



BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS STAFF REPORT

To: Members of the Board of Zoning Appeals

From: Sergio Mendoza, Planning Director

Meeting Date: December 9, 2025

Agenda Item: BZA 25-011

Hearing: Public Hearing

Application Type: Developmental Standards Variances

Summary: Requesting variances from Section 26-6.701(B) (5) t. General Sign Provisions, and Table 26-6. 701. B Monument Sign, Description and Dimensions to allow the installation of a 21 SF cabinet sign not to be installed on a solid base at 131 Ridge Road.

Owner: Family Dental

Applicant: Alexander Alemis

Property Address: 131 Ridge Rd.

Current Zoning: General Urban – A District (CD-4.A)

Adjacent Zoning: North: CD-3. R-1
South, East, West: CD-4. A.

Applicant Requested: Open Public Hearing

Actions Required: Findings of Fact

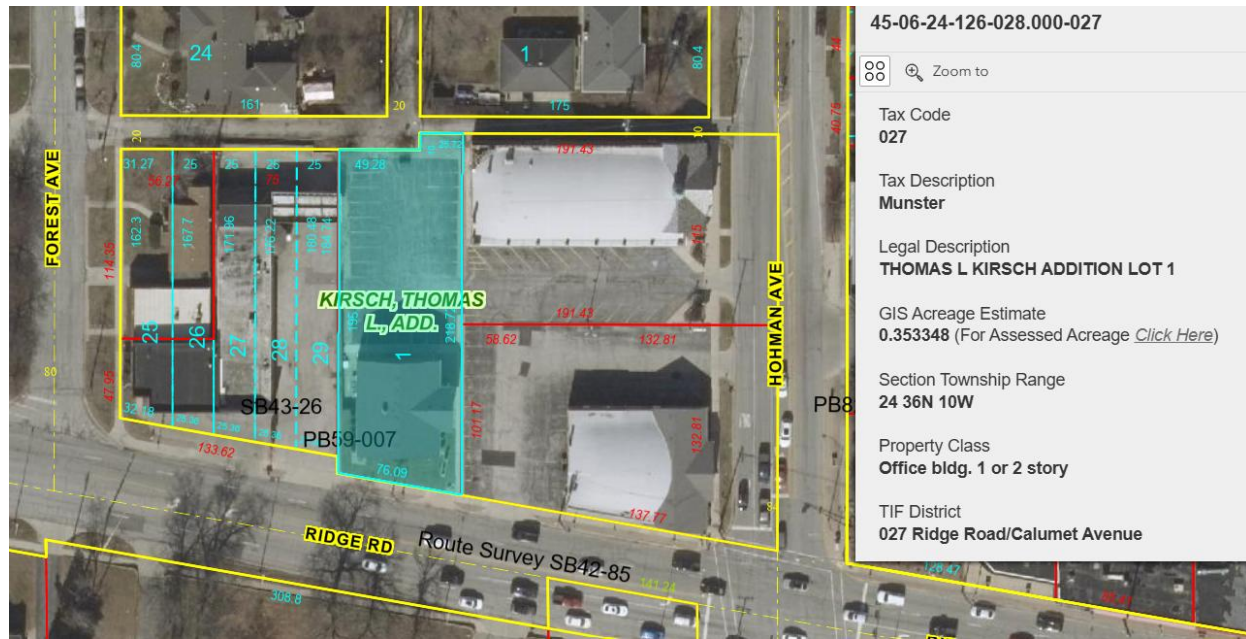
Staff Recommendation: Review of Zoning Code(s)
Review Conditions of Approval Questions
Approve proposed sign square footage
Deny elevated sign and exposed cabinet sign

Attachments:

1. Application, Exhibit A
2. Conditions of Approval, Exhibit B
3. Site Plan, Exhibit C
4. Proposed Sign, Exhibit D

PROJECT LOCATION

The proposed monument sign is located on the north side of Ridge Road between Forest Avenue and Homan Avenue at the driveway entrance of an existing two-story professional office building, commonly known as 131 Ridge Road.

**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

On June 10, 2025, the applicant was granted a Developmental Standards Variance to remove the existing legal nonconforming monument sign and replace it with a new multi-tenant monument sign identifying the four-unit condominium building and its tenants. The approval was conditioned upon the following:

1. The petitioner shall remove the property address ("131 Ridge Rd") from the monument sign and place it on the building, in compliance with the Zoning Code; and
2. The petitioner shall reduce the overall sign height to six (6) feet, as permitted by the Zoning Code.

The applicant now proposes to repair and maintain the existing brick monument sign while replacing the existing multi-tenant wood sign with a new multi-tenant cabinet sign featuring changeable, metal-routed sign faces for each tenant. The proposed cabinet-style design is not permitted for monument signs, and the sign does not include a solid base as required. Additionally, the proposed sign area is 21 square feet—3 square feet over the maximum 18 square feet permitted by ordinance, as calculated to include the background upon which the sign is placed and measured at a rectangle based for the total height and width computation.

VARIANCE REQUESTS:

Description

A Sign that is erected on a solid base directly on the ground, and that is itself constructed of a solid material.

t. Except as may be expressly permitted in this Article, Neon Signs, Cabinet Signs, and Projection Signs are not permitted.

Dimensions

Quantity (max)	1 per Frontage
Area (max)	18 sf
Height (max)	6 ft, including the base
Letter Height	max 12 in.

The applicant is requesting to remove an existing wood sign and proposing to install a cabinet sign on the existing brick monument sign

2019 Code (current)

1. Cabinet Sign prohibited
2. Solid base on ground
3. Area: 18 SF

Proposed Sign

Cabinet Sign
Between brick pillars
Proposed 21 SF

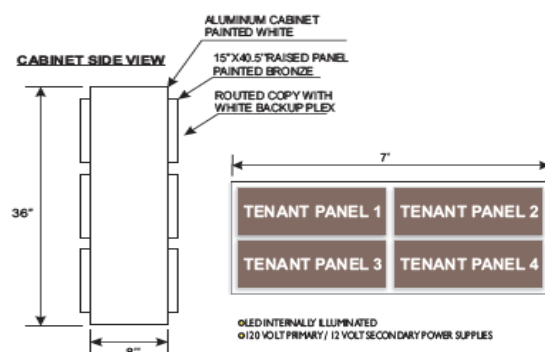
Existing Sign

Wood panel
between brick pillars
23.6 SF

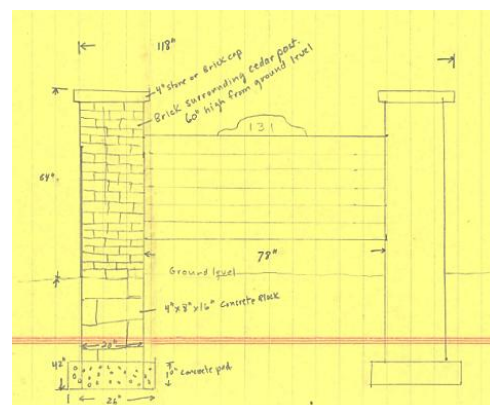
1985 Code

none
none
48 SF

Proposed Sign



Existing Sign



VARIANCE STANDARDS

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:

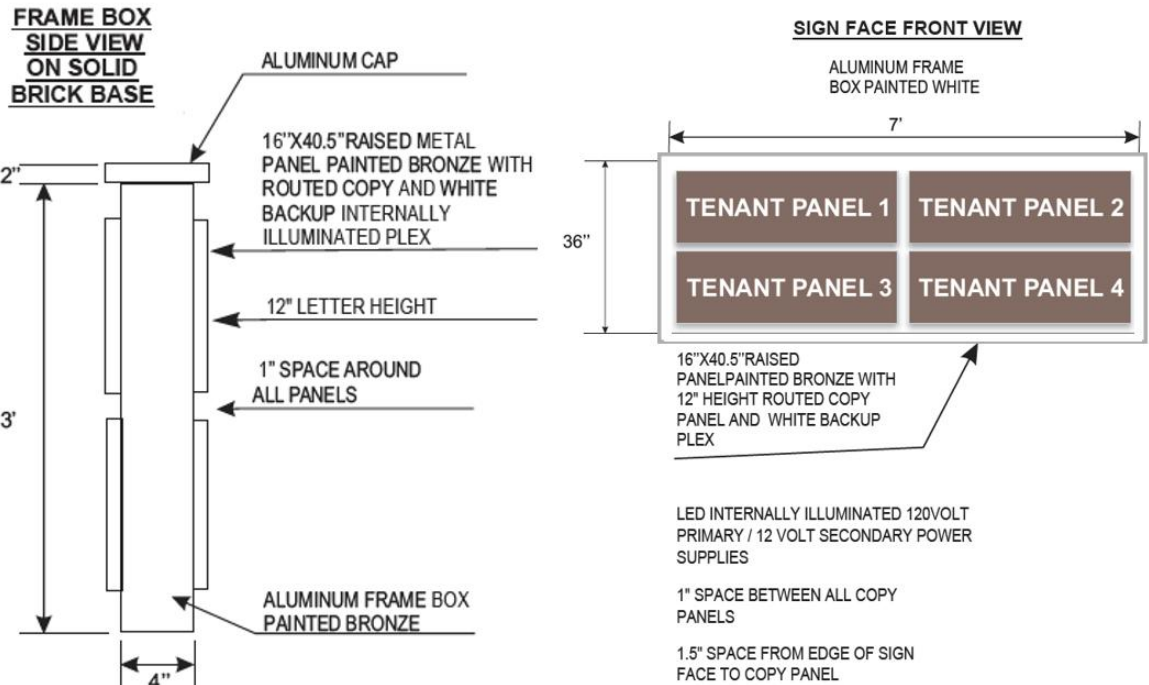
- i. It will not be injurious to the public health, safety, morals, and general welfare of the community;
- ii. The use and value of the area Adjacent to the property included in the Variance will not be affected in a substantially adverse manner; and
- iii. The strict application of the Development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

STAFF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATION

Staff has determined that the applicant has submitted a complete application, including all required supporting documents and affidavit of rights, and has satisfied the Public Notice requirements outlined in SECTION 26-6.804(K) of the Character-Based Zoning Code.

Staff notes that at the November 18, 2025 Preliminary Hearing, the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) recommended that the applicant return with an alternative proposal that is more compliant with the zoning code and reduces the number of variances requested. Staff has advised the applicant that installing an aluminum cap and extending the brick base to meet the height of the internally illuminated sign face would eliminate the need for two of the requested variances.

**SOLID BRICK BASE AND BRICK COLUMN MONUMENT LESS THAN 6' TALL
WITH INTERNALLY ILLUMINATED FRAME BOX AND 21 SQ FT DOUBLE FACE SIGN,
WITH 16" X 40.5" RAISED METAL PANELS AND 12" HEIGHT ROUTED COPY LETTERS**



Staff finds that a cabinet sign, not situated on a solid foundation and placed between two brick columns, would not adversely impact public health, safety, morals, or the general welfare of the community. However, staff does find that such a design may substantially and negatively affect adjacent property values, as there are no other cabinet signs without solid foundations within the area. Staff further finds that the requested increase in sign face square footage does not constitute a self-imposed hardship; rather, the increase is necessary to appropriately fit the existing monument structure.

Finally, staff concludes that the strict application of the zoning code requiring internally illuminated sign frames to be placed on a solid base does not create a practical difficulty, as other monument signs in the area adhere to this standard. Staff finds that granting a variance for the sign face square footage, while denying the request for a cabinet sign not on a solid foundation between two brick columns, would provide the minimum relief necessary to comply with the zoning code and address any practical difficulties.

MOTION

The Board of Zoning Appeals may consider the following motions:

Motion to Approve BZA25-011, a Developmental Standards Variance request for a 21 square foot double-sided sign face, internally illuminated, with the condition that the monument sign comply with all zoning codes, including all discussion and findings.

Motion to Deny BZA25-011 a Developmental Standards Variances request to install a cabinet sign not on a solid foundation, including all discussion and findings.