



Department of Planning and Economic Development

Staff Report to the Sign Board of Appeals

January 7, 2026

PVAI2025-0009

1101 W. University Dr. – Monument Sign Height and Area and Wall Sign Area

REQUEST 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.

APPLICANT	Henry Ford Health, 1101 W. University Dr., Rochester Hills, MI 48307
LOCATION	1101 W. University Dr., located on the south side of University Dr. and east of Livernois Rd.
FILE NO.	PVAI2025-0009
PARCEL NO.	15-15-101-003
ZONING	SP Special Purpose District
STAFF	Chris McLeod, Planning Manager

Requested Variance

The applicant is proposing a complete sign package for the rebranding of the Henry Ford Health Rochester Hospital campus. The majority of the signs being proposed have been determined to be directional signs by the City's Code Department and are therefore exempt from the Ordinance in terms of size and configuration. However, the main entrance signs being proposed as well as the main wall sign are required to meet the City's sign regulations. Based on the review and interpretation of the City's Code Department, the three (3) freestanding monument signs, one at each entrance, the freestanding signage that is a part of the architectural wall along W. University and the associated electronic reader board signs are all subject to regulation and the aggregate of the area of each sign as well as the height have been determined to be in excess of permissible sign area/height. In addition, a number of wall signs have also been determined to be exempt from ordinance requirements, however, the main identification wall signs are subject to review and ordinance compliance.

Therefore, 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 (which would be University) and one additional sign of twenty (20) square feet along an ancillary major road frontage.

Finally, the applicant requested 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.

NOTE: In preparing for the Sign Board of Appeals meeting, Henry Ford Health – Rochester Hospital submitted an additional wall sign package for a different part of the hospital. During the review of the additional sign package by the City's Code Department, it was determined that the additional wall signs would be counted against the overall amount of wall signage for the entire hospital. This additional wall sign package was not accounted for when the Sign Board of Appeals notice was originally published. Therefore, it is staff's recommendation that any action on the wall signs be postponed until the full wall signage request can be assessed and any variances that would be necessary can be identified and noticed correctly.

Context

The subject site is located on the south side of University Dr. and east of Livernois Rd. Below is a table for the zoning and existing and future land use designations for the site and surrounding parcels.

Subject Site	Zoning	Existing Land Use	Future Land Use
Subject Site	SP Special Purpose District	Henry Ford Health Rochester Hospital	Residential 4
North (Across Walton/University)	RM-1 Multiple Family Residential District and NB Neighborhood Business District with FB Flex Business Overlay District	Great Oaks Apartments and The Boulevard Shoppes	Mixed Use and Multiple Family Residential
South	RM-1 Multiple Family Residential District with FB Flex Business Overlay District	Hidden Hills	Multiple Family Residential
East	City of Rochester	Place of Worship/Single Family Residential	N/A
West	R-3 One Family Residential	Campus Corners Shopping Center	Mixed Use

Site Photograph



Ordinance

SECTION 134-5 – Monument Signs (excerpt)

Monument sign standards as follows:

- (1) *Monument signs—Maximum height and area.* The following table provides for the maximum height and area for monument signs by use type:

Recreational, church, institutional, public and quasi-public uses			
Public & private recreation uses			
Municipal buildings and uses, including cemeteries			
Schools, child care facilities	7	48	10 ft. setbacks
Places of worship, funeral homes			
Civic organizations			
Uses similar to the above			
Hospitals	7	150 sf when placed in front of the hospital from which it is addressed; 1 additional sign with a maximum area of 20 sf is permitted per major road frontage	10 ft. setbacks

SECTION 134-6 – Wall Signs (excerpt)

Wall sign standards as follows:

- (1) *Wall signs—Maximum area.* The following table provides for the maximum area for wall signs by use type:

Recreational, church, institutional, public, and quasi-public uses	
Public & private recreation uses	
Municipal buildings and uses, including cemeteries	
Schools, child care facilities	20
Places of worship, funeral homes	
Civic organizations	
Uses similar to the above	
Hospitals	100 sf per sign, up to 300 sf total sign area

Analysis

The Henry Ford Health Rochester Hospital has one (1) main entrance on W. University that services the hospital. However, there is a second entrance located to the far eastern side of the campus that also provided access to the main parking area as well as to the east side of the building. In addition, a third access to the hospital is located off of Livernois, south of Avon Tower and Campus Corners Shopping Center. This drive services Avon Tower directly but also ultimately connects to the main entrance/roadway for the Henry Ford Health Hospital Campus. Based on ordinance provisions, even though the sign is considered to be offsite, since it is proximate to a main drive that services the hospital, it is permissible. The main entrance location and the Livernois entrance location currently have monument signs. The eastern drive on W. University does not currently have a monument entrance sign.

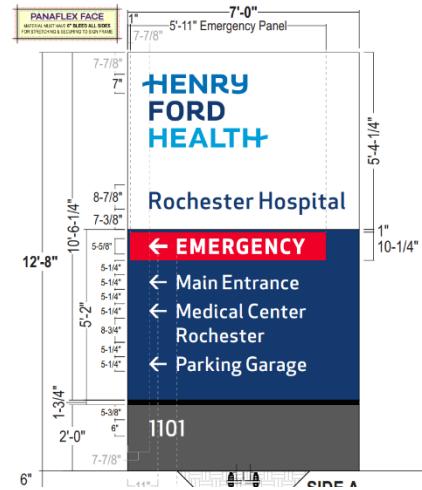
The current entrance monument signs, based on building permit data, are approximately 6'8" tall (including base) and 7'-0" in width. The overall area (sign cabinet only) based on the sign dimensions appears to be approximately thirty-seven (37) square feet. These signs depict the name of the hospital (Henry Ford Health Rochester Hospital) and for instance at the main entrance, the bottom of the sign includes a line for the emergency room. In addition to the freestanding monument signs above,



currently, the Hospital has a long, freestanding sign that runs parallel to W. University. Based on the Ordinance Inspector's review, this sign totals approximately 106 square feet based on the "copy" on the front of the sign and the two (2) (one on each end of the sign/wall) electronic reader board signs.

The proposed monument signs are 12'8" in height and have an overall area of 73.5 square feet. Therefore, the overall sign height is 5'-8" taller than the ordinance permits. However, during their review the Ordinance Inspector has indicated that the bottom portion of the sign, in blue, that depicts the directions for each main portion of the Hospital, would not count towards the overall sign area of the sign. Therefore, the actual sign area that is being counted towards the allowable sign area is approximately 40 square feet for each of the proposed signs along University. Based on the Ordinance Inspector's review, the total signage proposed along W. University is 186 square feet, or 36 square feet more than what the Ordinance allows.

The monument sign along Livernois is the same as those proposed along W. University and utilizing the same methodology for determining sign area as noted above, the sign area proposed along Livernois is 40 square feet, or 20 square feet more than what is permissible. The height is also the same as those signs proposed along W. University, 12'-8" and therefore is also in excess of the permissible height of 7'.



Findings

Findings of fact. A variance to this chapter may be authorized by the sign board of appeals only in cases when competent, material and substantial evidence in the official record of the appeal supports all the following affirmative findings:

1. *Special conditions.* That special conditions or circumstances exist which are peculiar to the land, structure or building involved and which are not applicable to other lands, structures or buildings in the same district.

The applicant's submittal indicates that the special conditions as they pertain to this property and application include that the site has a narrow street frontage on W. University relative to the overall size and height of the hospital; in addition, the application notes that the hospital sits back approximately 350 feet from W. University. Finally, it is noted that the 24-hour emergency operation of the facility also lends to the need for adequate visible and legible signage.

The current signs for the campus were permitted in 2020 and the sign height is slightly less than one half of the proposed sign height and given the adjustment method of calculating the sign area (excluding the directional portion), the area is nearly the same, albeit the proposed signs are slightly larger. The proposed signs represent a significant increase in the overall height of the signs for the hospital. In addition, a second monument sign is being proposed along W. University at the east entrance where there is currently not a monument sign (there is a sign noting that deliveries occur at that entrance). As proposed, there is a total of nearly 186 square feet of signage along W. University between the two (2) proposed signs (40 square feet apiece) and the existing sign that is located on the low-level wall (106 square feet), while currently there is approximately 143 square feet (37 square feet plus 106 square feet for the sign on the low-level wall).

In regards to the surrounding properties, those properties to the east are located within the City of Rochester, and the existing place of worship has a singular sign located on an architectural wall. To the west, within the City of Rochester Hills, the abutting office building has a sign that appears to generally be in compliance with City specifications. However, Campus Corners, located further to the west, has a sign that is significantly larger and is not a monument sign. That sign appears to be nonconforming based on current regulations.

In regards to sign height and size for hospitals, the City's Sign Ordinance provides separate provisions that are specific for a hospital, that are larger than what would otherwise be permissible for other similar nonresidential uses including municipal buildings, schools, places or worship, etc. Signs for hospitals are permitted to be approximately three (3) times the area of a sign allowed for these other similar nonresidential uses. The permissible height is the same for hospitals and other nonresidential uses, seven (7) feet.

Since at least 2018, the City has had its sign ordinance in place to eliminate taller signs within the community and as a regulatory ordinance, the City has worked to have new signs and modifications to existing signs bring all freestanding monument signs into compliance with the City's height requirements. A variance to allow significantly taller signs would be contrary to the work that has been done to this point.

2. *Deprivation of rights. That literal interpretation or application of the provisions of this chapter would deprive the applicant of property rights commonly enjoyed by other properties in the same district under the terms of this chapter.*

The applicant indicated that the nature of the medical facility is unique and not comparable to other uses. Further, that a literal interpretation of the Ordinance would deprive the hospital of adequate signage for motorists traveling under duress. Finally, the application notes that signage of this size and nature allows for signs that are legible in all weather conditions and posted speed limits.

As noted previously, the Zoning Ordinance allows for ground monument signage that is essentially three (3) times larger than other similar nonresidential uses, albeit the height regulation is the same. Given that the permissible sign area for hospitals is specifically called out in the Ordinance and is significantly larger than other monument signs, it is unclear as to how property rights enjoyed by others in the district are being restricted. Further, the application notes that sign size would be more legible for those motorists under duress or at all posted speed limits. The posted speed limit for this area of W. University is 35 mph. Given that this area is a relative low speed limit, signage should be more visible to typical drivers and motorists.

3. *Substantial justice. Allowing the variance will result in substantial justice being done, considering the public benefits intended to be secured by this chapter, the individual difficulties that will be suffered by a failure of the sign board to grant a variance, and the rights of others whose property would be affected by the allowance of the variance, and will not be contrary to the public purpose and general intent and purpose of this chapter.*

The applicant notes that a variance to allow for the requested sign area and height would allow the applicant to have visible signage, is of a sign type and illumination method typically allowed by ordinance and should not otherwise impair or affect other surrounding properties.

The Henry Ford Health Rochester Hospital is the only full hospital within the City and it services a significant portion of the surrounding region for not only routine medical procedures but also for emergency room services. The overall size of the hospital based on its square footage and the overall height of the hospital (in excess of seven (7) stories makes it unique within the community. No other buildings within the City have the size, configuration and type of usage the hospital does.

Sample Motions – Variance Request – Monument Signs

Motion to Approve

MOTION by _____, seconded by _____, in the matter of File No. PVAI2025-0009, that the request for a variance from Section 134-5 Monument Sign for Parcel Identification Number 15-15-101-003, be **APPROVED** to allow for the proposed monument signs to have an overall height of 12'8", including the base and for the sign area to be allowed to be 40' for that portion of the sign depicting the hospital's name, because a competent material and substantial evidence **does** exist in the official record of the appeal that supports **all** of

the following affirmative findings:

Findings

1. That special conditions or circumstances exist which are peculiar to the land, structure, or building involved and which are not applicable to other lands, structures or buildings in the districts noted above. Specifically, that the site has is a full-service hospital serving not only the Rochester Hills/Rochester area but also the larger region, the site includes an emergency room facility, and the majority of the requested signage, in terms of design, is dedicated to providing direction/location onto and within the site itself.
2. That literal interpretation or application of the provisions of *Chapter 134* would deprive the applicant of property rights commonly enjoyed by other properties throughout the City.
3. Allowing the variance will result in substantial justice being done, considering the public benefits intended to be secured by *Chapter 134*, the individual difficulties that will be suffered by a failure of the Sign Board of Appeals to grant a variance, and the rights of others whose property would be affected by the allowance of the variance, and will not be contrary to the public purpose and general intent and purpose of this chapter, since the site is utilized as a local and regional hospital with emergency services and that the majority of the requested signage is dedicated to providing direction/location onto and within the site itself.

Motion to Deny

MOTION by _____, seconded by _____, in the matter of File No. PVAI2025-0009, that the request for a variance from Section 134-5 Monument Sign for Parcel Identification Number 15-15-101-003, to allow for the proposed monument signs to have an overall height of 12'8", including the base and for the sign area to be allowed to be 40' for that portion of the sign depicting the hospital's name, be **DENIED** because competent material and substantial evidence **does not** exist as shown in the official record of the appeal and that the material does not support all of the following findings:

1. Special conditions or circumstances do not exist which are peculiar to the land, structure, or building involved and which are not applicable to other lands, structures or buildings within the City that have not already been addressed by the larger sign sizes allowed for hospitals within Rochester Hills.
2. A literal interpretation or application of the provisions of *Chapter 134* would not deprive the applicant of property rights commonly enjoyed by other properties in the SP District, particularly for hospitals under the terms of *Chapter 134* since the applicant can construct the majority of the desired signage, just at a smaller scale, that is compliant with Ordinance requirements.
3. Allowing the variance will not result in substantial justice being done, considering the public benefits intended to be secured by *Chapter 134*, the lack of individual difficulties that will be suffered by a failure of the SBA to grant a variance, and the rights of others whose properties would be affected by the allowance of the variance. Allowing the variance would be contrary to the public purpose and general intent and purpose of this chapter by allowing significantly larger signage than would otherwise be permissible by Ordinance and that the City has already provided additional sign area allowances for hospitals within the Ordinance.

Sample Motions – Variance Request – Wall Signs

MOTION by _____, seconded by _____, in the matter of File No. PVAI2025-0009, that the request for a variance from Section 134-6 Wall Signs for Parcel Identification Number 15-15-101-003, to allow for two (2) proposed wall signs that total 502.2 square feet, combined, be **POSTPONED** to allow the applicant time to amend the requested variance, based on the additional wall signs that have been submitted and the additional reviews that have been conducted by City Staff since the initial public notices being posted and allow for the posting of the appropriate revised public notices.