



MEMORANDUM

MEMO TO: Hearing Examiner for Howard County, Maryland

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

Thomas Huskins, Division Chief
Inspections and Enforcement Division

Brenda Saucedo, Supervising Sign Code Inspector
Inspections and Enforcement Division

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

DATE: October 29, 2020 (Revised due to Petitioner Change Request)

SUBJECT: Sign Variance Petition: BA19-004S Original package: submitted on 11/11/2019 and
Revised: Sign Permit #S19000215 and Variance Application submitted on
10/28/2020:
Petitioner: Howard Community College aka:(HCC)
Property owner: Board of Trustees, Howard County Community College
Location: 10901 Little Patuxent Pkwy, Columbia, MD 21044 aka:(HCC;10901)

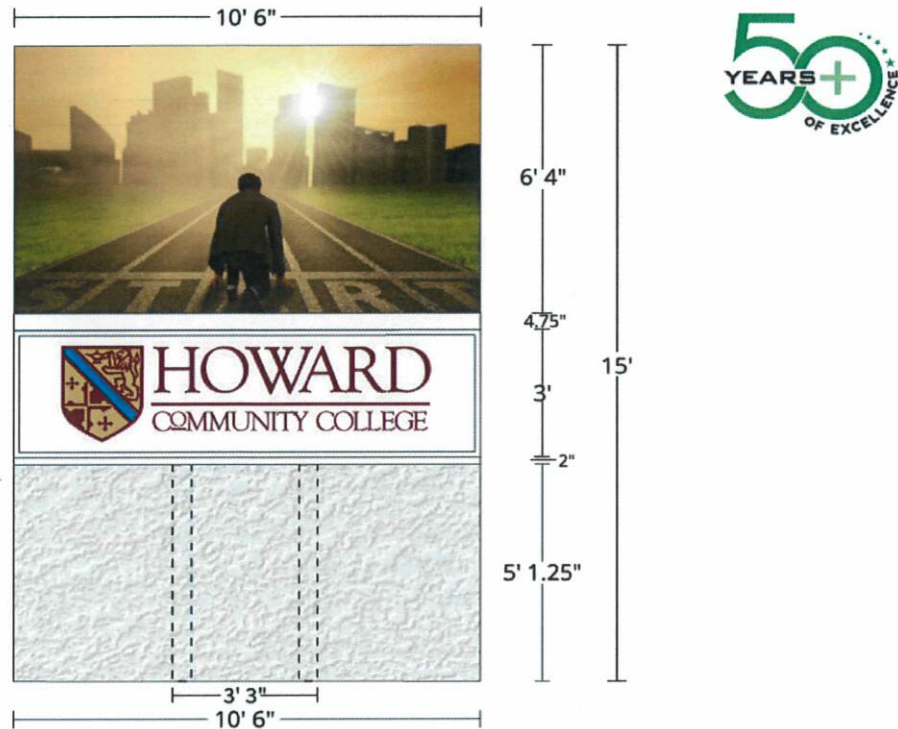
Request Description:

The Petitioner, Howard Community College (HCC), is requesting a variance of the Howard County Sign Code to install a double-sided freestanding monument style identification sign with an electronic message board. This sign will consist of an upper full color LED digital electronic message board and a lower ID Cabinet. (Howard Community College with logo) This doubled-sided sign is mounted on top of a five foot one and a quarter inch "Cornerstone" base with a white stucco finish.

Manufacturer's description for the sign: ***Modular DayStar-LED (upper) Cabinet with (lower) ID Cabinet, Freestanding LED Sign.*** **NOTE:** *This digital sign message will change once every 24 hrs. as required by the Department of Inspections, Licenses, and Permits sign permit policy.*

Each sign cabinet would have a width of 10 ft./6 in. and a height of 9 ft./10.75 in. with a total of 107.35 square feet of signage. Only one side of the double-sided identification sign is counted for the total amount of signage. The bottom of the combined sign cabinets would be 5 ft./1.25 in. from finished grade. The total height from grade to the top of the sign cabinet would be 15 ft./0 in.

See drawing attachment (A) below:



MODULAR COLOR 10mm 192x320

LED CABINET: 6' 4" x 10' 6" • FLAT FACE ID CABINET: 3' x 10' 6"

REMOTE USB

CORNERSTONE BASE: WHITE STUCCO FINISH

***Drawing Attachment (A)** - The drawing above is an example of the proposed upper full-color LED digital electronic message board and a lower ID Cabinet. The lower ID Cabinet will display: Howard Community College with logo. This doubled-sided sign is mounted on top of a five foot one and a quarter inch high "Cornerstone" base with a white stucco finish.*

Findings of Fact:

This technical evaluation from the perspective of the Howard County Sign Code is based upon the Revised BA19-004S variance petition package and sign permit application #S19000215 resubmittal on October 28, 2020. The large (36" x 24") site plan, and the four (17" x 11") plans labeled: **Zoning: POR**, the **Total Linear Footage of Buildings**, the **Aerial View** and the **Zoning Map**, all were submitted on November 11, 2019. (original variance package)

Note: Some of the variance paperwork was labeled incorrectly as BA19-0045. (BA19-004S is the correct variance number) This information was submitted by the Petitioner Howard Community College. (By: Charles Nightingale, Executive Director Facilities and Capital Projects)

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

Section 3.501(c) (2) (c) Sign standards by district

Commercial Districts, Commercial Areas, all Areas within Downtown Columbia, Industrial Districts, and Industrial Areas

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 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 computing allowable area under this section. No part of the sign shall extend beyond a property line or right-of-way line.

NOTE: The proposed sign is not located in the designated “Downtown Columbia” area.

The proposed sign cabinet front edge would be located about 2 ft./ 6 in. from the closest edge of the 10 ft. wide downtown Columbia bike/walkway. This is approximately 20 ft./ 4 in. from the Howard Community College property line. (HCC;10901)

Little Patuxent Parkway runs parallel along the front of the property line. At this proposed location, the sign code would only allow for a total sign height of 10 ft./4 in. and a total of 20.33 sq. ft. of signage.

The proposed sign at this location, would be 15 ft./0 in. above finished grade. At this height, the sign is 4 ft./8 in. over the allowable sign height permitted as per the code and would contain 87.02 sq. ft. of signage more than the code allows. Only one side of the double-sided identification sign is counted for the total amount of signage allowed per permit/code.

See Photo Attachments B, C and D below:

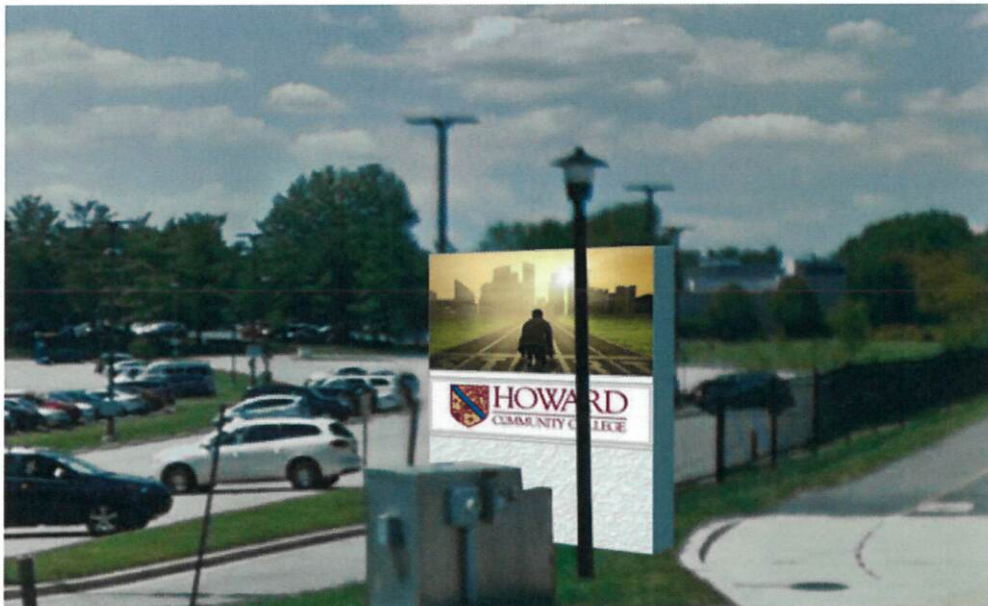


Photo Attachment (B) - The edited photo above depicts the proposed sign location at Campus Drive and Little Patuxent Parkway. The proposed upper sign would be an active full-color LED digital electronic message board. The lower ID cabinet would display the constant Howard Community College identifier with logo. This is a doubled-sided sign attached to a five foot one and a quarter inch high “Cornerstone” base with a white stucco finish.

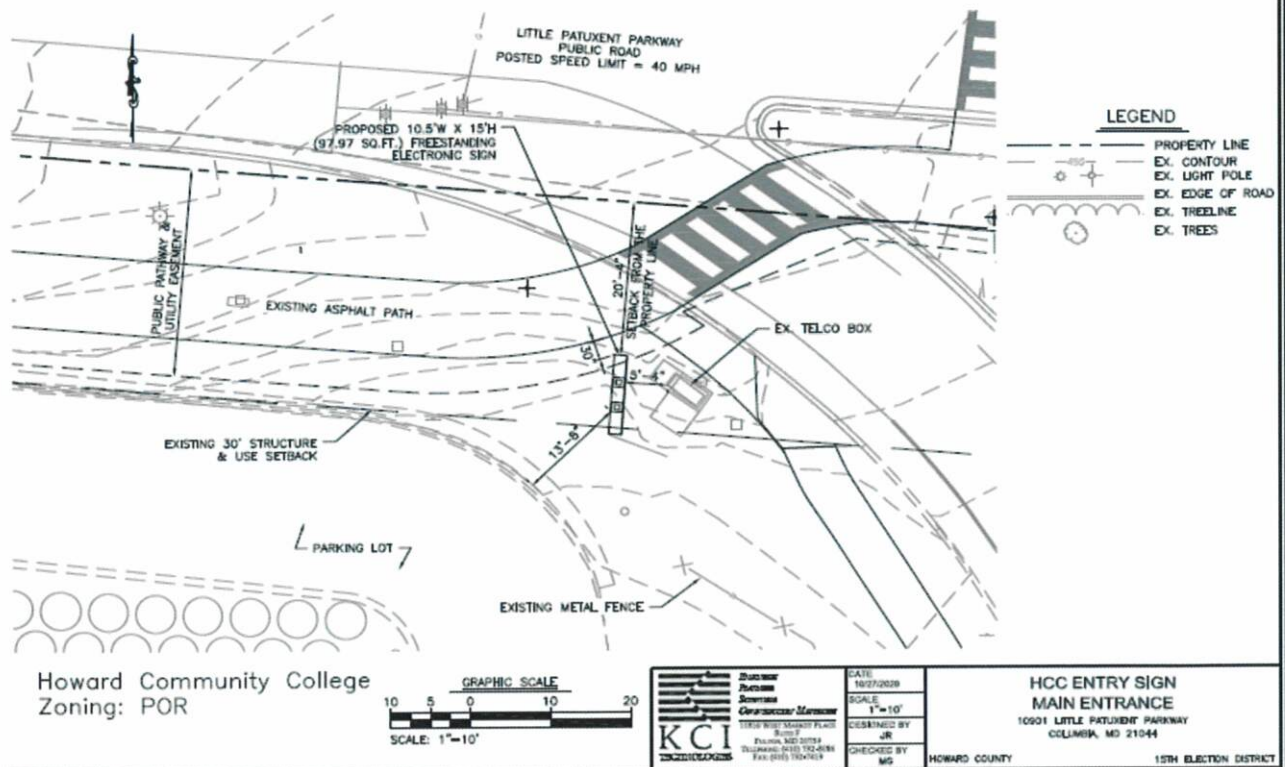


Photo Attachment (C) - The drawing above depicts the proposed sign location at Campus Drive and Little Patuxent Parkway, the main entrance to Howard Community College. The proposed sign cabinet front edge would be located 2 ft./ 6 in. from the closest edge of the 10 ft. wide downtown Columbia bike/walkway. This location is approximately 20 ft./ 4 in. from the Howard Community College property line.

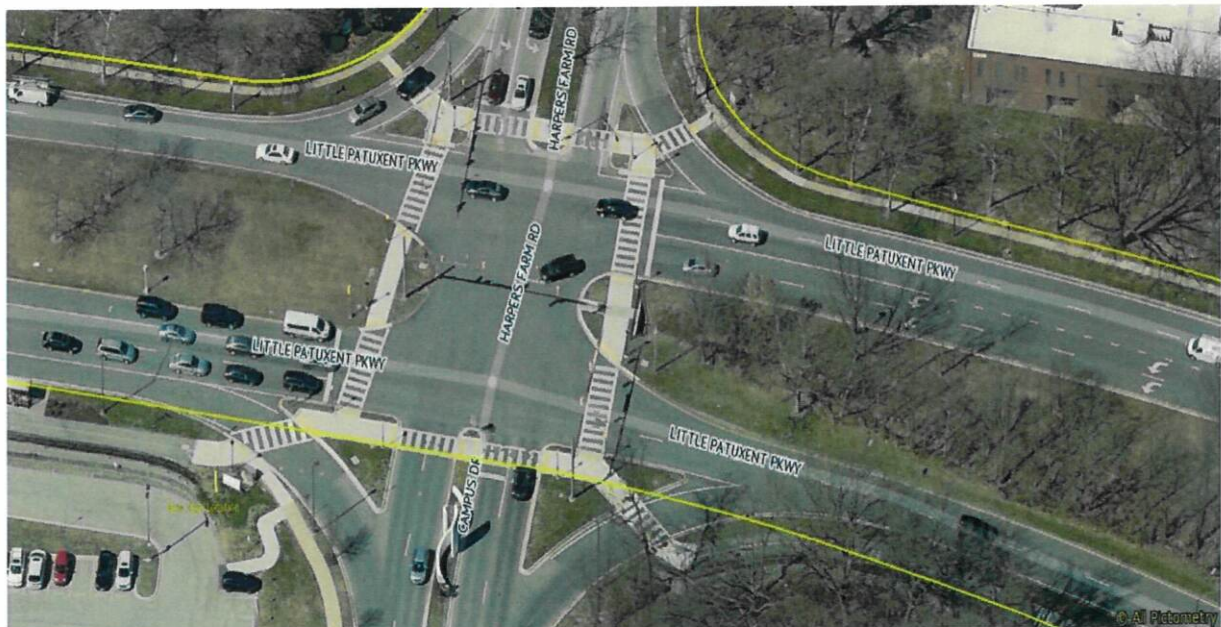


Photo Attachment (D) - The aerial view above depicts the (North side) of the intersection, Harpers Farm Road and Little Patuxent Parkway. On the (South side) of the intersection, Campus Drive acts as the main entrance for Howard Community College (HCC). The proposed sign location is on the left side of the main entrance to HCC. In the photo, it identifies the two sections of travel lanes (West/Eastbound) with its wide center roadway median separating them.

These proposed sign must also comply with the following section Sec. 3.508. – Illumination, 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.

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.

This sign must comply with changing its message only once every 24-hours.

Variance Requirement Questions:

[A] 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. After recent discussions between the Columbia Association and (HCC), it was reported that they have both agreed on the new revised variance package and sign permit application submitted on October 28, 2020. It was decided not to proceed with the original variance request with the two sign design and two locations. Instead, they have reportedly agreed to install just one of the double-sided signs and move the proposed location farther back from the roadway. The desired sign location would be in the area of the main front entrance of Campus Drive. This area has limited locations for any proposed sign location because it consists of a narrow section of land approximately 36 ft. wide. This narrow section of land runs from the edge of the Little Patuxent Parkway roadway curb to a decorative metal fence that runs along a 10 ft. wide asphalt pedestrian walkway. At the steepest point along the outside edge of this walkway, there is a 6 ft. steep drop off. The walkway and fence are held up by two stone retaining walls. The steepest part of this hill runs parallel with the original proposed two sign locations on either side of the (HCC) bus stop. Beyond these retaining walls, on either side, there continues a hill with a steep grade that runs down to the (HCC) front parking lot.

The revised proposed sign location is farther back from the roadway but it still offers travelers heading eastbound on Little Patuxent Parkway (towards Governor Warfield Parkway) and travelers heading westbound on Little Patuxent Parkway (towards Cedar Lane) a clear view of the sign. Travelers going through the Harpers Farm Road and Campus Drive traffic intersection would also have a clear view of the sign. The existing roadway and topographical conditions makes the revised location and having just the one double-sided sign a better fit for this area of Columbia as well as the College.

See Photo Attachments E, F, G and H below:

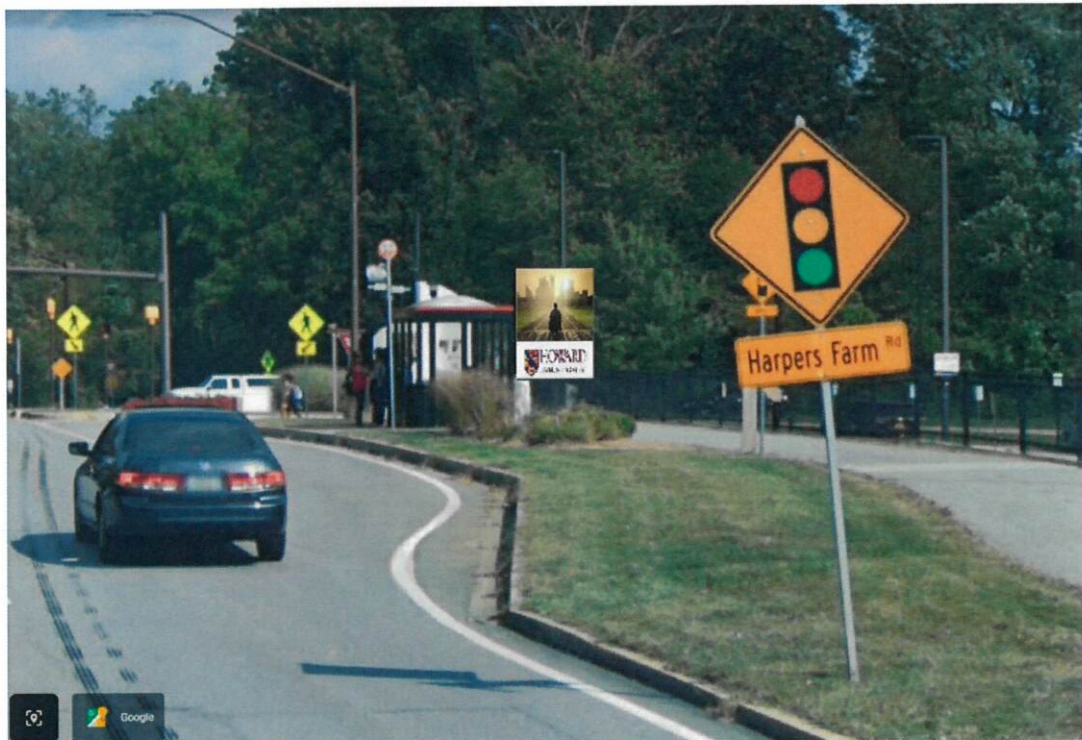


Photo Attachment (E) - The edited photo above is a view facing eastbound (towards Campus Drive) of the revised proposed location for the sign. The south side of this intersection, Campus Drive, is the main front entrance for Howard Community College. The right side of the photo depicts the black safety fence next to the 10 ft. wide walkway then the 13 ft. wide section that is either landscaped or grassy areas. The main (HCC) bus stop is located and depicted in this area also.

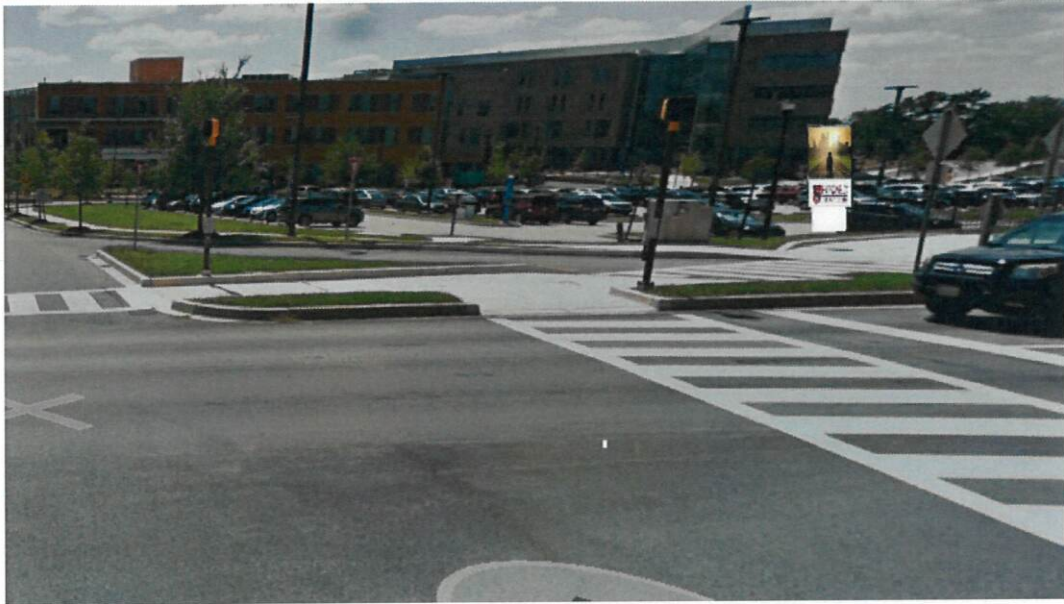


Photo Attachment (F) - The edited photo above is a view while standing in the the Little Patuxent Parkway median facing towards the east side of the main HCC entrance, Campus Drive, the revised sign and location. This depicts the view of the proposed sign while traveling through the intersection of Little Patuxent Parkway and Harpers Farm Road. On the north side of the intersection, Harpers Farm Road intersects with Little Patuxent Parkway. The south side of this intersection, Campus Drive, is the main entrance to Howard Community College.



Photo Attachment (G) - The photo above was taken standing in the HCC front parking lot while facing towards Little Patuxent Parkway. This photo depicts the two stone retaining walls and the (HCC) bus stop. Not shown in the photo, on the far right side, is the main HCC entrance, Campus Drive, and the proposed, revised location for the sign.



Photo Attachment (H) - The photo above was taken while standing in the HCC parking lot facing east towards Campus Drive. The photo shows the retaining wall ending and the continuing steep hillside and walkway.

Little Patuxent Parkway runs parallel along the front of the subject (HCC; 10901) property with two sections of dual travel lanes. The two travel lanes are westbound (towards Cedar Lane) and eastbound (towards Governor Warfield Parkway). These travel lanes (west/eastbound) each consist of two or more lanes of traffic with an approximately seventy-foot-wide center grass and landscaped roadway median separating them. Throughout the day and night, both travel lanes carry a constant heavy volume of traffic with a posted speed limit of 40 miles per hour. Little Patuxent Parkway is a main thoroughfare in Columbia.

[B] 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. On the south side of the main entrance to HCC, the Little Patuxent Parkway median and right side of its roadway becomes a more heavily wooded and overgrown natural area. These two natural wooded areas consist of overgrown bushes and mature deciduous trees. There does not appear to be another clearly visible sign site below the south side of the main HCC entrance.

See Photo Attachment I below:



Photo Attachment (I) - The photo above was taken facing towards the southside of the main HCC entrance, Campus Drive while standing along Little Patuxent Parkway. It depicts the Little Patuxent Parkway median and the roadway that both becomes more heavily wooded and overgrown.

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

Yes. This year, Howard County Community College will celebrate its upcoming fiftieth anniversary which is the historical reference.

Howard County Community College and the rest of Columbia has been changing its original architectural design and aesthetic characteristics. In the last few years, one of the changes that has been made is in the style and type of materials used for signs in Columbia in general. Most of these existing wooden signs have been replaced in the style and material used but not the overall size or location.

See Photo Attachments J, K and L below:

See also the Internal Memorandum from the Department of Planning and Zoning, Kristin O'Conner, DPZ Review of BA19-004S, Dated January 3, 2020.



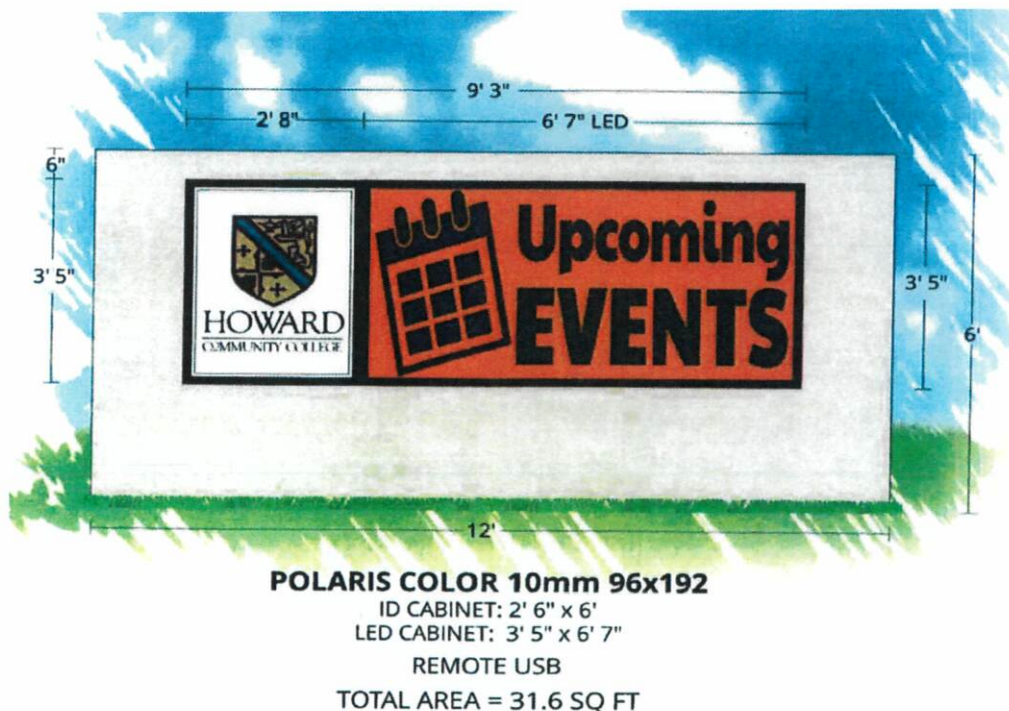
Photo Attachment (J)- The photo above depicts the original Columbia Choice Apartment sign as an example. (2013)



Photo Attachment (K)- The photo above depicts the current Columbia Choice Apartment sign as an example of the changes occurring to signage in Columbia. (2019)



Photo Attachment (L)- The photo above depicts the JH Hospital Sign, located along Little Patuxent Parkway, next door to HCC. This is an example of the design color and concept of a nearby sign.



Drawing Attachment (M)- The drawing above depicts the recently refaced and updated Howard Community College second entrance, existing two signs. Campus Drive and Hickory Ridge Road is where the HCC second, main entrance is located. They have been updated with matching, identical in-sync, LED digital electronic message boards. (Sign Permit #S19000214). This is for historical reference and not part of this variance request.

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 as long as the double-sided Modular DayStar-LED message board 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 so as not to distract drivers passing by.

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 the HCC student population and travelers along Little Patuxent Parkway, a main thoroughfare in Columbia.

See also the Internal Memorandum from the Department of Planning and Zoning, Kristin O’Conner, DPZ Review of BA19-004S, Dated January 3, 2020.

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.

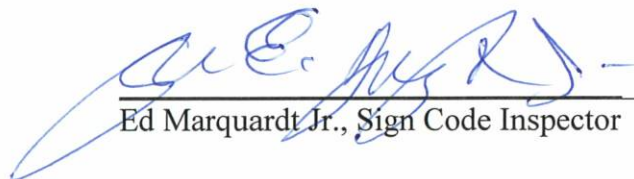
See Internal Memorandum from the Department of Planning and Zoning, Kristin O’Conner, DPZ Review of BA19-004S, Dated January 3, 2020.

Were the practical difficulties or hardships created by the Applicant?

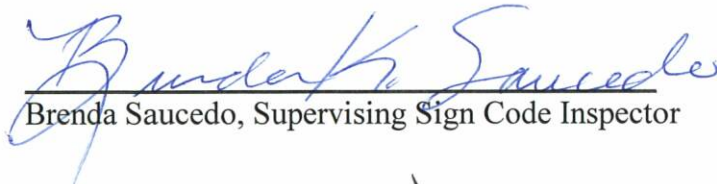
No.

The hearing date for this case has been rescheduled for November 12, 2020 @ 10:am.


Report Prepared by:


Ed Marquardt Jr., Sign Code Inspector

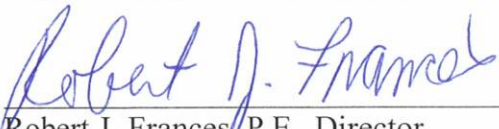
Report Reviewed by:


Brenda Saucedo, Supervising Sign Code Inspector

Report Reviewed by:


Thomas Huskins, Division Chief
Inspections and Enforcement Division

Report Approved by:


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

EM/rd

Revised: BA19-004S; Sign Variance Petition “Howard Community College”

Sign Permit: #S19000215 doc.

Attachments:

***Internal Memorandum from the Department of Planning and Zoning, Kristin O’Conner, DPZ
Review of BA19-004S, Dated January 3, 2020***



Subject: Sign Variance Petition Case No. BA19-004S

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

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

Date: January 3, 2020

I have reviewed the revised plans for Sign Variance Petition BA19-004S submitted by **Star Neon Signs** on behalf of the Howard Community College located at 10901 Little Patuxent Parkway, Columbia, MD.

The proposed freestanding identification entrance signs are 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 Sieglein, Zoning, DPZ

***Internal Memorandum from the Department of Planning and Zoning, Kristin O’Conner, DPZ
Review of BA19-004S, Dated January 3, 2020***