

IN THE MATTER OF
BALTIMORE SIGNS

and
GRAPHICS

Petitioner

: BEFORE THE
: HOWARD COUNTY
: BOARD OF APPEALS
: HEARING EXAMINER
: BA Case No. 26-015S

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DECISION AND ORDER

On August 19, 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 Baltimore Signs and Graphics) (Petitioner) for a variance to erect 4 (four) commercial wall mounted identification signs, in a NT (New Town) Zoning District, filed pursuant to § 3.513(b), Subtitle 5 of Title 3 of the Howard County Code (the Sign Code), in Council District 2, identified as Tax Map 36, Parcels T-X, also known as 6161 Columbia Crossing Circle, Columbia, Maryland. The total square footage of the requested signs is 489.25 square feet, requiring a variance of 289.25 square feet as the maximum square forage allowable per the Sign Code (per 100 lineal feet of building frontage) is 200 square feet.

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. Bailey Myers (Baltimore Signs and Graphics), Raquel Rhone (Blair Signs), and Nick Zahner (Blair Signs) 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 2, west of Snowden River Parkway, north of Md 175, south of Dobbin Road, in the Columbia Crossing Shopping Center. It is referenced as Tax Map 36, Parcels T-X, contains approximately 3.36 acres of land, and is identified as 6161 Columbia Crossing Circle, Columbia, Maryland.

2. Property Description. The Property is a commercial shopping center and the business is replacing the previous retail space of "Joann Fabrics" which had a wall sign permitted under SI9000280, which measured 87.58 square feet.

3. Requested Sign Variance. The Petitioner is requesting a variance of the Howard County Sign Code to install four signs for the retail outlet "Burlington"; at 6161 Columbia Crossing Circle in Columbia.

The proposed signs consist of:

S26000025 - a projecting commercial identification sign measuring 9.75 square feet.

S26000024 and S26000023 -two wall plaque commercial identification signs measuring 6.25 square feet each.

S26000022 - a commercial identification wall sign on the front facade of the building measuring 467 square feet.

The total square footage of the requested signs is 489.25 square feet, requiring a variance of 289.25 square feet as the maximum square footage allowable per the Sign Code (per 100 lineal feet of building frontage) is 200 square feet.

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 July 10,

2026 Technical Staff Report, a technical evaluation from the perspective of the Howard County Sign Code, is based upon the BA26-015S variance petition package submittal for sign permit applications #S26000022, S26000023, S26000024, and S26000025, originally filed on June 16, 2026, and additional revision documentation received on July 2, 2026. The proposed wall mounted identification signs are to be located at 6161 Columbia Circle Crossing, Columbia, Maryland.

FINDINGS OF FACT AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

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

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

(1) a. Size: The provisions of this paragraph shall not apply in Downtown Columbia. A total sign area of two square feet for each lineal foot of building frontage shall be allowed. If the building has multiple frontages, an additional sign area of one square foot for each additional lineal foot of building frontage shall be allowed. The total area of all signs erected on the lot and building shall be within the allowable square footage. Where there are multiple frontages, no more than two square feet of sign area for each lineal foot of building frontage shall be allowed to face that frontage.

- **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 Signs will feature an LED panel, they must comply with the above Code requirements for illuminated signs.

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

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

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

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

This property is in the rear southeast corner of the Shopping Center fully removed from main roadways similar to most other establishments in this Shopping Center. There are no unique physical conditions or exceptional topographical conditions peculiar to the property on which the proposed signs are to be located. Petitioner argues that the existing landscaping/trees partially obscures the visibility of the signage but the trees are required by the Howard County Code and are not a unique physical or topographical condition of the Property.

(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

There are obstructions which interfere with the street visibility of the proposed signs, but these obstructions are the same as other businesses in this same Shopping Center. Columbia Crossing Shopping Center is recessed from Dobbin Road by design. Most of the businesses are obscured along Dobbin Road with elevated grading, dense deciduous tree coverage, and landscaping. This is also true along MD 175 (Rouse Parkway) where dense trees mostly obscure this and other businesses in this Shopping Center.

(3) That there are historical, architectural or aesthetic characteristics

which shall be considered; and

There are architectural characteristics that should be considered. Petitioner is expanding the facade (under building permits B26002282 I B26001J30) on the front of the building and claiming hardship that the “signs are not proportionate to the facade upon which it will be placed”; whereas the existing facade and previous “JOANN” sign were proportional and in-line with the other businesses in the Shopping Center.

(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 variance will not adversely affect the use or development of adjacent properties or result in a dangerous traffic condition.

(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 wall sign is much larger in size than similar examples in the same Shopping Center. Of the comparable signs that were submitted as part of the variance package by the applicant, the Petitioner references the stores of Dick’s Sporting Goods (signage of 211 square feet), Ross Dress for Less (signage of 163 square feet), Bob’s Discount Furniture (signage of 177 square feet), and Old Navy (signage of 142 square feet). These are all far less in area than the instant sign variance request of 489.25 square feet (289.25 square feet variance request).

Petitioner asserts that much of the proposed signage is “dead space” (186 sq ft) and only 281 sq ft is utilized by the actual sign. It is the nature of the brand logo that creates this “dead area”. Petitioner argues that other jurisdictions do not count the “dead area” square footage towards the total square footage and that Howard County should adopt this approach whereby Petitioner would only require a variance of 81 sq

ft. Unfortunately discounting the "dead area" is not the current law in Howard County.

Additionally, Petitioner argues a hardship as the result of the proportion of the proposed signage to the façade which has been increased by Petitioner. The existing facade was proportional to the previous sign (JOANN) while at 87.58 square feet in area. Part of the remodeling/or the store is to expand the existing facade, which in turn has self-created this hardship (under building permits B26002282 I B26001130).

Petitioner also argues that the lack of way finding or monument signage listing the tenants in the Shopping Center is a hardship on Petitioner necessitating the larger Burlington signage. Howard County does not require way finding or monument signage listing the tenants in Shopping Centers.

DILP finds that the proposed signage is excessive in size for its location and is not proportionate to the surrounding signage within the shopping center. Your Examiner makes the same finding.

(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.

The practical difficulty of hardship resulting from a denial of the requested variance is self-created and pertains to the increase in size by Petitioner of the facade creating a lack of proportion between the signage and the façade.

ORDER

Based on the foregoing, it is this 20th day of August, 2026, by the Howard County Board of Appeals Hearing Examiner, **ORDERED**:

That the Petition of Baltimore Signs and Graphics for a 289.25 square feet variance from the 200 square foot maximum (per 100 lineal feet of building frontage) to erect 4 (four) commercial wall mounted identification signs, in Council District 2, identified as Tax Map 36, Parcels T-X, also known as 6161 Columbia Circle Crossing, Columbia, Maryland, be and is hereby **DENIED**.

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.