Staff Report

Devens Enterprise Commission

Date: 8/22/24

To: **Devens Enterprise Commission**

Cc:

From: Neil Angus, Director

RE: **CFS-2 Building-Mounted Sign Waiver Request**

Applicant: Commonwealth Fusion Systems (CFS)
Owner: CFS
Address: 111 Hospital Road (Parcel ID #018.0-0007-0200.0)
Zoning: Innovation and Technology Business District

Request:
The applicant (CFS) is proposing to install a 494 square-foot building mounted sign on the front (east) façade of their new building currently under construction at 111 Hospital Road (SPARC Facility and Tokomak Hall). Normally sign permit applications are processed administratively, however in this case, the applicant is proposing signage that is not in compliance with the DEC Rules and Regulations and would require a waiver – which is a Level Two Unified Permit application process.

974 CMR 6.03(5)d. - Type 4 Building-Mounted Signs allows for a single building-mounted sign up to 3% of the façade area or a maximum of 100 square feet in size. The applicant's proposed sign exceeds the maximum size by 394% 974 CMR 6.03(1)d. authorizes the DEC to increase the maximum allowable size of signs by up to 50% if the DEC determines there are exceptional site conditions such as topography, location of existing preserved vegetation, or lot configuration that necessitate a larger sign.

The applicant is requesting this sign size and waiver above and beyond the 100 sq.ft. and the 50% increase due to the size and scale of their building, coupled with the location and situation. They claim that the proposed "…*scale fits within the thoughtful design of our campus. Moreover, the site lines to this portion of our campus are minimal, limiting the sign's visibility to neighbors, abutters, and passers-by*." As part of the application, the Applicant provided three (3) different proposed renderings of the sign (see attached):

1. A 100 sq.ft. sign (complaint)
2. A 150 sq.ft. sign (complaint if exceptional site conditions exist)
3. The proposed 494 sq.ft. sign

The total sign area is calculated by the dimensions of the smallest box that fits around the logo and text, so because of the CFS symbol, there is a lot of blank space that is not actually part of the sign. The CFS symbol and the text letters will be individually mounted to the building (no background), so there is a lot of blank facade space included in the total sign area that is actually not sign. So, for the proposed 494 sq.ft. sign, the CFS logo is actually only 58 sq.ft and the "Commonwealth Fusion Systems" text is 160 sq.ft, for a total of 218 sq.ft. of actual signage, or 1.1% of the facade. This is not how we measure signage as per our regulations but it does help partially explain the much larger than allowed proposal.

Staff reviewed the three proposed sign renderings and agreed with the applicant that both the 100 sq.ft. and 150 sq.ft. sizes were too small given the scale of the building and it's location fronting on the campus green. The proposed 494 square foot sign, while large, does fit in architecturally with the scale of the building and is still less than 3% of the total façade area.

The proposed rendering for the 494 sq.ft. sign would be allowed if the DEC made a finding that exceptional site conditions exist and issued a waiver of 974 CMR 6.03(1)(d). The large, campus development, the size of the building, the actual area that the sign is occupying on the facade and setback from Hospital Road, and the fact that it will not be illuminated or visible from any public street all could factor into the "exceptional site conditions" argument for a waiver.

Almost every project that comes into Devens initially requests a larger sign or more signage than is allowed. The DEC sign regulations were thoughtfully crafted to provide sufficient wayfinding space for businesses to advertise, without creating too much visual clutter. Allowing a sign of this size that exceeds the allowable and discretionary size would normally not be entertained, but the unique nature, size, and scale of this project are like no other in Devens, so a waiver in this case would not necessarily set any precedent for future sign applications or create any nuisance issues for any of the adjacent properties, especially since it would not be visible beyond the CFS campus and will not be illuminated.

Process:
CFS submitted the Unified Permit Application on July 25, 2024 and a Determination of Completeness was issued on July 26, 2024. Copies of the application were received by the surrounding Towns on July 29, 2024. Legal notices were placed in Nashoba Publications on August 2 and 9, 2024. All abutting property owners were duly notified by certified mail. The 30-day Town comment period expires on August 28, 2024. No comments have been received to date.

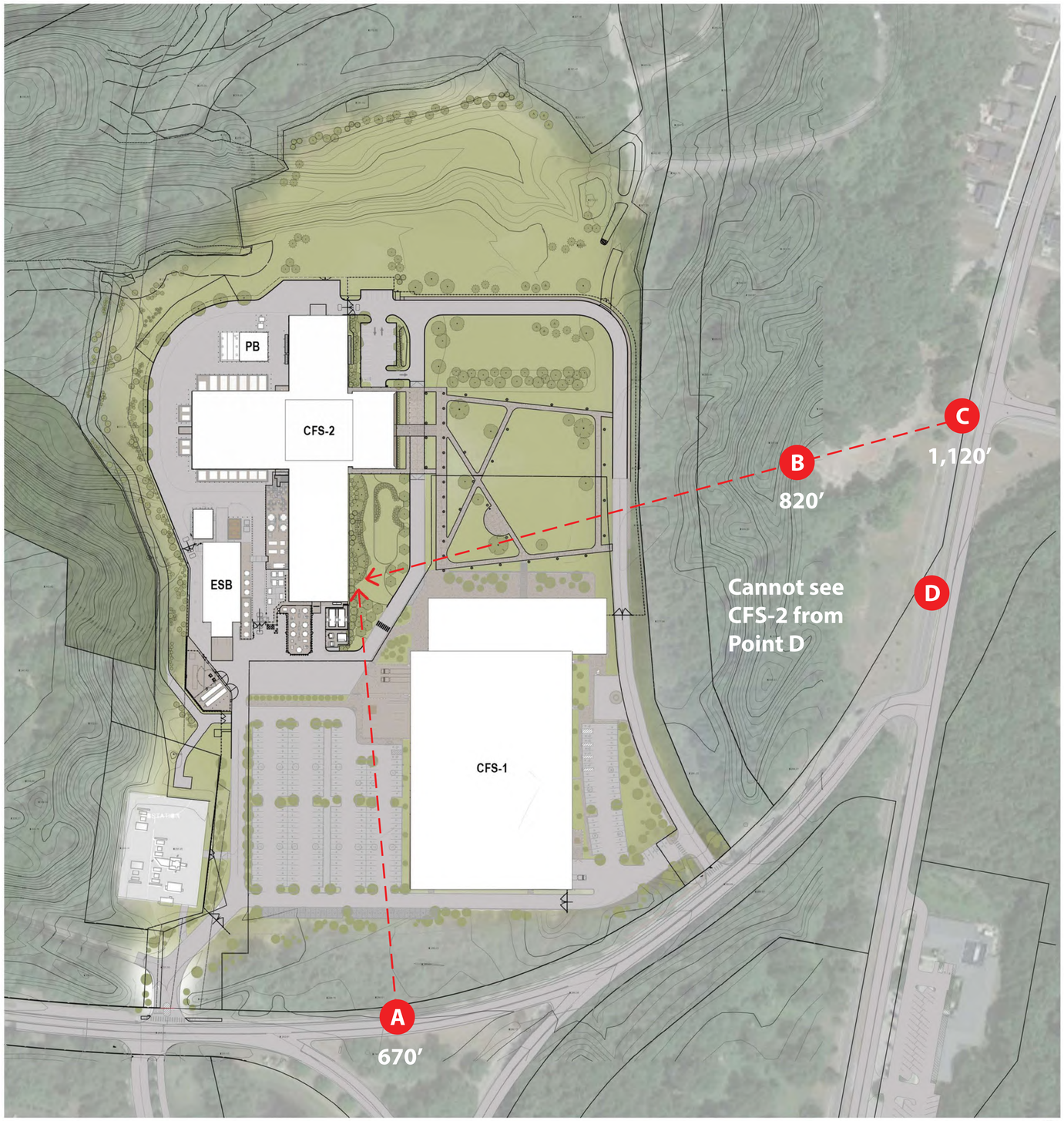
Recommended Action:
As the 30-day town comment period has not yet expired, the Commission should continue this public hearing to the September 12th meeting at 7:30AM. Unless there is any additional information or comments presented, based on the proposed submittal, there are currently three potential options for the Commission once the 30 -day town comment period has expired and the public hearing has closed:

1. If the DEC is in agreement that the 494 sq.ft. sign size is appropriate, the DEC will need to make a series of findings that "exceptional site conditions" unique to this parcel and development exist and issue a Record of Decision and waiver of 974 CMR 6.03(d) accordingly. Staff will prepare a Draft decision for the Commission's consideration at the September 12 meeting.

2. If the Commission is only amenable to the 150 sq.ft. maximum size, and once the 30-day Town Comment period has expired, the DEC could state their reasoning (ie. Exceptional site conditions warrant the additional 50% increase but no greater) and staff could then issue the sign permit administratively under 974 CMR 6.03(1)d.

3. If the Applicant maintains their request for the 494 sq.ft. sign and the Commission in NOT amenable, unless there is additional supporting information provided, staff would recommend, once the 30-day town comment period has expired, the DEC deny this application due to the size being well in excess of the 50% additional sign area allowed under 974 CMR 6.03(1)d.

NJA



Site Plan

A. View from Hospital Road

B. View from Top of Hill

C. View from Grant Road

HDR Architecture, P.C.
1000 Lenox Drive
Lawrenceville, NJ 08648

Thornton Tomasetti
Thornton Tomasetti, Inc.
27 Wormwood Street, Suite 200
Boston, MA 02210-1668

vhb
101 Walnut Street
P.O.Box 9151
Watertown, MA 02472

Commonwealth Fusion Systems Campus - Building 2

111 Hospital Rd
Devens, MA 01434

Commonwealth Fusion Systems

SPARC

MARK	DATE	DESCRIPTION

Project Number 10211243
Original Issue 01/21/22

James R. Wisniewski, AIA 952072
Architect

Sheet Name
Proposed
Building Sign Plan
April 2024

Scale

Sheet Number
AG-100

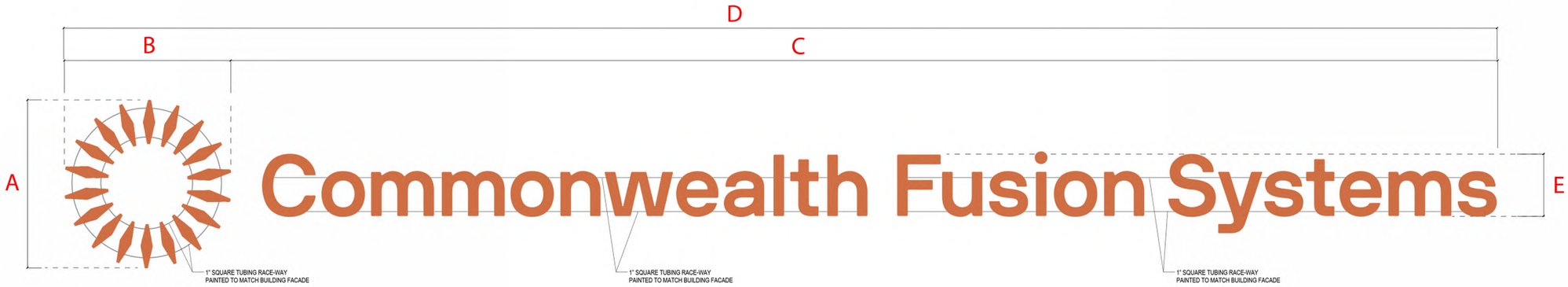
CFS Technical Document No.

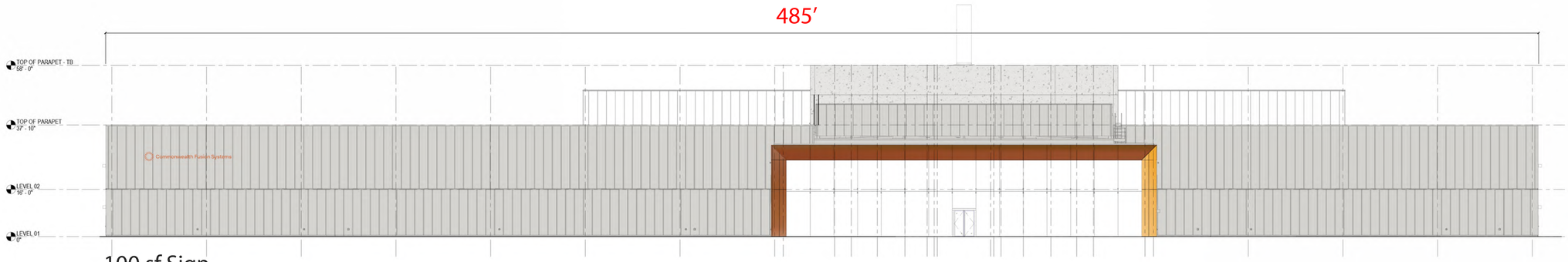
Project Status
CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS

	A	B	C	D	E
Regulation	3' - 5.2"	3' - 5.2"	25' - 8.7"	29' - 1.9"	1' - 3.1"
Reg+50%	4' - 2.4"	4' - 2.4"	31' - 6.0"	35' - 8.4"	1' - 6.5"
Proposed	7' - 7.5"	7' - 7.5"	57' - 2.0"	64' - 9.4"	2' - 9.5"

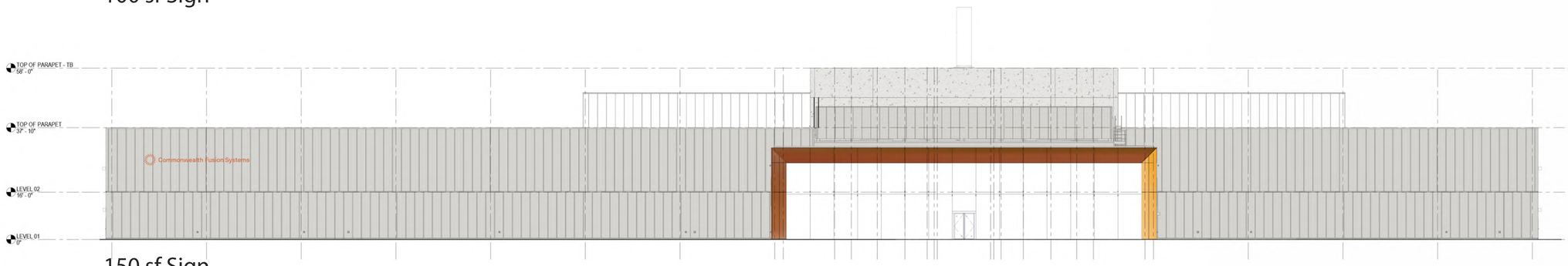
Area A x D	East Façade	%
100 sf	20,354 sf	0.5%
150 sf	20,354 sf	0.7%
494 sf	20,354 sf	2.4%

Area A x B	Area C x E	Area AB+CE	East Façade	%
12 sf	32 sf	44 sf	20,354 sf	0.2%
18 sf	48 sf	66 sf	20,354 sf	0.3%
58 sf	160 sf	218 sf	20,354 sf	1.1%

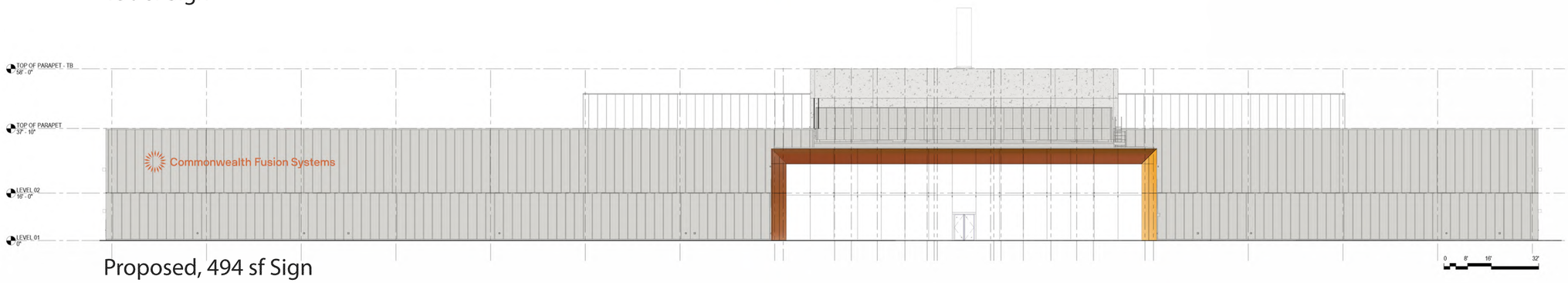




100 sf Sign



150 sf Sign



Proposed, 494 sf Sign

HDR Architecture, P.C.
1000 Lenox Drive
Lawrenceville, NJ 08648

Thornton Tomasetti
Thornton Tomasetti, Inc.
27 Wormwood Street, Suite 200
Boston, MA 02210-1668

vhb
101 Walnut Street
P.O.Box 9151
Watertown, MA 02472

Commonwealth Fusion Systems Campus - Building 2

111 Hospital Rd
Devens, MA 01434

Commonwealth Fusion Systems

SPARC

MARK	DATE	DESCRIPTION
	01/21/2022	75% CONSTRUCT. DOCS OWNER REVIEW
1	04/01/2022	ISSUE 12

Project Number 10211243
Original Issue 01/21/22

James R. Wisniewski, AIA 952072
Architect

Sheet Name
Proposed Building Sign March 2024

Scale

Sheet Number
AG-203

CFS Technical Document No.

Project Status
CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS