

IN THE MATTER OF
HARMONY HALL at
HOWARD COUNTY
HEALTH PARK, LLC
Petitioner

: BEFORE THE
: HOWARD COUNTY
: BOARD OF APPEALS
: HEARING EXAMINER
: BA Case No. 26-012S

DECISION AND ORDER

On July 22, 2026, the undersigned, serving as the Howard County Board of Appeals Hearing Examiner, and in accordance with the Hearing Examiner Rules of Procedure, heard the Petition of Harmony Hall at Howard County Health Park, LLC (Harmony Hall) (Petitioner) for a variance to erect a freestanding commercial monument identification sign with an electronic message board, in a POR (Planned Office Research) Zoning District, filed pursuant to § 3.513(b), Subtitle 5 of Title 3 of the Howard County Code (the Sign Code), in Council District 4, identified as Tax Map 35, Block 17, Parcel 365, Lot 10, also known as 6336 Cedar Lane, Columbia, Maryland. The variance is for 124.5 feet from the 169.5 feet setback requirement based on the 169.5 square footage of the proposed sign, which will be located 45 feet from the street.

Petitioner certified to compliance with the notice and advertising requirements of the Howard County Code. The Hearing Examiner viewed the subject Property as required by the Hearing Examiner Rules of Procedure. Mr. Sam Mangione, Esq. represented Petitioner. Joe Weber testified in support of the Petition. No one appeared in opposition to the Petition.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Based upon the preponderance of evidence presented at the hearing, the Hearing Examiner finds the following facts:

1. Property Identification. The subject Property is located in Council District 4, on the north side of Cedar Lane, across from its intersection with Freetown Road and the Hickory Ridge Village Center. It is referenced as Tax Map 35, Block 17, Parcel 365, Lot 10, contains approximately 12.28 acres of land, and is identified as 6336 Cedar Lane, Columbia, Maryland.

2. Property Description. The Property is a developed health campus and the proposed signage is to be located at the entrance of the health campus.

3. Requested Sign Variance. The Petitioner, Harmony Hall, is requesting a variance of the Howard County Sign Code to install a freestanding commercial monument identification sign with an electronic message board. This sign will replace the existing sign which has become difficult to see as a result of the growth of existing vegetation. The existing sign is 5 ft in height from grade and 7.1 ft in width. The proposed sign is 9 feet 5 inches in height including foundation and framing and is 18 ft in width, a total of 169.5 square feet. Its proposed location is 45 feet from Cedar Lane. Based on the size of the proposed sign, §3.501(c)(2)(c) of the Howard County Sign Ordinance requires a minimum road setback of 169.5 feet. A variance of 124.5 feet from the setback requirements is requested.

4. Technical Staff Report. All Department of Inspection, Licenses, and Permits (DILP) Technical Staff Reports evaluate a proposed sign variance Petition against the criteria for granting a variance and make recommendations. The June 24, 2026 Technical Staff Report, a technical evaluation from the perspective of the Howard County Sign Code, is based upon the BA-26-012S Variance Petition package submittal for Sign Permit Application S26000073, final revision received on March 13, 2026. The proposed monument identification sign is to be located at 6336 Cedar Lane, Columbia,

Maryland.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The proposed sign described within the Variance Petition would be in violation of the following section of the Howard County Sign Code:

• **Section 3.501(c)(2)(c) - Sign Standards by District:**

Freestanding signs: The provisions of this paragraph shall not apply in Downtown Columbia. Where a building does not cover the full area of the property, business signs may be freestanding or ground-supported and may be located in the front yard. The height of the sign may not exceed one foot for each two feet the sign is set back from the right-of-way and shall not exceed 26 feet from the grade level to the top of the sign.

Freestanding signs shall be permitted only where there is a minimum of 40 lineal feet of lot frontage. The maximum allowable area for a freestanding sign shall be one square foot for each one foot the sign is set back from the road right-of-way. The largest single face of a freestanding sign shall be considered for the purpose of computing allowable area under this section. No part of the sign shall extend beyond a property line or right-of-way line. Signs satisfying requirements for gas price posting are permitted up to an area of 32 square feet per face. Such signs may be affixed to the main freestanding sign and will not be assessed against the allowable area for the facility, nor will they be considered for the purpose of determining setback in relation to sign area.

The monument sign has a proposed 45-foot setback from the right-of-way. Per the Sign Code requirements, the sign would require a setback of 169.5 feet from the right-of-way. This is a difference of 124.5 feet from the required setback.

• **Section 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. Nothing contained in this section shall, however, be construed as preventing the use of lights or decorations related to religious and patriotic festivities. Beacon lights or search lights shall not be permitted as a sign for advertising purposes.

(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 so as to expose the face of the bulb, light or lamp to any public street or adjacent property.

In addition to the other requirements, as the Sign will feature an LED panel, it must comply with the above Code requirements for illuminated signs.

Additionally, an Electrical Permit must be obtained for the proposed Sign.

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact, the Board of Appeals Hearing Examiner concludes as follows:

1. Section 3.514(u) defines:

Sign, monument building means a sign where the entire base or bottom of

the sign is ground mounted.

The proposed sign is in violation of Sections 3.501(c)(2)(c) and 3.508 of the Howard County Sign Code.

2. Section 3.513 - Variances

b. The Board of Appeals may grant variances outside of Downtown Columbia from the provision of this subtitle where the following determinations are made:

(1) That there are 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, which conditions lead to practical difficulty and unnecessary hardship in complying strictly with the provisions of this subtitle; or

The "Harmony Hall" facility is located at the intersection of Cedar Lane and Freetown Road. Travelling south along Cedar Lane from Little Patuxent Parkway, there is a curve in the road which prevents visibility of the intersection until nearly upon the intersection. Compounding the visibility issue is the short distance from the traffic light at Cedar/Freetown. Additionally, the landscaping and trees have grown since the original sign was erected in 1988, obscuring sign visibility. These trees are not on the Subject property and therefore Petitioner is not authorized to remove them.

(2) That there are 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, resulting in practical difficulties and unnecessary hardship in complying

strictly with the provisions of this subtitle; or

In addition to the winding nature of Cedar Lane and mature trees and landscaping, the facility is located at the top of an elevated grade and fronted with parking lots, which mostly obscure visibility of the facility from Cedar Lane.

(3) That there are historical, architectural or aesthetic characteristics which shall be considered; and

There are no historical, architectural or aesthetic characteristics which should be considered.

(4) That the variance, if granted, will not adversely affect the appropriate use or development of adjacent properties, nor result in a dangerous traffic condition; and

The proposed sign's location is recessed from the roadway in a manner that does not inhibit sight lines while turning onto Cedar Lane from the parking area. In addition, there is a dedicated right-hand turn lane from the parking areas onto Cedar Lane.

Of note, the posted speed limit of Cedar Lane is 30 MPH, but most cars are observed to be travelling about 40 MPH.

(5) That the requested variance is the minimum necessary to afford relief, and can be granted without substantial impairment of the intent, purpose and integrity of this subtitle;

The proposed sign's size and location do not appear to be excessive based on the conditions of the lot size and shape. The previous sign for Harmony Hall was in nearly the exact location. The new proposed sign is simply larger, adds an electronic message element and enhances the aesthetics of the intersection.

DILP has no issues with the variance request regarding the intent, purpose, or integrity of the code.

(6) That such practical difficulties or hardships have not been created by the Applicant; provided, however, that where required findings pursuant to section 3.513 are made, the purchase or lease of the property on which a proposed sign is to be located subject to the restrictions sought to be varied shall not itself constitute a self-created hardship.

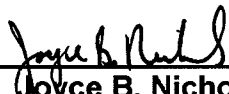
There are obstructions, such as grade, road curvature, building and parking lot interference, traffic lights, and landscaping on abutting property or properties which seriously interfere with the visibility of a proposed sign, resulting in practical difficulties and unnecessary hardship in complying strictly with the provisions of the Sign Code that were not created by the Property owner.

ORDER

Based on the foregoing, it is this 23rd day of July, 2026, by the Howard County Board of Appeals Hearing Examiner, **ORDERED**:

That the Petition of Harmony Hall at Howard County Health Park, LLC for a 124.5 ft variance from the 169.5 ft setback requirement to erect a freestanding commercial monument identification sign with an electronic message board, in Council District 4, identified as Tax Map 35, Block 17, Parcel 365, Lot 10, also known as 6336 Cedar Lane, Columbia, Maryland, be and is hereby **GRANTED**.

HOWARD COUNTY BOARD OF APPEALS**HEARING EXAMINER**



Joyce B. Nichols

Notice: A person aggrieved by this decision may appeal it to the Howard County Board of Appeals within 30 days of the issuance of the decision. An appeal must be submitted to the Department of Planning and Zoning on a form provided by the Department. At the time the appeal petition is filed, the person filing the appeal must pay the appeal fees in accordance with the current schedule of fees. The appeal will be heard *de novo* by the Board. The person filing the appeal will bear the expense of providing notice and advertising the hearing.