



Rochester Hills

Minutes

Zoning Board of Appeals

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Rochester Hills, MI
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Home Page:
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Chairperson: Kenneth Koluch; Vice Chairperson: Charles Tischer; Secretary: Jayson Graves
Members: Deborah Brnabic, Marvie Neubauer, Jason Sakis, and John Young

Wednesday, March 11, 2026

7:00 PM

1000 Rochester Hills Drive

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Koluch called the March 11, 2026 Zoning Board of Appeals meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Michigan Time.

ROLL CALL

Present 7 - Deborah Brnabic, Jayson Graves, Kenneth Koluch, Charles Tischer, Jason Sakis, Marvie Neubauer and John Young

Others Present

Chris McLeod, Planning Manager
Jennifer MacDonald, Recording Secretary
Mike Johnson, Ordinance Inspector

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

[2026-0099](#) February 11, 2026 Zoning Board of Appeals Minutes

A motion was made by Neubauer, seconded by Tischer, that this matter be Approved. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye 7 - Brnabic, Graves, Koluch, Tischer, Sakis, Neubauer and Young

COMMUNICATIONS

Chairperson Koluch noted the receipt of the Michigan Planner, which was distributed to all members in electronic format. He mentioned having paper copies available for review.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

NEW BUSINESS

[2026-0100](#) Public Hearing - File PVAI2026-0003

Location: 1300 N. Livernois Rd., located on the east side of Livernois between Tienken and Dutton, Parcel 15-03-351-006, zoned RE One Family Residential

Request: The applicant is requesting a variance from *Sec. 138-5.100 Schedule of Regulations*, which requires a minimum lot area of 43,560 square feet in the RE One Family Residential zoning district. The proposed variance, if granted, would allow for a portion of the subject parcel to be divided (subject to further administrative review) and added to the adjoining parcel to the north (1420 N. Livernois), resulting in the subject parcel having a lot area of 0.8 acres or 34,848 square feet, approximately 8,700 square feet less than required by Ordinance. No new parcel would be created as a result of the variance, if granted.

(Staff Report dated 3-04-26, Location Map, ZBA application, Plans, Photos & additional documentation, and the Public hearing notice had been placed on file and by reference became a part of the record thereof.)

Present for the application was Kristen Sheers, 1300 North Livernois, and Jeff VanHoorne, 1420 North Livernois. Chairperson Koluch confirmed that Mr. VanHoorne is a neighbor to the property in question.

Chairperson Koluch explained that the request is for a variance from Section 138-5.100 Schedule of Regulations, which requires a minimum lot size of 43,560 square feet in the R-1 One Family Residential zoning district. He noted that the variance, if granted, would allow a portion of the subject parcel to be divided and added to the adjoining parcel to the north, located at 1420 N. Livernois. This would result in the subject parcel having a lot area of 0.8 acres (34,848 square feet), which is approximately 8,712 square feet less than the ordinance requires. He clarified that no new parcel would be created as the land is intended to be sold to the neighbor, Mr. VanHoorne. Chairperson Koluch then invited Ms. Sheers to present her case. Ms. Sheers stated she purchased the property in 2009 and described significant difficulties with the land's topography. She explained that while the property backs up to a trail and creek, there is no safe access to the rear of the property due to the extreme steepness of the elevation. She recounted that multiple companies declined to install steps, citing dangerous conditions, while others failed to provide quotes after initial inquiries. She further noted that the previous owners of 1420 N. Livernois, the Palmers, had informed her that multiple past owners of her property had unsuccessfully tried to utilize that portion of the land. In 2011 or 2012, the Palmers requested access to her property to install a drain to prevent storm runoff from the hill from washing away their driveway. She agreed to this request. Mr. VanHoorne clarified that he and his wife purchased the property from the Palmers in 2017.

Ms. Sheers explained that over the last four to five years, the topography of the land has significantly changed, exacerbating drainage issues. She noted that a severe storm three years ago felled several full-grown trees along the back of the hill, which remain inaccessible for removal. These fallen trees blocked natural drainage, causing floodwater and runoff to collapse the driveway at 1420 N. Livernois. Ms. Sheers emphasized her inability to access that portion of her property, stating that she must enter through neighbors' yards to reach the trail. She described the area as a "mess" due to storm drainage and an infestation of phragmites, which her summer guests have attempted to help Mr. VanHoorne clear by accessing the land through his property. Regarding the proposed land transfer, Ms. Sheers stated that an easement was considered but deemed insufficient due to liability concerns. She expressed that it is unfair for Mr.

VanHoorne to perform and fund maintenance on land she cannot access while she remains legally responsible for potential injuries or property damage, such as a tree falling on his garage. Ms. Sheers provided historical property imagery from 2017 to demonstrate how much the land has changed. Chairperson Koluch examined the documentation, noting it provided a clearer view of the current conditions.

Ms. Sheers continued her presentation, stating that provided photographs illustrate "band-aid" repairs that have been made over the last five years. She noted that she is the third owner of the home, which was built in 1958, and that none of the previous owners have been able to access or maintain that portion of the land. She emphasized that she and her neighbors, including Mr. VanHoorne and Mr. Hohausser, care deeply about the environmental health of the creek and the management of phragmites.

Ms. Sheers said that the variance is necessary not just for the current situation, but to prevent future liability and maintenance issues for subsequent homeowners. She stated that while she does not necessarily want to sell a piece of her property, doing so would clean up the boundary lines and allow Mr. VanHoorne to work directly with the City on environmental remediation that she cannot physically perform due to the lack of access. She concluded by stating the request is a necessary fix for a problem that has existed for decades. Chairperson Koluch thanked Ms. Sheers for the clarification and turned the meeting over to Mr. McLeod for the staff report.

Mr. McLeod thanked the Chairperson and explained that the request involves a variance for lot area within the RE zoning district. He noted that the proposed split would reduce the property at 1300 N. Livernois to 0.8 acres, which is approximately 8,700 square feet less than the 43,560 square feet required by the zoning ordinance. He clarified that while an administrative lot split application was previously denied due to insufficient land area, the Board's role is specifically to review the lot area variance; if granted, the split could then move forward for final administrative approval. Describing the area as unique, Mr. McLeod pointed out that the properties were developed in the 1950s and feature highly irregular "flag" or "panhandle" configurations that would not be permitted under current ordinances. He noted that even the city assessor was unable to determine exactly how or when these specific lot configurations were originally created. Mr. McLeod displayed a survey and site plan, identifying the proposed split line. He explained that the land to the right of the line - the "bottom of the hill" - would be transferred to 1420 N. Livernois, while the land to the left - the "top of the hill" - would remain with 1300 N. Livernois. He characterized this as a logical split point given the property's topography. Finally, Mr. McLeod utilized city mapping layers to highlight the natural features affecting the site. He identified significant steep slopes, wetlands, and floodplain areas, noting that the dark brown areas on the map represent the steepest slopes regulated by the city. He concluded by reminding the Board to evaluate the request against the standard variance criteria, specifically whether strict compliance is unreasonable given that the owner currently cannot access or use that portion of the property.

Chairperson Koluch inquired about the specific location of the proposed split

relative to the site's topography. Mr. McLeod confirmed that the split line is drawn at the bottom of the hill, noting that the portion of land to be transferred is at a similar elevation to the neighbor's lot. He explained that the east side of the property physically aligns with the property to the north, whereas the current home at 1300 N. Livernois sits on a "little island" approximately 40 feet above that level.

In response to a question from Chairperson Koluch regarding a previous real estate listing, Ms. Sheers clarified that her decision to take the house off the market was due to personal family reasons and her desire to remain in Rochester Hills. She stated that the listing was unrelated to the current variance request.

Chairperson Koluch observed that while the Board has recently denied several lot split variance requests to maintain consistency, this case differs because it does not involve the creation of a new buildable parcel. He noted that in prior denied cases, applicants often sought to create new lots, whereas this request involves land that is completely un-buildable and lacks ingress or egress. Ms. Sheers agreed, confirming that the section of land in question cannot support independent construction.

Chairperson Koluch inquired about the portion of the parcel located on the other side of Paint Creek, specifically whether its proximity to the trail allowed for any construction. Ms. Sheers confirmed that building is not possible because there is no access and the topography consists almost entirely of steep hills leading down to the creek. Mr. VanHoorne added that the section is also very narrow. He estimated the width of the property at the creek to be approximately 75 feet and between 80 to 90 feet wide overall.

Chairperson Koluch inquired if Mr. VanHoorne currently maintains the lawn and trees at the bottom of the hill near his driveway for the applicant. Mr. VanHoorne confirmed that the area near the shed is lawn and stated that the land proposed for transfer is effectively only accessible from 1420 N. Livernois. He noted that the portion of 1300 N. Livernois on the other side of the creek is inaccessible unless one wades through the water or uses the bridge belonging to 1420, which he allows the homeowners to use to reach the trail.

Mr. VanHoorne described the hillside as having drainage runoff from rain and springs that create constant water runoff into the creek. Ms. Sheers added that phragmites are currently blocking the natural drainage in that area. Mr. VanHoorne explained that the split line was drawn specifically to include this "problem area," noting it is unfair for Ms. Sheers to be responsible for land she cannot access. He stated that if any issues occur on that portion of the property, 1420 N. Livernois is the only parcel affected, and argued the land should have always been part of his property.

Chairperson Koluch observed that while the board often sees uniquely shaped lots, the "bow tie" configuration of this specific parcel is particularly strange. Ms. Sheers reiterated that neither her real estate legal counsel nor city staff could find records explaining when or why the lot was created in such a manner. Mr. VanHoorne suggested that a previous owner likely split the lot to build near the

road while offloading the "crummy" inaccessible land to the other parcel. He emphasized that since 1420 N. Livernois is the only property 100% affected by issues on that land, he has the most "skin in the game" to ensure it is maintained correctly.

Mr. VanHoorne further explained his involvement with trout habitat restoration groups, noting that when the drainage on the hillside is blocked, cold spring water is diverted into his pond where it warms up before entering the creek, which is detrimental to the trout. He argued that a permanent solution is needed to ensure the cold water flows directly into the creek, and that the current homeowners are willing to take on the responsibility and property loss to fix a decades-long problem. He stressed that the split line must be drawn exactly as proposed to effectively solve the drainage and access issues.

Chairperson Koluch asked for clarification on whether other parcels in the immediate vicinity were less than one acre. Mr. McLeod identified several nearby lots that are under the requirement, including one across the street at 0.85 acres and others closer to the open space subdivision that are approximately half an acre. Chairperson Koluch noted that the subject parcel would not be the only one of that size in the area before turning the floor over to the Board for questions, starting with Mr. Tischer.

Mr. Tischer noted that he had reviewed the application several times to understand the full back story of the request. He stated that, in his personal opinion, the applicants clearly demonstrated a practical difficulty and met all the necessary criteria for a variance. He expressed that the unique circumstances of the property provided a defensible rationale for the decision and voiced his support for the split. Chairperson Koluch then invited further comments from the board, addressing Ms. Neubauer.

Ms. Neubauer expressed her agreement with the board's sentiment, stating that this case is precisely why the ability to appeal was created. She emphasized for the record that the proposed split would not result in the creation of a new parcel that would be accessible. She noted that the property owner is currently unable to access her own land and highlighted the uniqueness of the lot's shape and the maintenance issues that the neighbor is currently forced to address as compelling reasons for approval. Ms. Neubauer stated that it was important to read the criteria into the record to ensure a clear explanation of how the testimony matches the city's requirements.

Chairperson Koluch opened the floor for public comment, and seeing none, he closed the floor.

With that, Ms. Neubauer made a motion to approve the variance request, and it was seconded by Ms. Brnabic. Ms. Brnabic expressed her full support, stating that the request fits all necessary criteria and serves a true purpose. She noted that the combination of wetlands, topography, and the irregular lot configuration made it completely unreasonable for a property owner to have to use a neighbor's land to access their own.

Chairperson Koluch called for a roll call vote. The motion to approve the

variance passed by a unanimous vote.

Following the vote, Member Sakis raised a concern regarding a potential encroachment issue involving a shed on the property to the south. He advised the applicants that even if the current neighbor is friendly, future owners could potentially initiate legal action if the encroachment is not addressed. Ms. Sheers clarified that she had already discussed the matter with the neighbor, who is a lawyer and expressed a willingness to remove the structure if necessary. Mr. Tischer remarked that the applicants were fortunate to have such cooperative neighbors, as such issues often lead to significant litigation.

Ms. Sheers thanked the Board, stating that the supportive neighborhood environment was why they chose to pursue the variance and emphasized that the group is collectively dedicated to the future of Rochester Hills. Chairperson Koluch and the Board wished the applicants luck with their project.

A motion was made by Neubauer, seconded by Brnabic, that this matter be Approved. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye 7 - Brnabic, Graves, Koluch, Tischer, Sakis, Neubauer and Young

Resolved, the Rochester Hills Zoning Board of Appeals hereby **APPROVES** the request for a variance of approximately 0.2 acres from Sec. 138-5-100 Schedule of Regulations, which requires a minimum lot size of 1 acre or 43,560 square feet in the RE One Family Residential zoning district, Parcel Identification Number 15-03-351-006, to allow for the reduced lot size and allow the continued review of the proposed lot split, because a practical difficulty does exist on the property as demonstrated in the record of proceedings and based on the following findings. With this variance, the property shall be considered by the City to be in conformity with the Zoning Ordinance for all future uses with respect to the setbacks for which this variance is granted.

1. Compliance with the strict letter of the Zoning Ordinance would prohibit the reasonable use of the entire property and without the variance would be unnecessarily burdensome on the applicant to maintain and access the majority of the rear portion of the property.
2. Granting the variance will preserve a substantial property right for the applicant and thus substantial justice shall be done.
3. A lesser variance will not provide substantial relief, and would not be more consistent with justice to other property owners in the area.
4. There are unique circumstances of the property that necessitate granting the variance as described in the above criterion, specifically that the property includes significant steep slopes, potential wetlands and potential floodplains as shown on the City's GIS mapping, the physical shape and layout of the property as a "bow tie" shape along with the significant natural features essentially prohibits access to the rear portion of the property for maintenance without entering the neighbor's property, that due to the extensive natural features on the property, issues regarding drainage and trespass onto the property to the north cannot be addressed appropriately and the proposed lot split would help alleviate those issues.
5. The granting of this variance would not be materially detrimental to the public welfare or existing or future neighboring uses, and the neighbor to the north is supportive of the variance request.

6. Approval of the requested variance will not impair the supply of light and air to adjacent properties, increase congestion, increase the danger of fire, or impair established property values in the surrounding area since there is no new building lot being created and that the rear of the lot is essentially not accessible or maintainable in the current configuration.

2026-0008

SIGN BOARD OF APPEALS

Public Hearing - File No. PVAI2025-0009

Location: 1101 W. University Dr., located on the south side of University Dr. and east of Livernois Rd., Parcel No. 15-15-101-003, zoned SP Special Purpose

The applicant is requesting a variance, which if granted, would allow a maximum monument sign height of up to 12.67 feet. Per Ordinance, maximum monument sign height is seven (7) feet.

In addition, the applicant is requesting a variance, which if granted would allow a total sign area, of all regulated monument signs of 186 square feet of monument signage along University Dr. and an additional forty (40) square feet of monument signage along S. Livernois Rd. Per Ordinance, maximum monument sign sizes are one hundred and fifty (150) square feet along the front of the hospital from which it is addressed and one additional sign of twenty (20) square feet along an ancillary major road frontage.

Finally, the applicant is requesting a variance which if granted would allow for two (2) wall signs that total 502.2 square feet, combined. The Ordinance permits a maximum wall sign size of one hundred (100) square feet per sign and overall sign area of three hundred (300) square feet for all wall signs.

(Staff Report dated 3-04-26, Location Map, Building dept. reviewed plans, ZBA application, plans & other documents, and the Public hearing notice had been placed on file and by reference became a part of the record thereof.)

Present for the applicant was Tracy Diehl, 6487 Hilliard Drive, Canal Winchester, Ohio. Ms. Diehl identified herself as a signage expert assisting Henry Ford Health with their re-branding development through the variance process. She clarified that she works by affidavit for the hospital and also represents Stratus, the sign manufacturer for the project.

Chairperson Koluch introduced the item, noting that the application was originally filed the previous year, revoked, and had now returned for consideration. Prior to the presentation, Vice Chairperson Tischer announced his recusal from the matter. He explained that because he is employed by Health Alliance Plan and maintains a connection with Henry Ford Health, he would recuse himself from the discussion and left the meeting for the evening.

Chairperson Koluch provided an overview of the request, noting that the applicant is seeking several variances regarding freestanding and wall signage. If granted, the variances would allow for three regulated freestanding signs to reach a height of 12.67 feet, which exceeds the ordinance maximum of 7 feet by 5.67 feet. Additionally, the total area of all freestanding monument signs would reach 218.27 square feet along University Drive and 38.58 square feet along South Livernois, exceeding the permitted limits of 150 square feet and 20

square feet, respectively.

Regarding wall signage, the applicant is requesting a total area of 1,322 square feet, which exceeds the permitted 600 square feet by 722 square feet. The request also includes a 244 square foot wall sign that exceeds the individual sign limit of 200 square feet by 44 square feet, and two existing 256 square foot wall signs that each exceed the limit by 56 square feet. Chairperson Koluch noted that while the remainder of the signage complies with city requirements, the overall building size and setback triggered these specific variance needs. He then invited Ms. Diehl to present the case for why these modifications are necessary.

Ms. Diehl stated that Henry Ford Health has been engaged in an extensive process of re-branding all of their sites across the state, a project she has personally overseen for more than three years. She explained that for every campus, a specialized team studies the location to determine which signage configurations will be most effective by identifying visual obstructions and determining how wayfinding and mobility can be improved through better sign placement. This process is intended to represent the brand clearly so there is no confusion for patients, especially considering that many people traveling to the facility are not from Rochester Hills and may be coming from outlying communities that lack their own hospital facilities. She emphasized that as a 24-hour emergency facility, the signage must accommodate individuals dealing with extreme distress, those who may have low vision, or motorists navigating the city for the first time.

The branding and signage proposed for this site were designed with the understanding that users must be able to see and read them in emergencies and through all weather conditions, which is critical because most visitors to a medical facility are already under significant stress. Ms. Diehl noted that during her personal visit to the campus that afternoon, she found that traffic on Livernois was so heavy that the existing signs were frequently blocked by SUVs and other large vehicles. She pointed out that if a driver misses the sign, the inability to make a left turn at the Walton intersection creates a dangerous situation where the driver must navigate unfamiliar areas just to find a way to turn around. Furthermore, she observed that a current ordinance-compliant sign on Walton had the word "Emergency" completely obscured by shrubs and landscaping, rendering it ineffective for those in urgent need.

Ms. Diehl explained that the technical design of the signs, including letter size and negative space, must take into account a specific height to ensure the information remains legible even in congested traffic. She said that the special conditions of the request are rooted in the hospital's status as an emergency medical facility, which distinguishes it from standard businesses like restaurants or retail stores that use signage primarily to attract customers. Because the hospital campus is enormous and positioned between multiple street frontages, the signs must be high enough to be seen over six-foot SUVs and winter snowfall. She maintained that a medical facility cannot be compared to a typical business like Target and that granting the variance would provide substantial justice by allowing the hospital to upgrade to a system that is more visible, legible, and aesthetically consistent with other Henry Ford Health campuses.

Mr. McLeod thanked the Chairperson and noted that while he would not reread the specific variance requests already entered into the record, he would discuss the signage package in general terms. He confirmed that the proposal was originally brought forward in the late fall of 2025 but was pulled by staff to allow for a more comprehensive and holistic review of the entire package once additional building signage was proposed. He expressed hope that the Board could now address the matter with this full view of the campus facility layout.

He oriented the Board to the southernmost entrance off Livernois, which he described as an offsite entrance providing access to both the hospital and a neighboring multiple-family development. He then identified the two main entrances on University Drive, noting that the property sits directly against the city boundary with Rochester. He pointed out that the City of Rochester's own entrance sign is located right at the property corner as one enters the hospital grounds, and the applicant's other sign is proposed for generally the same location as the current main campus entrance.

In terms of the monument signs, Mr. McLeod explained that the Board is reviewing variances for the overall height and area of signs on University Drive as well as the height and size for the sign on Livernois. He clarified that while the city ordinance accounts for multiple entrances by allowing certain signs on the primary University Drive frontage, it stipulates that additional signs on a non-addressed property, such as the Livernois frontage, are restricted to just 20 square feet. He noted that the applicant is seeking a larger sign for that Livernois entrance than what is permitted.

Regarding the wall signage, Mr. McLeod stated that most of the signs within the package reviewed by the Building Department are "one-for-one" branding changes that the administration considers essentially taken care of. However, the major items requiring Board consideration are the main sign at the top of the tower and the large banners on either side of the atrium. He informed the Board that these banners have been in place for a substantial period of approximately 10 to 15 years, starting as temporary signs that grew into permanent fixtures over time. He explained that these banners are now being requested as permanent signs and, because they exceed the 200-square-foot limit for individual wall signs, they significantly increase the total requested square footage for the site.

Mr. McLeod provided a visual overview of the campus signage locations, identifying the tower as the location for the primary facility sign, alongside the monument signs and the tall vertical banners. He pointed out that the proposed tower sign is essentially the same size as the previous Ascension signage that occupied that space, but the Building Department determined that the size differentiation still required a formal review by the Board. He also highlighted the banner signs in their current configuration, noting the applicant's intent to update them with Henry Ford Hospital branding and transition them into permanent fixtures.

The staff report further detailed the placement of monument signs, including one on the bottom left corner directly west of the east entrance, situated near the

City of Rochester sign. Mr. McLeod noted a minor technical concern regarding a ditch and under-drain crossing the driveway at that location, though he clarified this would be addressed as a permitting issue through the Building Department. He explained that a wall sign near the hospital entrance, which features electronic message boards on either end, is also being re-branded and is considered part of the overall monument signage package for the front of the hospital. Another monument sign on the University Drive frontage was identified in its current configuration; Mr. McLeod noted that it would replace an existing, smaller delivery entrance sign with a more prominent 12 to 12.5 foot high monument sign consistent with the new branding.

Finally, Mr. McLeod oriented the Board to the Livernois frontage, noting the northbound and southbound lanes and the nearby football field for context. He pointed out an existing sign located on property owned by a multi-family development which serves as the primary entrance to the hospital from Livernois. He showed the Board a street perspective of where this sign sits and explained that the applicant is proposing to replace it with a new monument sign in that same location.

Mr. McLeod explained that the city ordinance contains a separate provision specifically for hospitals regarding sign standards. For monument signs, the ordinance allows for 150 square feet of signage on the primary frontage where the facility is addressed, which is University Drive in this instance, while restricting signage to 20 square feet on any other roadway featuring a driveway. He emphasized that a seven-foot height limit is the standard for every monument sign across the city and has been in place for a very long time. He noted that the city has made a significant effort to bring signs into compliance with this height requirement, and the ordinance stipulates that when a site redevelops, undergoes major maintenance, or changes ownership, signs must be brought down to the seven-foot maximum.

Regarding wall sign standards, Mr. McLeod stated that the typical allowance is 100 square feet per sign with a total maximum of 300 square feet. However, because of the specific setback of the hospital building, the Building Department applies a two-times multiplier. This multiplier effectively doubles the limits to 200 square feet for individual signs and 600 square feet for the total allowable wall sign area, as the ordinance automatically permits larger signs for buildings set further back from the road.

Mr. McLeod also clarified that the Building Department exempted all internal monument signs on the campus from the square footage calculations, with the exception of the three specific signs being discussed. He noted that while there are numerous wayfinding and directional signs throughout the campus that still require building permits for structural and electrical reasons, they are not counted toward the overall square footage totals for the sign package currently before the Board.

Mr. McLeod transitioned to the specific proposals, noting the overall height of 12.8 feet for the monument signs. He explained the Building Department's methodology for calculating square footage, stating that while the illuminated white areas were counted in their entirety, the department drew a tight square

around only the text for non-illuminated panels. This approach was intended to minimize the total square footage being requested by the applicant, and as such, the blue background and the sign base were excluded from the calculations. He provided a comparison between the proposed design and the existing Henry Ford signage currently on-site.

Regarding the hospital tower, Mr. McLeod pointed out the proposed Henry Ford Health branding and cross, noting that the location has traditionally featured signage for previous hospital identities such as Crittenton and Ascension. He characterized the new tower sign as being very similar in size to what has traditionally been there, despite having a different configuration. He also addressed the large vertical banners, noting that while they have been a long-standing feature of the campus, they were never originally permitted as permanent fixtures. He observed that the current proposal to make these banners permanent would actually represent an overall reduction in signage on the facade, as a large graphic previously located in the center of the atrium has since been removed.

In conclusion, Mr. McLeod noted that the standards of review for the Sign Board of Appeals are slightly different than those for standard zoning variances. He introduced Mike Johnson from the Building Department, who performed the technical reviews, to assist with any specific questions from the Board.

Chairperson Koluch inquired about the building material located behind the current banners and asked what would be visible if they were removed. Mr. McLeod explained that the underlying surface consists of a taupe-colored stone facade material. Ms. Diehl added that the surface would likely require rehabilitation and resurfacing because the materials have likely been discolored or damaged by weather, wind, and sun exposure after having signage hanging on them for so long.

Mr. McLeod estimated that the banners have been in place for approximately 15 years, and Chairperson Koluch noted that he did not recall a time when they were not there. Mr. McLeod clarified that while the banners have historically acted as permanent features and permits for temporary banners were found in the system, they were never formally permitted as permanent attributes. He explained that the Building Department required the request to come before the Board now because, if approved, the signage would be classified as a permanent fixture moving forward.

Ms. Diehl informed the Board that the applicant had worked extensively with Ms. MacDonald, Mr. McLeod, and Building Department member Jodi Welch to ensure that the variance package was comprehensive. She explained that the intention was to include everything in the request so that all site signage would be brought into compliance or established as legal non-conforming, thereby avoiding any potential illegalities or questions regarding the site in the future. She expressed her gratitude to the staff for working with her over a long period to finalize the comprehensive package.

Chairperson Koluch stated that he intended to split the discussion into two separate issues to avoid jumping back and forth, beginning with the wall sign

variance requests before moving to the monument signs. After viewing the proposed image of the wall sign, Chairperson Koluch inquired if the lettering represented a new font for Henry Ford Health, which Ms. Diehl confirmed was the case.

Ms. Diehl confirmed that the new font is being implemented across the entire region, noting that rebranding has already been completed or is underway at several sites including Novi, West Bloomfield, and the city of Detroit, with an additional project upcoming in Macomb. She explained that most campuses have adopted this new font and suggested that any current signage displaying the new branding might simply be a temporary wrap used to represent the new brand until permanent signs are installed.

Chairperson Koluch inquired about the cross included in the design, noting it appeared to be a new addition since the hospital began working with the current entity. Ms. Diehl stated that while she did not know the full history, the cross is a part of their official branding and likely represents the religious and charitable aspects involved in medical care, particularly given the facility's history with Ascension and the Trinity. Chairperson Koluch observed that the total square footage would still be well beyond the ordinance limits even without the cross. He asked if other locations that have transitioned to the new branding also include the cross, and Ms. Diehl replied that some of them do.

Chairperson Koluch noted that while he had seen some older signage at other locations, such as the hospital on the Lodge, he understood that the new font was a requirement of the Henry Ford Health branding. Comparing the proposal to the previous Ascension and Crittenton signs, he remarked that the old lettering actually appeared quite small. He expressed that for a facility like a hospital, having large, bright letters on the wall signage is preferable for visibility.

He further observed that the hospital is by far the tallest and largest building in the city, which was confirmed by Mr. Graves. Chairperson Koluch pointed out that although the building's significant setback had already been factored into the ordinance's allowances, the proposed lettering did not seem excessive to him given the scale of the structure. He stated that he did not personally have an issue with the request due to the unique nature of the building being a hospital, but he invited the rest of the board to provide their questions or comments on the matter.

Ms. Neubauer raised a point regarding the text on some of the proposed signs, noting that they currently identify the facility as "Rochester Hospital" despite its actual location in Rochester Hills. Ms. Diehl acknowledged the discrepancy, admitting that there had been confusion even among her colleagues and within her own drawings as to whether the campus was in Rochester or Rochester Hills, likely due to the property's proximity to the border. She offered to relay a request to her team to change the copy to "Rochester Hills" as a condition of approval, noting that it was a minor change.

Mr. McLeod clarified the boundary for the Board, pointing out that nearly the entire hospital-with the exception of a small portion of the parking garage and surface lot-falls within Rochester Hills. Ms. Neubauer emphasized that while she

appreciates the City of Rochester, the two cities are frequently confused, and she felt it was important to "mark our trees" and claim the city's identity. Ms. Diehl agreed, stating she understood the importance of the city receiving proper recognition for a monumental project of this size. Ms. Neubauer concluded that this was her only question regarding the proposal.

Ms. Brnabic inquired whether the proposed signage was part of a standardized package for Henry Ford Health or if it was being custom-designed specifically for this location. Ms. Diehl explained that the hospital implements a standard branding package at every location, while taking into account site-specific factors such as traffic volume, speed, and positioning. She noted that they strive to maintain a delicate balance by staying relatively close to what previously existed on-site, even if the current request appears to be a significant deviation. Ms. Diehl said that this branding is standard across all Henry Ford Health locations, citing a previous project in Detroit where she managed a variance request for 55 signs on a single campus.

Chairperson Koluch asked that the discussion remain focused on the wall signs for the time being, as the board would be making separate motions for the wall and monument requests. Ms. Diehl confirmed that the proposed wall signs also follow the organization's standard branding. Ms. Brnabic noted that she was more interested in discussing the monument signs and agreed to wait until that portion of the deliberation to continue her questioning.

Chairperson Koluch emphasized that the primary justification for the wall signage variance lies in the unique nature of the facility. He noted that as a very large hospital with significant building frontage facing the road, the proposed signs do not appear excessive. In fact, he observed that the previous signage appeared small in retrospect and argued that the public generally prefers large, bright lettering for a hospital to clearly identify its location from a distance.

Addressing the specific criteria for a variance, Chairperson Koluch stated that the literal interpretation of the zoning ordinance would deprive the applicant of rights enjoyed by others, primarily because a hospital is a unique business and building type. He noted that since it is the tallest and largest building in the city, there is nothing else to compare it to. He recalled that previous sign variances were often granted due to visibility issues, and he felt this case was similar. Regarding the large "tapestry" or banner signs, he noted that they have been present for so long that the community already associates them with the hospital's facade, making their transition to permanent status a non-issue in his view.

Chairperson Koluch concluded that substantial justice would be served by granting the request, as the signs are not excessive and appropriately identify the facility without negatively impacting the surrounding area. He maintained that all three criteria for the variance were met based on the building's unique scale and function. He then invited further comments or questions from the Board.

Ms. Brnabic asked for clarification regarding the illumination of the Henry Ford Health wall sign pictured on page seven of the application materials. Ms. Diehl confirmed that the sign would indeed be illuminated and noted that it would

comply with all city regulations regarding sign lighting.

Expressing concern about the potential impact on the surrounding area, Ms. Brnabic questioned how much light would be transmitted and whether the illumination would affect any residential properties, noting that the immediate area across the street primarily consists of strip malls. Ms. Diehl addressed these concerns from a construction perspective, explaining that the sign is engineered specifically to illuminate its face for legibility-similar to how the screen of a cell phone allows a user to see text-rather than casting a wide glare or acting as a light source for the parking lot. She pointed out that the existing parking lot lighting would supersede the illumination from the sign, which is strictly intended to ensure the hospital's name remains visible and legible at night. Ms. Brnabic thanked her for the clarification.

Member Sakis stated that he had a specific concern regarding one of the monument signs but expressed his overall support for the wall signage motion. Chairperson Koluch clarified that a formal motion had not yet been made, as he had only been outlining how the request established the necessary criteria for approval.

Ms. Neubauer then made a formal motion to approve the wall signage variance as presented, and she included an additional condition that the signage must specifically reference "Rochester Hills Hospital" rather than "Rochester Hospital." The motion was seconded by Mr. Sakis.

Chairperson Koluch questioned whether any of the wall signs actually contained the word "Rochester," as he believed the naming issue was limited to the monument signs. Mr. McLeod noted that while he did not believe the wall signs contained the name, the condition should remain in the motion as a safeguard for the entire package, allowing administration to ensure any references to "Rochester" are corrected to "Rochester Hills," provided such changes do not increase the approved square footage.

Following the roll call vote, Chairperson Koluch announced that the motion to approve the wall sign variance was passed unanimously.

A motion was made by Neubauer, seconded by Sakis, that this matter be Approved. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye 6 - Brnabic, Graves, Koluch, Sakis, Neubauer and Young

Abstain 1 - Tischer

Resolved, in the matter of File No. PVAI2025-0009, that the request for a variance of 722.79 square feet from Sec. 134-6 Wall Signs, which permits wall signage of up to 600 total square feet for the hospital property and that no individual sign can exceed 200 square feet, for Henry Ford Health at 1101 W. University, Parcel Identification Number 15-15-101-003, be **APPROVED** to allow for the proposed wall signage package as presented to the Sign Board of Appeals at the March 11, 2026 meeting, because special conditions do exist on the property as demonstrated in the record of proceedings and that the granting of this variance will grant substantial justice to Henry Ford Health, based on the following findings and conditions. With this variance, the property and the associated wall signage shall be considered by the City to be in conformity with the City's Sign

Ordinance, for which this variance is granted.

Findings

1. Compliance with the strict letter of the Sign Ordinance would unnecessarily burdensome.
2. Granting the variance will preserve a substantial property right for the applicant and thus substantial justice shall be done.
3. A lesser variance will not provide substantial relief, and would not be more consistent with justice to other property owners in the area.
4. There are unique circumstances of the property that necessitate granting the variance as described in the above criterion, specifically that the use of the property is for a regional hospital and that the hospital building is of a size and height that is not typical within the City of Rochester Hills.
5. The granting of this variance would not be materially detrimental to the public welfare or existing or future neighboring uses since this is the only regional hospital within the City, is located on two major roadways and that the proposed signage is located amongst either nonresidential uses or multi story residential buildings.

Conditions

1. That the word "Rochester" be replaced with "Rochester Hills" on all signs, without increasing the sign area, and subject to Staff review.

2026-0008

SIGN BOARD OF APPEALS Public Hearing - File No. PVAI2025-0009

Location: 1101 W. University Dr., located on the south side of University Dr. and east of Livernois Rd., Parcel No. 15-15-101-003, zoned SP Special Purpose

The applicant is requesting a variance, which if granted, would allow a maximum monument sign height of up to 12.67 feet. Per Ordinance, maximum monument sign height is seven (7) feet.

In addition, the applicant is requesting a variance, which if granted would allow a total sign area, of all regulated monument signs of 186 square feet of monument signage along University Dr. and an additional forty (40) square feet of monument signage along S. Livernois Rd. Per Ordinance, maximum monument sign sizes are one hundred and fifty (150) square feet along the front of the hospital from which it is addressed and one additional sign of twenty (20) square feet along an ancillary major road frontage.

Finally, the applicant is requesting a variance which if granted would allow for two (2) wall signs that total 502.2 square feet, combined. The Ordinance permits a maximum wall sign size of one hundred (100) square feet per sign and overall sign area of three hundred (300) square feet for all wall signs.

Chairperson Koluch transitioned the discussion to the monument signs and requested a technical clarification from staff regarding the measurement of the

proposed signage. He specifically inquired about how the blue area was being calculated and whether the Board was reviewing an accurate representation of the final product. Mr. McLeod explained the Building Department's methodology, noting that because the white box portion of the sign is illuminated, it was counted as a full rectangular dimension in the square footage totals.

In contrast, Mr. McLeod described how the department handled the blue, non-illuminated panel. He stated that rather than counting the entire blue surface, staff drew a tight, irregular rectangle around the specific text, excluding the large blue area at the bottom and the far right side of the panel. He noted that this approach was taken to keep the calculated square footage as low as possible. Chairperson Koluch then clarified that his main concern was the physical height of the structure rather than just the area of the text. Mr. McLeod confirmed that for the purposes of the variance, the height is measured in totality from the ground to the top of the sign, confirming the request is for a height of 12.8 feet.

Mr. McLeod directed the Board's attention to the Building Department's formal review included in the meeting packet, using a red outline to demonstrate exactly which portions of the sign were included in the square footage calculations. He explained that everything within the primary illuminated area was counted, but the gray base, the numerical address, and large sections of the blue panel were excluded from the final area calculation. Ms. Diehl added that this determination was based on a night view of the sign; since the "dead space" on the blue panel does not illuminate, the Building Department omitted it from the square footage total.

Chairperson Koluch then sought to clarify the specific height dimensions relative to the city's seven-foot ordinance. He asked for the measurement from the ground up to the point where the blue panel ends and the white illuminated section begins. Ms. Diehl clarified that the section from the bottom of the "Emergency" text to the top of the sign measures five feet, four and a quarter inches. More importantly, she confirmed that the distance from the ground to the top of the blue section is seven feet, two inches. Chairperson Koluch observed that this lower section of the sign alone is already two inches over the city's maximum height limit before even accounting for the white illuminated portion at the top.

Ms. Diehl offered her expert testimony regarding sign design, noting her 21 years of experience in the industry, including a background in municipal code enforcement. She cited recommendations from the United States Sign Council, a nonprofit organization that studies signage effectiveness, to explain the necessity of the proposed design. She emphasized that the "negative space" - the areas of extra white and blue surrounding the text - is critical for legibility. Ms. Diehl argued that when text is "crunched together," as seen on the hospital's existing signage, it becomes significantly harder for a driver to process. She maintained that these studies confirm that adequate spacing is a functional necessity for drivers attempting to read signs while operating a vehicle.

Chairperson Koluch then sought to clarify the count and location of the

monument signs, specifically asking if a sign currently used for deliveries would fall under the 20-square-foot maximum for secondary entrances. Mr. McLeod clarified that the current condition at the University Drive entrance includes a standard sign of no more than seven feet in height that simply directs delivery and parking traffic. However, the applicant is proposing to replace that sign with a 12.8-foot tall structure that matches the primary Henry Ford branding. He further explained that the proposal includes replacing the currently branded sign at the other main University entrance with this same large-scale design, effectively upgrading secondary directional signage to the full height and stature of the main campus monuments.

Mr. McLeod clarified the physical impact of the request, explaining that the proposal involves replacing existing signage with much larger structures. On University Drive, the plan is to replace a current seven-foot sign with a 12.8-foot sign, effectively adding nearly six feet of height. Similarly, at the Livernois frontage, the applicant proposes a one-for-one replacement that would also stand 12.8 feet tall, representing a five-foot, eight-inch increase over the current sign's stature.

Chairperson Koluch questioned the necessity of the easternmost sign, specifically regarding the "Emergency" designation in red letters. He asked if this was intended to be the primary route for emergency room access or if there was another entrance further north. Ms. Diehl explained that the strategy utilizes two signs at separate entrances to ensure visibility regardless of the direction of travel. She noted that if a driver approaching from Livernois misses the first entrance, the second sign serves as a critical backup. Conversely, for those approaching from the opposite direction, she pointed out that a large pine tree completely obstructs the view of the second sign, making the first sign absolutely essential for wayfinding.

When Chairperson Koluch suggested cutting down the tree to improve visibility, Ms. Diehl noted that people are generally not in favor of removing trees to accommodate signage. Chairperson Koluch countered that if a tree is blocking emergency access, it might be a different conversation, especially since the city has been very diligent in enforcing the seven-foot height limit for monument signs. He also expressed concern about mixing delivery traffic with emergency access lanes. Ms. Diehl clarified that having two points of entry is a safety measure, providing an alternate route if one entrance becomes obstructed. Mr. McLeod then asked if there had been any consideration given to placing a sign within the boulevard where power is already available, but Ms. Diehl dismissed the idea, stating that their experience shows signs in such locations are frequently struck by vehicles.

Chairperson Koluch pivoted the discussion to the Livernois entrance, noting his personal familiarity with the area and the traffic conditions often found when driving northbound. He questioned the necessity of the height increase, asking if the current seven-foot sign - which is compliant with city standards - was truly insufficient for drivers to identify the hospital turn-in. In response, Ms. Diehl offered to show the Board a video she had recorded earlier that day while driving down the street to provide a first-person perspective.

As the Board viewed the footage, recorded around 3:00 PM, Ms. Diehl explained the challenges she faced while attempting to locate the entrance. She admitted that during her first pass, despite using GPS navigation, she completely missed the turn because vehicles were obstructing the view of the seven-foot sign. She described the difficult maneuvers she had to perform to circle back through the high school and return to the site. She clarified that the video was taken from the passenger seat, emphasizing that if she had been the one driving - balancing road awareness with listening to GPS directions - spotting the sign would have been even more difficult.

To reinforce her point, Ms. Diehl cited statistics indicating that 40% of Americans do not use GPS for travel, relying instead on physical signage. She argued that for these drivers, the existing sign height creates a significant barrier to safe and efficient wayfinding. While some Board members, like Mr. Sakis and Ms. Neubauer, indicated they were already intimately familiar with the traffic conditions on Livernois, Ms. Diehl maintained that her experience as a professional in the industry highlighted a clear deficiency in the current sign's visibility.

Chairperson Koluch questioned the design of the proposed monument signs, suggesting that if visibility and noticeability were the primary goals, it would make more sense to place the red "Emergency" text at the top of the sign rather than the bottom. Ms. Diehl noted that she could request this change from her team if it were made a condition of approval. However, Chairperson Koluch clarified that his main concern remained the requested height of over 12 feet. He noted that a 12.8-foot monument sign is exceptionally tall, with nothing else in the city even approaching that scale. He argued that the necessity of such height was questionable, especially since the hospital would already feature enormous new wall signage and most locals are already aware of the facility's location. He further pointed out that the current visibility issues might be due to landscaping, noting that the "Emergency" text on the existing sign is currently obscured by shrubs.

Ms. Diehl reiterated that the hospital would likely be agreeable to moving the emergency branding to the top of the sign, but she pivoted back to the functional necessity of the 12.8-foot height. She explained that a seven-foot sign is simply too short to be effective in modern traffic, as the average SUV stands approximately six feet tall and completely obstructs the line of sight for other drivers. Drawing on her personal experience as someone who is five feet, two inches tall, she argued that it is impossible for her to see over a standard SUV to locate a low-profile sign. She maintained that the extra height is essential so that drivers can see the signage over the vehicles that are inevitably blocking their view while they are attempting to navigate.

Member Sakis shared his concerns regarding the Livernois entrance, noting that while he didn't want to speak out of turn, he felt compelled to address the inherent dangers of that specific location. He explained that drivers heading north on Livernois frequently attempt to cross multiple lanes of traffic to reach the turnaround, creating a hazardous situation. He argued that making the sign bigger would essentially invite more traffic to use this entrance, which he believes is a bad idea because it would likely lead to more accidents. He

acknowledged the applicant's point about needing to see the sign for emergencies, but he maintained that bringing more attention to this entrance by making the sign taller would be problematic because the area is already a "mess."

He further described the "triple danger" of the intersection, pointing out that vehicles waiting to turn often obstruct others who are simply trying to use the turnaround without going to the hospital. While he stated his general support for Henry Ford's initiatives, he emphasized that from a safety perspective - though he noted he is not a traffic expert - the current setup is already dangerous. Ms. Diehl responded by appreciating his perspective but assured the Board that the sign would be required to comply with all code - mandated sight triangle and visibility requirements to ensure its positioning does not obstruct a driver's line of sight.

Mr. Sakis clarified that his concern was not a literal obstruction of the line of sight, but rather the hesitation and confusion caused by more people focused on the signage. He pointed to a vehicle in the visual example, noting how drivers hesitate when making turns there, and argued that a larger sign would only increase the likelihood of accidents. He concluded by stating that while he would ultimately support the Board's consensus, it remained his firm opinion that increasing the sign's stature at this location is an accident waiting to happen.

Chairperson Koluch expressed skepticism regarding the need for such a significant height increase, noting that he had not personally observed monument signs of 12 or 13 feet at other hospitals. He argued that if such massive signs existed elsewhere, they likely would have caught his attention. He emphasized that since the applicant was requesting variances for three separate locations, he needed a compelling reason why the current seven-foot height was no longer sufficient. He pointed out that the seven-foot standard has been working for the hospital for as long as those signs have been in place, and he had not encountered any complaints regarding their visibility.

Ms. Diehl responded, clarifying that she did not wish to sound argumentative, but she stated that the current signage definitively did not work for her during her visit that day. She recounted that even with the aid of GPS navigation, she was unable to find the entrance and could not determine where she was supposed to turn because the entrance did not look like it belonged to a hospital, causing her to drive right past it.

Chairperson Koluch countered by suggesting that the issue might be the nature of the entrance itself rather than the signage. He remarked that even a 30-foot sign might not prevent people from missing the turn due to the specific way drivers approach that location. He concluded by reiterating that his primary focus remained on whether the strict legal criteria for granting a variance had been met.

Member Sakis reinforced the Chairman's point, asserting that due to the layout of the road, drivers are likely to miss the entrance regardless of the sign's size. Chairperson Koluch agreed, noting that he had yet to see a compelling reason why a height increase was so much more necessary now than in years past. He

specifically questioned the need for variances on the University frontage (which he initially referred to as Walton), pointing out that there are already two large access points directly in front of the hospital. He stated that he did not see why exceeding the ordinance was necessary for any of the monument signs.

Ms. Brnabic voiced her agreement, focusing on the actual design and layout of the sign face. She noted that much of the sign's surface area appeared unnecessary, specifically pointing to the "dead space" or open white area between the "Henry Ford Health" logo and the "Rochester Hospital" text. She echoed the Chairman's suggestion to move the red "Emergency" branding to the top of the sign to emphasize what is most important for a driver in distress. By tightening the layout and moving the text up, she suggested the hospital could achieve its goals within the seven-foot limit rather than asking for an additional six feet, which she labeled as excessive.

Regarding the Livernois entrance, Ms. Brnabic admitted that location is more difficult, recalling her own personal experience trying to navigate it during a snowstorm. However, she weighed this against the concerns raised earlier about driver distraction and traffic safety. She noted that while emergencies are stressful, the hospital has occupied that same location for over 60 years under various names like Crittenton and Ascension. She argued that the facility is well-known even to residents as far north as Dryden or Lapeer. Ultimately, she concluded that since the hospital has operated successfully for decades with current signage heights and she had never heard of accidents caused by poor visibility, she could not support the request for the additional height.

Ms. Neubauer expressed a respectful disagreement with her colleagues, noting that she favored a higher degree of visibility for the signage. She emphasized that "Henry Ford Health" is a broad brand that could easily be mistaken for a smaller clinic rather than a full-scale hospital. She argued that for people who are unfamiliar with the area - particularly those driving themselves to the emergency room in a high-stress situation rather than calling an ambulance - clear and prominent signage is critical. She reiterated the point that the "Emergency" text is currently buried by hedges and agreed that moving it higher up on the sign was essential. She then asked Ms. Diehl if the applicant would be willing to consider these design adjustments in exchange for a reduction in the overall requested height.

Ms. Diehl confirmed that the applicant would be open to an alternative height and prompted the Board to define a "middle ground." She acknowledged the Board's concern that 12.8 feet might set an undesirable precedent or simply appear too tall, but she reminded them that a variance would be necessary regardless of the final dimensions, whether for height or total square footage. She asked what specifically the Board would like to see in a motion, such as moving the emergency branding to the top and ensuring the name was corrected to "Rochester Hills Hospital."

Chairperson Koluch said that he did not feel qualified to determine what an "appropriate" height should be from a technical standpoint. He stated that if the Board was going to treat this as a safety issue, he would prefer to see professional recommendations from other departments to establish what height

is absolutely necessary for safety and visibility. Ms. Diehl noted that they did have a nine-foot version of the signage elsewhere on the property, which could serve as a potential reference point for a compromise.

Mr. Graves suggested a potential compromise by questioning if the sign could be designed with the name portion and directional information side-by-side rather than stacked vertically. He proposed that by elongating the sign horizontally, the applicant could maintain the necessary content without exceeding the height limits that seemed to be the primary point of contention for the Board. Ms. Neubauer clarified his suggestion as reducing the height while lengthening the sign, which Mr. Graves confirmed. Chairperson Koluch noted that such a design would be a significant change that would likely require further coordination with city staff.

Mr. McLeod acknowledged that staff had previously considered the possibility of placing the white and blue boxes side-by-side. He noted that while this configuration might not achieve the specific height goals the applicant desires, it would still require an area variance but could accommodate all the necessary branding and information. However, he cautioned the Board against attempting to redesign the signs or negotiate specific dimensions "on the fly" during the meeting. He reminded the members that their role as the Zoning Board of Appeals is to determine if a variance is warranted based on established criteria, not to set new city policy, which currently dictates a seven-foot height limit. He suggested that if the applicant wished to address the Board's concerns, they could take the feedback and return with a revised proposal. While acknowledging that reaching an agreement during the meeting is a common goal, Mr. McLeod emphasized that the city's requirement remains seven feet unless the Board formally determines that a variance is justified. He advised the Board to follow the same rigorous standard-of-review process they had applied to previous applicants before making a final determination.

Ms. Neubauer addressed the applicant, suggesting that if they were open to revisiting the design based on the Board's feedback, a motion could be made to postpone the decision. Chairperson Koluch, however, expressed reservations about simply tabling the matter. He argued that since the current proposal lacked majority support and any redesigned sign would likely look significantly different, the variance requests themselves would change. He emphasized that the Board's role is not to dictate appropriate dimensions but to evaluate specific criteria, and he worried that a complete redesign would essentially restart the process.

Mr. McLeod clarified the procedure, noting that while any postponement should technically be at the request of the applicant, the city would have to determine if a revised proposal required a new public notice or publication. He advised the Board to finish providing their comments so the applicant would have clear direction for any future submission.

Ms. Diehl then sought to clarify the scope of the current request, confirming with staff that the variance covers both height and square footage. She proposed a middle ground, asking if the Board might consider denying the height variance while approving the square footage variance. She suggested that if the square

footage were approved, her team could potentially design a sign that remained height-compliant within those area parameters. Chairperson Koluch remained hesitant to split the motion in that manner, while Ms. Neubauer reiterated that this complexity was precisely why she recommended a postponement to allow for further coordination.

Chairperson Koluch reiterated his stance, stating that the request to nearly double the allowed height was simply too excessive to meet the criteria for a variance. He expressed concern that if the sign were redesigned-such as flipping it horizontally-the total square footage and overall aesthetic would change, making it difficult to judge the current application.

Ms. Neubauer explained that her recommendation for a postponement was intended to protect the applicant. She noted that if the Board were to formally deny the request, the hospital would be barred from reapplying with a similar petition for one year. A postponement, conversely, would allow Ms. Diehl to amend the petition and return to the Board sooner. Mr. McLeod confirmed this procedural distinction, and Ms. Diehl acknowledged that a postponement was her only viable path forward since the hospital could not afford to be without signage for a year.

Ms. Diehl expressed frustration regarding the timeline, noting that having already missed the deadline for the next meeting, the project would likely be delayed until June. She also pointed out a practical hurdle: it would take several weeks for her team to develop a new proposal, yet she still felt she lacked clear guidance from the Board on what specific dimensions or designs would actually be acceptable to them.

Mr. McLeod clarified that the proper procedure would be for the Board to make a formal motion to postpone the decision specifically at the applicant's request.

Mr. McLeod clarified the Board's position by stating that the city's preference is always for an ordinance-compliant sign. He acknowledged that while Henry Ford Health might find the 12.8-foot height desirable, the Board must consider the precedent it sets. He noted that if every retail applicant requested larger signs because they felt their business was important, the city's seven-foot height policy would become meaningless. He challenged the applicant to consider whether the branding could be achieved in a height-compliant configuration, noting that while the hospital is a unique and important entity, the Board must still find a valid rationale to exceed the citywide standard.

Accepting the Board's feedback, Ms. Diehl officially requested a postponement of the monument sign portion of the application. Chairperson Koluch called for a motion, which was made by Ms. Neubauer and seconded by Mr. Young. The Board conducted a roll call vote, and the motion to postpone passed unanimously.

Following the vote, Ms. Diehl inquired about the next submission deadline. Ms. MacDonald indicated it would likely be the following Tuesday for the April 8th meeting. Mr. McLeod explained that if the revised proposal features a height less than or equal to the original 12.8-foot request, the city would not be required

to re-publish a public notice, as the impact would be less than what was originally advertised. Mr. Graves made a final observation that the proposed height was actually closer to 13 feet, emphasizing the scale of the original request.

A motion was made by Neubauer, seconded by Young, that this matter be Postponed. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye 6 - Brnabic, Graves, Koluch, Sakis, Neubauer and Young

Abstain 1 - Tischer

Resolved, in the matter of File No. PVAI2025-0009, that the request for a monument sign variance be postponed.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None.

NEXT MEETING DATE

April 8, 2026

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to discuss, a motion was made by Neubauer, seconded by Graves, to adjourn the meeting at 8:42 p.m.

*Minutes were approved as presented/amended at the _____
2025 Regular Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting.*

*Kenneth Koluch, Chairperson
Rochester Hills
Zoning Board of Appeals*

Jennifer MacDonald, Recording Secretary