established on this land parcel for over four decades. The land parcel has been a church property for over a century. Throughout this time, we have continually adapted to meet the needs of our congregation and the broader Bluegrass community in Knox County, Tennessee, providing essential services such as food, clothing, and school supplies drives and distributions; educational and faith-based programs; and emergency relief. The memorial garden on our land parcel has also provided the wider Bluegrass community with a peaceful place for personal prayer and rest.
- **Equity with Surrounding Institutions on Our Portion of S. Northshore Drive:** The land parcel on the opposite side of S. Northshore Drive—Shultz Pediatrics, located at 9142 S. Northshore Drive, Knoxville, TN 37922 (Parcel ID 155 04405), owned by Randall R. Shults—is has a place type of CC Corridor Commercial and is zoned as a CA General Business Zone, showing that the Knox County Planning Commission and/or the Knox County Commission has/have deemed the CA General Business Zone as allowable in our



district along S. Northshore Drive. It would reveal inequity if the Knox County Planning Commission and/or the Knox County Commission does/do not approve our Church's "Development Request" for the same CA General Business Zone as other land parcels along the same part of S. Northshore Drive. See also 9202 S. Northshore Drive, Knoxville, TN 37922 (Parcel ID 155 00701), zoned CA General Business Zone.

Furthermore, all the land parcels after Northshore Hills Boulevard on S. Northshore Drive are zoned CA General Business Zone, CH Highway Commercial Zone, or PC Planned Commercial Zone up to where I-140 and S. Northshore Drive intersect. Thus, a commercial district begins only a few feet southwest of our land parcel on S. Northshore Drive. This can be seen on the attached zoning map from KGIS Maps.

- **Unique Topographical Requirements:** The topography of our Church's land parcel presents visibility challenges for drivers approaching from either direction on S. Northshore Drive. The attached topographical map from KGIS Maps shows two sizable, steep hills flanking the entrance to our property, obstructing sightlines for drivers traveling north or south on S. Northshore Drive. Installing a more prominent, illuminated church sign that exceeds the size limitations specified in the Code of Knox County, Tennessee, for an A Agricultural Zone (while still complying with the restrictions established for a CA General Business Zone) would give drivers more time to see and read the new illuminated church sign and the messages displayed on its EMC.
- **Enhanced Communication and Safety:** Communication is crucial today, especially in emergencies. Having an EMC with our new illuminated church sign on S. Northshore Drive would allow us to disseminate information quickly and efficiently to Knoxville-area travelers and community members. This could include weather alerts, emergency notices, and important community updates that benefit our congregation and the public.
- **Minimal Impact, Community Aesthetics, and Residential Character:** We recognize that our Church's land parcel is bordered on three sides by residential properties in a more affluent community. We wish to enhance, not detract from, the community's curb appeal. The new illuminated church sign, featuring an EMC, is designed to blend harmoniously with the existing environment and incorporates beautiful landscaping. It will not compromise the residential character of the nearby neighborhoods. The wooded areas surrounding our land parcel will further mitigate any perceived disturbance from the light and EMC of the new illuminated church sign. Modern digital signs can be engineered to comply with aesthetic and brightness regulations, ensuring they are not intrusive. Our Church is committed to adhering to the ordinances regarding EMCs in the Code of Knox County, Tennessee.

Additionally, EMCs offer significant aesthetic and environmental advantages. With an EMC, our Church would no longer need to advertise our programs and events with obtrusive banners along the roadside that stretch and sag over time due to exposure to the elements. The EMC will allow for a cleaner and more visually-pleasing roadside. Moreover, not needing to produce such banners because of the EMC reduces wasteful marketing materials, contributing to a cleaner environment.

- **Future of Land Parcel:** We understand there may be hesitancy from the Planning Commission of Knox County and the Knox County Commission in approving our "Development Request" and "Amendment Request" due to concerns that our Church might sell the land parcel in the future, potentially allowing a commercial business to

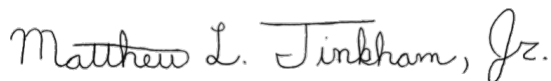


acquire the property against the wishes of the surrounding Bluegrass community. However, we can definitively assure you that this will NEVER happen. First, our Church has no plans or desire to do this. Second, when the land parcel was deeded to our Church by J. Fred and Dora Lou Scott, two “restrictions and covenants” were incorporated into the “Warranty Deed,” stating: “1. The property is never to be sold or used for any type of commercial or rental property,” and “2. The property is to be used only as a Seventh-[d]ay Adventist Church and Church School.” Therefore, under no circumstance can the present owner, the Georgia-Cumberland Conference Association of Seventh-day Adventists, sell the property, especially not to any commercial entity. I have attached the “Warranty Deed” for your convenience. Furthermore, while our Church’s facility is currently not near maximum capacity, when that time comes, we have ample space on the land parcel to develop, accommodating such growth. If our Church were to outgrow the land parcel, our decision would be to divide the congregation and plant a new church somewhere else in West Knoxville instead of selling it.

Given these points, we respectfully request that the Planning Commission of Knox County and the Knox County Commission approve our “Development Request” and “Amendment Request.” This new illuminated church sign is not merely a convenience but a crucial tool to support our ongoing community service and outreach efforts.

Thank you in advance for considering our Church’s requests. If you would like to speak with me further, please do not hesitate to contact me on my mobile phone or by email at +1 (423) 599-8083 or [mtinkham@gccsda.com](mailto:mtinkham@gccsda.com). Mail can be sent to my personal address at 1001 Wyndham Way, Apt 1231, Knoxville, TN 37923, or to my attention at the Church’s address, 9123 S Northshore Drive, Knoxville, TN 37922.

Sincerely,



Matthew L. Tinkham, Jr., M.Div., *Pastor*  
Grace Seventh-day Adventist® Church (Knoxville, TN)  
Georgia-Cumberland Conference of Seventh-day Adventists®

*Attachments:* Development Request, Amendment Request, Public Notice and Community Engagement, Production Rendering of New Sign, KGIS Topographical Map, KGIS Zoning Map, KGIS Place Type Map, KGIS Land Parcel Map, Place Type and Zoning Correspondence Matrix, Temporary Construction Easement, Warranty Deed, Church Board Meeting Minutes 2023.09.19, Church Business Meeting Minutes 2023.10.07, Church Board E-mail Minutes 2024.12.18, and Church Board E-mail Minutes 2025.02.19

