



BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS STAFF REPORT

To: Members of the Board of Zoning Appeals

From: Sergio Mendoza, Planning Director

Meeting Date: October 14, 2025

Agenda Item: BZA 25-007

Application Type: Developmental Standards Variance

Hearing: Public Hearing

Summary: Applicant is seeking a Developmental Standards Variance from TABLE 26-6. 701. B. WALL SIGN SPECIFIC STANDARDS, DIMENSIONS, SIGN SIZE, and ADDITIONAL STANDARDS to install a new MUNSTER HIGH SCHOOL PERFORMING ARTS CENTER sign to exceed the permitted height and over an architectural details.

Applicant: Emma O'Brien, Legacy Sign Group

Property Address: 8808 Columbia Avenue

Current Zoning: CZ – Civic Zone (MHS)

Adjacent Zoning: North: CZ – Civic Zone (STOM Administrative Building)
South: CZ – Civic Zone (NIPSCO ROW) and PUD (Community Hospital)
East: CZ – Civic Zone (STOM Athletic Fields)
West: CZ – Civic Zone (Community Park)

Action Requested: Applicant seeking approval

Additional Actions Required: Findings of Fact

Staff Recommendation: Review Conditions of Approval Questions
Review of Zoning Code(s)
Deny and redesign sign to compliment the building architecture.

Attachments:

1. Exhibit A: Application
2. Exhibit B: Conditions of Approval
3. Exhibit C: Proposed Signage
4. Exhibit D: Alta Survey

PROJECT LOCATION

The subject property is generally located between Columbia Avenue and Calumet Avenue, north of Fisher Street. The proposed entrance sign is located at Munster Highschool. The entrance sign faces Fisher Street and sits approximately 475 FT back from the road. The entrance sign is currently identified as the Munster High School Auditorium and proposed to be relabeled as the Munster High School Performing Arts Center.



PROJECT SUMMARY

The applicant is requesting to install an internally illuminated, 11'-2" High by 22'-8" Wide routed face wall sign with $\frac{3}{4}$ " white acrylic push through letters, and $\frac{1}{2}$ " non-illuminated flat cut-out logo over the following architecture elements of the building:

- Triangular limestone pediment over entry.
- Exposed I-Beams framing around the entry.



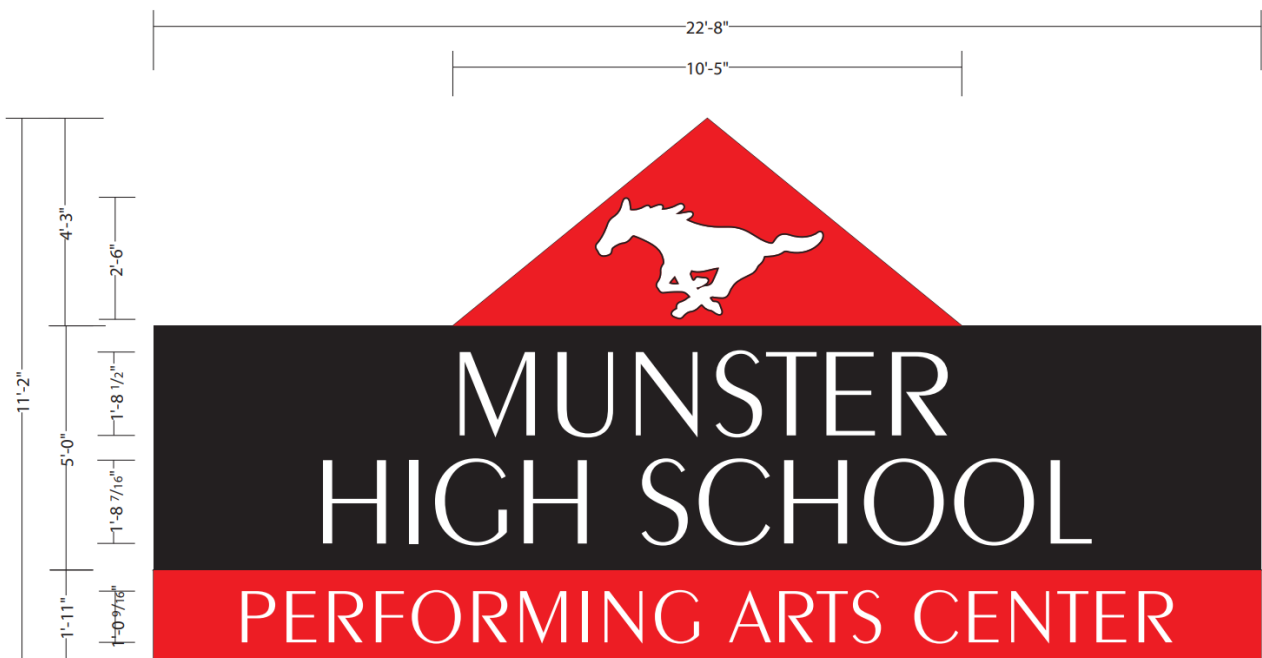
ZONING CODE**WALL SIGN****TABLE 26-6.701.B SIGN TYPES
SPECIFIC STANDARDS****Dimensions (continued)**

	Material	Letter Height (max)	Overall Height (max)	Illumi-nation	
Sign Size	channel letter(s)	24"	36"	internal, external or backlit	
	Lot with bldg. setback < 100'	Flat cut out acrylic, pvc, metal, wood or like material; or routed etched on wood or like material; or static neon	36"	48"	external or backlit
	channel letter(s)	36"	48"	internal, external or backlit	
	Lot with bldg. setback ≥ 100'	Flat cut out acrylic, pvc, metal, wood or like material; or routed etched on wood or like material; or static neon	48"	72"	external or backlit

Additional Standards

In addition to all other applicable standards, each Wall Sign allowed under this Article:

- shall be applied to the first Story Facade and not project vertically above the roof line;
- shall not obscure any architectural element of the Building and shall be in vertical alignment with the center of an architectural element such as a storefront window or entrance, or centered over the bay or overall space occupied by the business;
- any background panel or cabinet shall be made of metal or painted or stained wood or similar material; and
- vinyl may not be used to create any design.



VARIANCE REVIEW

The variance process is established to provide relief to a property owner when, due to unique circumstances, compliance with the zoning code imposes a hardship or practical difficulty on a property owner. The BZA is under no obligation to grant a variance. It is the petitioner's responsibility to prove a hardship or practical difficulty. The BZA should ask the petition to address the criteria listed below.

Section 26-6.804. I. Deviation from Standards & Requirements (pg 392) of the Munster Zoning Code states that the basis for a variance is as follows:

g. General Standards.

A variance may be granted only if the Decision-Making Authority has made the following determinations for such variance:

- i. The practical difficulties or unnecessary hardships that would be incurred by strict application of the Use or Development standard, as applicable, are unique and not shared by all properties in the vicinity and are not self-imposed;
- ii. Such Variance is the minimum Variance that will relieve such practical difficulties or unnecessary hardships, as applicable;
- iii. Such Variance is in the spirit of the general purposes and intent of this Article as stated in Division 1; and
- iv. Such Variance is so designed as to provide reasonable consideration to, among other things, the character of the neighborhood, District, or Civic Zone, the conservation of property values in the vicinity, and the guidance of Development in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan.

h. Specific to development standards variances:

A variance from development standards may be approved or approved with conditions only if:

- i. It will not be injurious to the public health, safety, morals, and general welfare of the community;
- ii. The use and value of the area Adjacent to the property included in the Variance will not be affected in a substantially adverse manner; and
- iii. The strict application of the Development standards will result in practical difficulties in the use of the property.

The applicant has addressed these criteria in Exhibit B

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff finds all documents are in order to conduct a public hearing. Staff also finds that while the proposed sign and aluminum wrap and backer panels may not be directly injurious to the public health, safety, morals, and general welfare of the community; Staff finds the follow two conditions would be adversely impacted:

- The proposed sign would adversely affect Munster High School's mid-20th-century (1966) institutional/functional architectural design. Architectural elements incorporated into the building which characterized the institutional architecture design are the aesthetic and symbolic materials of strength and learning are the triangular limestone over the entrance and exposed robust I-Beams framing the entrance. At a pedestrian level, the aluminum wrap and backer panel for a sign would cover two significant architectural and exposing only a beige/tan brick.
- The strict applications of the terms of the zoning ordinance will not result in difficulties in the use of the property because sign lettering and branding may be installed without the need to cover architectural elements of the building and utilizing font consistency and brand iconography applied to other building entrances.

Staff also recommends that the applicant consult with an architect to recommend design sign standards which will help build brand identity and enhance the mission of institutional architecture and the complementary additions to the school campus that have occurred over the years. Finally, staff would encourage the school to install wayfinding signage throughout the site to support a campus environment and less commercial visibility sign efforts from a public right-of-way.

MOTION

The Board of Zoning Appeals may consider the following motions:

Motion to DENY BZA25-007, a Developmental Standards Variances request to install a new MUNSTER HIGH SCHOOL PERFORMING ARTS CENTER sign that will exceed the permitted height and over architectural elements of the building, including all discussion and findings.