



HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF INSPECTIONS, LICENSES AND PERMITS

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MEMORANDUM

MEMO TO: Hearing Examiner for Howard County

TO: Robert Frances, P.E., Director
Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits

THROUGH: Brenda Saucedo, Chief Supervising Sign Code Inspector
Inspections and Enforcement Division

FROM: Ed Marquardt, Jr., Sign Code Inspector
Inspections and Enforcement Division

DATE: March 9, 2018

SUBJECT: Sign Variance Petition: BA 17-003S
Sign Permit Application: S17000142
Petitioner: West Friendship Volunteer Fire Department
12535 Old Frederick Road
Sykesville, MD 21784

Request Description:

The petitioner is requesting a variance of the Howard County Sign Code by first proposing to remove their existing commercial freestanding identification sign which was erected in 2008. This existing sign is located along the west side of their property which runs parallel to State Highway Route 32. Next, the petitioner is proposing to erect a new commercial ground mounted, freestanding digital LED identification sign. The proposed new location would be near the entrance along State Highway Route 99, a.k.a, Old Frederick Road. The proposed new sign is comprised of two aluminum double faced sign cabinets. One upper (header cabinet) and a lower LED, digital display cabinet.

The upper (header cabinet) is 2 ft. /0 in. high and is 9 ft. /5 in. wide, and contains their fire house logo design and station name, i.e., WEST FRIENDSHIP VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT. This header cabinet will be an LED internally illuminated digital sign that has a total of 18.83 sq. ft. of signage.

The lower cabinet is rectangular shaped, has a full color LED double-sided (RGB) display panel. This lower cabinet measures, 3 ft. /8 in. high is 9 ft. /5 in. wide, and has a total of 34.53 sq. ft. of signage. These two proposed sign cabinets would rest on a brick base 2 ft. /0 in. high by 2 ft. /0 in. wide and is 10 ft. /0 in. long. This brick base has two 1 ft. /0 in. high brick rows matching the existing architectural design and colors of the fire station brick. The upper brick row is tan in color

and has 6 in. high by 3 ft. /6 in. long permanent black letters that spell out the fire station website (www.wfvfd.org). The lower brick row matches the upper brick width in size and is light red in color.

The proposed two sign cabinets have a combined sign face total of 53.4 sq. ft. of signage. Only one side of the combined upper and lower sign cabinets count toward the total of signage allowed by code. The total height measured from finished grade to the top of the proposed sign is 7 ft. /8 in. high.

Findings of Fact:

This technical evaluation from the perspective of the Howard County Sign Code is based upon the BA17-003S variance petition package for sign permit application # S17000142. This information was submitted by the petitioner, West Friendship Volunteer Fire Department, and is dated January 26, 2018.

The proposed new sign, described within the variance petition, would be in violation of the following sections of the Howard County Sign Code, To Wit:

Sec. 3.502(f) - Signs permitted in all districts.

Subject to the other conditions of this subtitle, the following signs shall be permitted anywhere within the County:

(f) Civic, Religious and Quasi-Public Signs. *Name, directional and informational signs, and emblems of service clubs, places of worship, civic organizations and quasi-public uses shall be permitted on private property. Each sign shall be not more than 15 square feet in area. The top of such sign shall not exceed eight feet above grade. Illumination shall be in accordance with the restrictions set forth in section 3.508; and in the event that there is a need for more than one sign at one location, all such signs must be consolidated and confined within a single frame, subject to the review and recommendations of the Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits.*

The proposed sign is to be located 10 ft. from the State Highway Route 32 right-of-way. The proposed sign having a combined height of 7ft. /8 in. above finished grade, meets the sign code height requirements. The total square footage of signage is 53.4 sq. ft. which is 38.4 sq. ft. more than the code allows.

The proposed RGB display, full-color LED illuminated digital sign must comply with following section of the Howard County Sign Code, To Wit:

Sec. 3.508. - Illumination.

(a) Shading. *The light from any illuminated sign or billboard or from any light source, including interior of a building, shall be so shaded, shielded or directed that the light intensity or brightness shall not adversely affect surrounding or facing premises nor adversely affect safe vision of operators of vehicles moving on public or private roads, highways or parking areas. Light shall not shine or reflect on or into residential structures.*

(b) Blinking or Flashing. Except as provided in section 3.502A of this subtitle, a sign shall not have blinking, flashing or fluttering lights or other illuminating devices which have a changing light operated as to create an appearance or illusion of writing or printing. ***A variance may be granted by the Board of Appeals for movement showing the date, the time and the temperature exclusively.***

(c) Strobe and Incandescent Lamps. No exposed reflective type bulbs and no strobe lights or incandescent lamps which exceed 15 watts shall be used on the exterior surface of any sign to expose the face of the bulb, light or Strobe and Incandescent Lamps. No exposed reflective type bulbs and no strobe lights or incandescent lamps which exceed 15 watts shall be used on the exterior surface of any sign to expose the face of the bulb, light or lamp to any public street or adjacent property.

The lower cabinet LED, double-sided (RGB) display panel must meet the requirements of Sec. 3.508. – Illumination and comply with only changing its message once every 24-hours which will be a stipulation of the issued sign permit.

Variance Requirement Questions:

Are there unique physical conditions or exceptional topographical conditions peculiar to the property on which the proposed sign is to be located, including the location of existing buildings and other structures, irregularity, narrowness or shallowness of the lot, irregularity of the road right-of-way, location on a highway that has a dependency on nonlocal use?

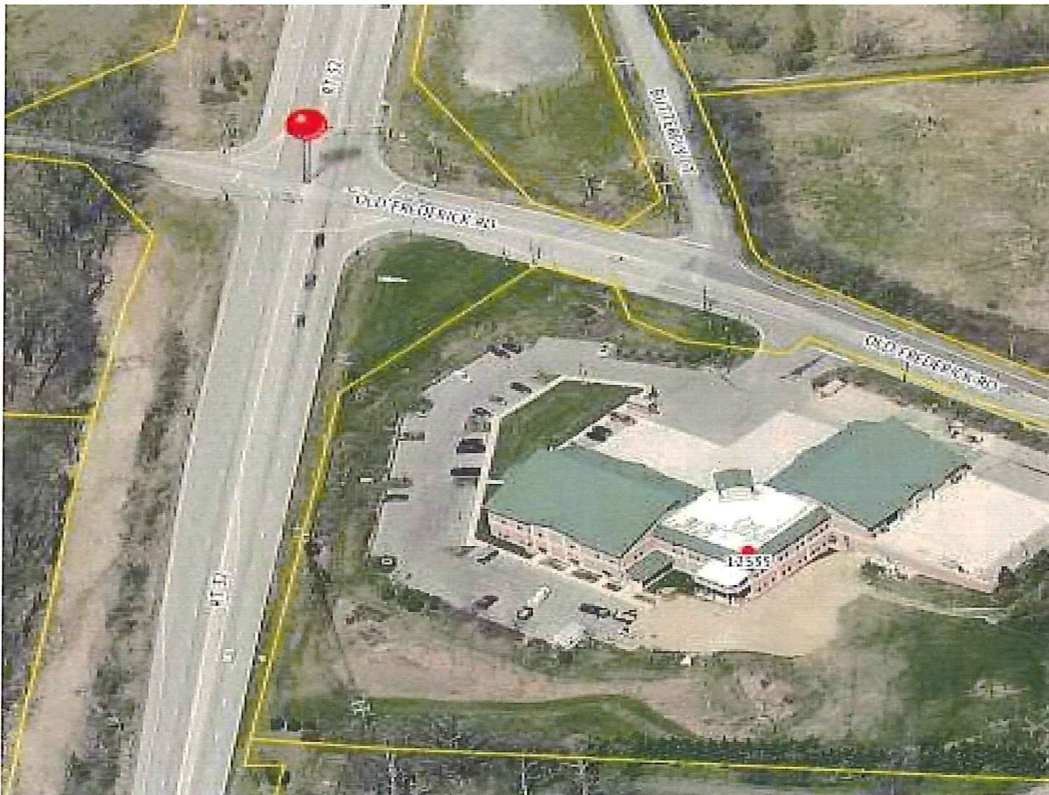
Yes. Along the West and North sides of the fire station property there exists both a MD State roadway and a wide land buffer. This buffer contains the established, now matured, landscaping, of evergreen and ornamental trees that are more than 10+ years old. There are also steep embankments for water drainage, and steep changes in elevations in this same land buffer.

The North side of the property is also located parallel to a MD State roadway, Route 99, a.k.a., Old Frederick Road. This side of the property also contains the same type of the established land buffer. The aforementioned conditions severely impact the effective viewing of signage.

The proposed sign location is on the West side of the property, which is located parallel to MD State Highway, Route 32. This sign location is about 26+ feet from the closest travel lanes and is separated by a road shoulder and a steep drainage/embankment. This drainage/embankment ditch varies in both width and height along this edge of the travel lane. This section of Route 32, is a four-lane wide, very heavily travelled highway with a posted speed limit of fifty-five miles per hour. When traveling either on MD State Highway Route 32 or MD State Highway Route 99, the width of the roadway, heavy traffic volume, and posted speed limit, all contribute in hindering the visibility of a smaller code compliant sign.

The MD State Highway Department has started Phase I and II of the widening of MD Route 32, from MD Route 108 (Clarksville) to Linden Church Rd. (Dayton). Phase III has also started and this phase involves the State conducting a planning study to determine how to most effectively

widen MD Route 32 from I-70 to MD Route 26 in Eldersburg. The final planning study is not finished, and any future widening of MD Route 32 from the Phase III study, will likely be on the southbound side of MD Route 32. Future widening of MD Route 32 would further impact the visibility of a smaller code compliant sign.



The photo above depicts the State Highway right-of-ways for both Route 32 & Route 99 and the property lines for the West Friendship Volunteer Fire Station.

Yellow lines are property/highway right-of-way boundry lines.



The photo above, facing North, depicts the steep embankments for water drainage and

the established mature landscaping including grown evergreen and ornamental trees on the right. This drainage ditch varies in both width and height along the edge of the travel lane. To the left is the South/North bound lanes of MD Route 32.



The photo above, facing South, depicts the steep embankments for water drainage and the established mature landscaping including grown evergreen and ornamental trees on the left. This drainage ditch varies in both width and height along the edge of the travel lane. To the right is the four lane wide, South/North bound lanes of MD Route 32.



The photo above, facing South, depicts the proposed sign location. This location is approximately 26+ feet from the closest travel lanes which are separated by a road shoulder and the steep embankment. There are established, mature landscaping sediment control areas on the left. To the right, is the four lane wide South/North bound lanes of MD Route 32.

Are there obstructions, such as excessive grade, building interference, structures or landscaping on abutting property or properties which seriously interfere with the visibility of a proposed sign?

Yes. The existing 32 sq. ft. freestanding sign was erected in 2008, along with the extensive planting of young plants and trees for the landscaping/sediment control plans. Ten years later, all of these different types of landscaping plants and trees have grown so dense the existing sign is no longer visible.

On the North border (MD Route 32) and West border (MD Route 99) of the fire house property, there are wide land buffers containing established landscaping and mature evergreen and ornamental trees. In some these buffers, there are locations that contain steep embankments for water drainage and also have steep changes in elevation. All of these conditions combined obscure the visibility of the existing sign and would hinder the visibility of any future code compliant sign.



The photo above, facing South, depicts the steep embankments for water drainage and the different changes in elevation that border both the North and West edges of the fire house property. The existing sign that was erected in 2008 is now hidden by this land buffer containing the established landscaping of mature evergreen and ornamental trees. To the right, is the four lane wide South/North bound lanes of MD Route 32.



The photo above, facing North, depicts the steep embankment changes in elevation that border both the North and West edges of the property. The existing sign is now hidden by the established landscaping and trees. To the left is the four lane wide, South/North bound lanes of MD Route 32.



The photo above, facing North, depicts the steep embankment and change in elevation that borders both the North and West edges of the property. This wide land buffer contains the established, mature landscaping including

evergreen and ornamental trees. Large established mature landscaping is also part of the various sediment control areas located in and around the property.



The photo above depicts the Southern property line when facing North. Midway from electric pole (far left) to the tree on the right is the proposed location for the new sign. To the left, is the four lane wide South/North bound lanes of MD Route 32.

Are there are historical, architectural or aesthetic characteristics which shall be considered?

Yes. The ideal location for the proposed sign would have been in the large triangle intersection of MD Route 32 and MD Route 99 which is within the State right-of-way. A sign location request was submitted by the West Friendship Fire Station to the MD State Highways Department; however, their request for this location was denied by the State because all highway right-of-ways have very restricted/limited regulations for any future signage.

(per: Steven F. Thomas, Office of Outdoor Advertising, MD State Highways Department, 301-624-8115)

The design, colors and function of the proposed sign compliments the existing West Friendship Firehouse architectural design.

See the Internal Memorandum from the Department of Planning and Zoning, Kristin O'Conner DPZ Review of BA17-003S, Dated February 14, 2018.

If the variance is granted, will it adversely affect the appropriate use or development of adjacent properties, or result in a dangerous traffic condition?

No. The proposed digital sign will not create a dangerous traffic condition at the proposed location. One of the main intended uses for the proposed LED digital sign would be to display information to advise the general public of any current emergency, traffic and/or weather-related events for both MD State Highway's, Route 32, Route 99 and Route 70.

No dangerous traffic condition would be created as long as the LED, double-sided (RGB) display panel meets the requirements of Sec. 3.508 of the Howard County Sign Code. The permit, if issued, would require that the sign not change more than once in any 24-hour period.

Is the requested Variance the minimum necessary to afford relief, and can it be granted without substantial impairment of the intent, purpose and integrity of the code?

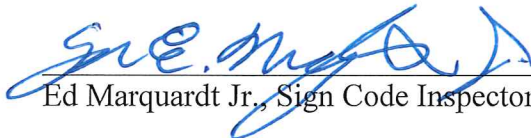
Yes. See the Internal Memorandum from the Department of Planning and Zoning, Kristin O'Conner DPZ Review of BA17-003S, Dated February 14, 2018

Were the practical difficulties or hardships created by the Applicant?

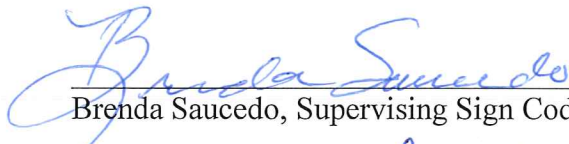
No. The existing sign, erected in 2008 per plan, in a wide land buffer containing extensive landscaping and sediment control areas is no longer visible.

The hearing date for this case is scheduled for: April 9, 2018 at 5:30 p.m.

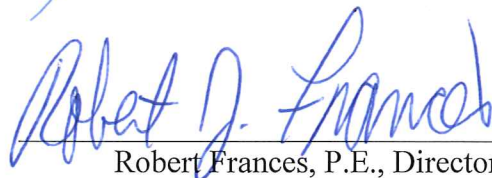
Report Prepared by:


Ed Marquardt Jr., Sign Code Inspector

Report Reviewed by:


Brenda Saucedo, Supervising Sign Code Inspector

Report Approved by:


Robert Frances, P.E., Director
Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits

EM/rd

BA17-003S Sign Variance FIRST DRAFT S17000142 West Friendship Volunteer Fire
Department. doc

Attachments:

Internal Memorandum from the Department of Planning and Zoning, Kristin O'Conner DPZ
Review of BA17-003S, Dated February 14, 2018



Howard County

Internal Memorandum

Subject: Sign Variance Petition Case No. BA17-003S

To: Ed Marquardt, Jr., Code Enforcement Officer, DILP

From: Kristin O'Connor, Division Chief, Comprehensive and Community Planning, DPZ

Date: February 14, 2018

I have reviewed the Sign Variance Petition BA17-003S submitted by the **West Friendship Volunteer Fire Department** on behalf of the West Friendship Station 3 Fire Station located at 12535 Old Frederick Road, Sykesville.

The proposed sign is not subject to recommendations of the Design Advisory Panel therefore, staff has **no comments at this time.**

If you have questions, please contact me at 410-313-2350.

cc: Brenda Saucedo, DILP
Geoff Goins, Zoning, DPZ
Toni Sleglein, Zoning, DPZ

Internal Memorandum from the Department of Planning and Zoning, Kristin O'Conner DPZ
Review of BA17-003S, Dated February 14, 2018