

**MUNSTER BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS**  
**MINUTES OF REGULAR BUSINESS MEETING**  
Meeting Date: June 10, 2025

The Board of Zoning Appeals held its regularly scheduled meeting on June 10, 2025, at Munster Town Hall, 1005 Ridge Road, in the Main meeting room and could be accessed remotely via Zoom Webinar, a video conference application.

**Call to Order:** Member Raffin called the meeting to order at 6:13 pm

**Moment of Silence and Pledge of Allegiance**

**Roll Call:**

Roland R. Raffin, Member, Appointed by: Plan Commission, Initial Appointment: 08/20/2018-Term Expiration: 12/31/2025  
Sharon A. Mayer, Member, Appointed by: Town Council, Initial Appointment: 10/23/2000-Term Expiration: 12/31/2026  
Jennifer Johns, Appointed by: Town Council, Initial Appointment: 06/01/2018-Term Expiration: 12/31/2027  
Brad Hemingway, Appointed by: Town Council, Initial Appointment: 3/7/2022-Term Expiration: 12/31/2025

**Members in Attendance:**

Roland Raffin  
Jennifer Johns  
Sharon Mayer  
Brad Hemingway (Arrived 6:22)  
Edward Pilawski resigned April 11, 2025

**Members Absent:**

**Staff Present:**

Nicole Bennett, Town Attorney  
Denise Core, Administrative Assistant

**Special:**

Member Raffin said we have a quorum but need a motion to appoint a member to preside over the meeting in the absence of the elected Chair and Vice-Chair.

**Motion:** Member Mayer made a motion for Member Raffin to run the meeting.

**Second:** Member Johns seconded the motion.

**Vote:** Yes – 3 No – 0 Abstain – 0. Motion carried.

**Approval of Minutes:**

**Motion:** Member Johns moved to approve the May 13, 2025; minutes as presented.

**Second:** Member Raffin seconded the motion.

**Vote:** Yes – 3 No – 0 Abstain – 0. Motion carried.

**Preliminary Hearings:** None

**Public Hearings:**

**BZA25-002 DEVELOPMENTAL STANDARDS VARIANCE: Alexander Alemis of Family Dental requests variances from TABLE 26-6. 701. B SIGN TYPES, MONUMENT SIGN, Dimensions and Additional Standards for Area and Height, at 131 Ridge Road.**

Member Raffin introduce this agenda item and asked if anyone present wanted to speak on behalf of the petitioner and, if so, to please state your name and address for record.

Attorney Scott Yahne of 3 Lincoln Way, Suite 201, Valparaiso, IN, said he was recently engaged as counsel; he had represented this group previously before this Board. He stated Peter Alemis, one of the principals, has some updates for the Board and he will assist him as necessary.

Mr. Peter Alemis of 131 Ridge Road in Munster said since the last time they were here, they have been working with Denise, Nicole, and Sergio to handle some of the variances they were previously requesting. He said they took over this building about a year or so ago; it is almost 40 years old. They feel it best, because of the hardship of the dilapidated sign, that they uplift the building by redoing the sign and making a brand-new look for our tenants. He said since they took over, they have had 2 tenants that wanted to move. They feel that putting up a nicer sign will attract new people to the community and make it a very professional space. He stated that the sign will have panels for the tenants; there is a doctor and a lawyer there now and they want to attract some other professional services to the building. He said by making a nice new sign, they feel that the residents in the community will be able to see the sign better. He said he had worked closely with Director Mendoza since the last Board meeting and listed the following updates to the variance requests since they were last before the Board.

- They originally had a full aluminum sign that sat on a brick base. They worked with Director Mendoza to change it to a full masonry structure that has aluminum panels that affix to the sign and are backlit.
- They previously had a polycarbonate sign that has been changed to routed aluminum with back lighting.
- They moved the setback to the current position assigned. He said it was a little further ahead, but they have moved it back.
- They changed some of the address fixtures on the sign to make it less large and, perhaps, less distracting.

He said they made a lot of changes since the last meeting try to appease the current ordinances. They feel that the current setup would really be nice for tenants and the neighborhood, and would make it a nice, new addition to the community. He thanked the Board for their attention.

Chairman Hemingway arrived at 6:22 pm.

Attorney Scott Yahne added that he wanted to let everyone know they are prepared to address the statutory requirement; health and safety of the community will not be impaired by the placement of this sign. They have set it back more in conformity with the current zoning ordinance than the existing sign as was suggested by Director Mendoza in their discussions. He said Peter Alemis will assure this Board that he will work with the building department to make sure the appropriate permits are obtained and they will work with appropriately licensed contractors and electricians to make sure this installation is done fully compliant with the code. He said they don't believe this will have an adverse effect on the use or value of the surrounding area, including our neighbors. He said the photos of the existing sign that were included with the submission show that the existing sign has been there for quite some time and its condition is challenged. They are looking to install signage that is more in keeping with their current objectives. He said they do need some variances; the height is one that needs discussion. They do have some challenges in that area so they ask to be given some relief from the strict application of the zoning code in that they have a neighboring car wash that intrudes upon the vision. In working with their sign consultant while trying to come closer to the requirements, they have narrowed the scope of their requests for variances. He said he understands the Board is reluctant to vary from the sign ordinance, he knows a lot of thought went into it. He said looking at Mr. Alemis' sign proposal and the type of sign, it's going to be in character with those buildings, it's going to be substantial, it's going to be quite an enhancement to what is there. They are not seeking a digital board; they are not seeking anything that is

going to obscure the vision of passersby, or, more importantly, drivers approaching that intersection. He concluded by stating he does think this meets the statutory criteria and they understand that is for the Board to determine. He pointed out that the petitioner is Family Dental Care which is an affiliate of Osceola Properties Inc., the owner of the property. Mr. Peter Alemis is a member owner of the corporation that owns the property. He said they had discussed this with Town Attorney Bennett to give the assurance that although they use those entities, this is not a sign for Family Dental. This is for the benefit of the tenants in that center, including the folks that have been there for quite some time and would like to see their signage updated.

Member Raffin said he was trying to determine what the actual hardship is; when he looks at the proposed sign, it is a little less than double the area allowed by the town code which is 18 square feet. This sign is roughly 32 square feet in area and the height of the sign is 8 foot 8 inches. For comparison, he said that is about a foot and a half taller than the main conference room doors. For further comparison, he said Community Hospital, which is a much larger building on a much larger parcel, has a sign that is 10 foot tall. He said they have multiple businesses and a handful of doctor's offices inside Community Hospital but their sign is not too much bigger than what the petitioner is asking for a 4-unit condominium building. He stated that he doesn't feel like the car wash blocks them. He has been driving down Ridge Road for 25 years and that sign is farther down the street so he doesn't see that argument. He suggested they might want to look at putting the address, "131 Ridge Road", on the building to shorten the sign and not have it be 9 foot tall. He said that is a pretty large sign for a 4-unit tenant and he doesn't see it in other areas. He said he was driving on Ogden Avenue and York Road in Hinsdale. There are a lot of buildings on that strip, and the only thing they have on the buildings to mark them was the address. He thinks that nowadays, with apps and Google and everything else, he tends to put the business he's looking for into his Google map and go that way. He said he is torn on the size of the signs since they worked really hard on the sign ordinance to try to have consistency in the town, and this sign is nearly double the size of the sign standards.

Member Mayer said she was comparing the existing sign size to the proposed sign size, the written word area on the yellow, hand-drawn sketch, it is 78 inches wide and, about 40 inches high. She asked if that sounded right; Mr. Alemis said yes. Member Mayer said in comparing the area of the existing sign with the proposed; where the existing is 78 inches wide, the new is 60 inches wide, and the existing is 40 inches tall, new is 75 plus the maybe 15 inches for the address, so 90 inches tall. She said the Board is getting a little concerned and asked why the font is so much larger on the proposed sign than on the existing. Mr. Alemis said that's the way their sign company designed it, and they felt, based on their years of experience, that it was best for the tenants to stand out. He added that they are willing to work with the Board in terms of figuring it all out, they just want to make it a win-win for everybody, the tenants and the town. Member Mayer said she appreciates the changes they made to it with the routed tenant panels, the backlight, and the aluminum panels. She said all of that looks very nice; the issue is the size. Member Johns said she agrees completely. She also appreciates the fact that Mr. Alemis addressed everything the Board asked them to address, except for the proportion; she, too, likes everything about it except for the size. Member Mayer asked Mr. Alemis what they would be willing to reduce in order to save time and avoid being sent back to the drawing board. Attorney Yahne said 72 inches is the height limit in the current code. Member Raffin said yes but the issue is also the area; the code is 18 square feet, which is 6' X 3' or 9' X 2' or however they want to do the math to total 18 square feet. Mr. Alemis said he wants to work with them and asked what the Board would ideally want them to do to make it work. Member Raffin said he thinks the whole purpose of going to monument signs and away from the elevated pole signs or big monstrous signs, was to work toward a maximum height of 6 feet so they are not detracting from the buildings like when driving down 41 and pulling to a strip mall

and the sign is overpowering the building. He said we want the buildings to be the first thing you look at, and signage is secondary. They want landscaping and quality construction materials and signage is secondary to that. He said the proposed sign is close to 9 feet and 6 feet and that is a stretch. He said he thinks they can lower this sign down to the 6-foot standard and put the address nicely on the building with some letters; they are allowed to have signs in their building. Mr. Alemis said they could remove "131 Ridge Road" from the sign and put that on the building and cap the sign. Member Mayer said they could shrink it down to 72 without the address. Mr. Alemis said he didn't think they had anything on the building with the address; he asked if they could put that on the side or would they have to go back for variance for that. Attorney Bennett said that would not count in the square footage because it would be a directional, or informational, sign. Attorney Bennett said, to clarify the calculation under the code 26-6.7 0 1 d., the sign area computation is based upon the total height of the smallest rectangle that encompasses all such lettering so that measurement of 8'8" is going from the top of address to the bottom of what would be that tenant. The brick around that would not be calculated into that area so the numbers might need to be adjusted. Member Mayer said they could eliminate the "131 Ridge Road" from the monument sign, put the address on the building, and lower the sign height to 72 inches so the overall height, including the stone cap at the top would be 72 inches rather than 104. Member Raffin said the red box around the lettering is still 30 square feet of signage so they would still need a variance. Member Mayer said they do still need a variance but the height would be within code. Member Johns said she would rather not see the brick on top. Attorney Bennett said as long as they are compliant with the code, the Board cannot tell them otherwise. She said the 6' height maximum is separate from the area of the signage. She said the actual signage area of 31¼' would be closer to the 18' maximum area but if you are only looking at the top of the "American Home Choice" letters and measure all the way down to the bottom of the "Tenant 4" lettering, that would be the space that would be calculated for the purposes of determining the total area. It would be whatever is the easiest way to square around all of the text. There was a discussion regarding the dimensions shown on the proposed sign on page 3 of the staff report as it relates to the exact area. Member Mayer calculated 68 inches by 53 inches for the sign area. Attorney Bennett said it's hard to tell exactly what it is but she thought that was close; it depends on whether it is 3 ½ inches coming off the top. Member Raffin said that was close to 29 square feet. Member Mayer said they need a variance for the size of the lettering, just not for height. Member Raffin asked if there were any other questions for the petitioner.

Member Raffin opened the public hearing to members of the audience. He acknowledged a great many Munster High School students in attendance. He explained that this is the public part of the Board of Zoning Appeals meeting; if anyone wished to speak either on behalf or against any ideas or thoughts they have this petition; they could step up to the microphone and state their name and address for public record. There were no comments, he closed the public hearing and brought the meeting back to the Board.

Member Mayer made a motion to approve BZA25-002 based on the revision of the sign dimensions, the elimination of the "131 Ridge Road" from the sign, the reduction of sign height to 72 inches maximum, the width to remain as shown on the drawing, and the signage to remain as shown on the drawing except for the address.

**Motion:** Member Mayer moved to approve with conditions BZA Docket No. 25-002 Developmental Standards variances granting a variance from TABLE 26-6. 701. B SIGN TYPES, MONUMENT SIGN, Dimensions and Additional Standards for Area only [denying the height variance request] at 131 Ridge Road including all discussions and findings. The conditions include the following:

- The removal of the address, 131 Ridge Road, from the sign for the purpose of reducing the height to 72", in compliance with TABLE 26-6. 701. B SIGN TYPES, MONUMENT SIGN, Dimensions and Additional Standards for height.
- The dimensions shown on the Proposed Sign on page 3 of the BZA25-002 Staff Report dated June 10, 2025 will remain the same with the exception of the height, as referenced above.

**Second:** Member Johns seconded the motion.

**Vote:** Yes –4 No – 0 Abstain – 0. Motion carried.

#### **Findings of Fact:**

**BZA25-003 DEVELOPMENTAL STANDARDS VARIANCE:** Jim Glascott of WT Group representing the School Town of Munster received variances from SECTION 26-6.405. O. 1. h. vii. I., Parking Lot Landscape Standards; Table 26-6.502. E. Public Lighting Head Type; Section 26-6.405.Q. 2. b. Pole Height; and Section 26-6.405.Q. 3.c., Color Temperature at 8823 Columbia Avenue.

**Motion:** Chairman Hemingway moved to approve the Findings of Fact for BZA Docket No. 25-003.

**Second:** Member Johns seconded the motion.

**Vote:** Yes – 3 No – 0 Abstain – 1. Motion passed.

Member Mayer abstained noting she was not present at the meeting when the approval was granted.

**Continued Discussion Items:** None

**Other Business:** None

**Next Meeting:** Member Raffin announced the next regular business meeting will be held on July 8, 2025.

#### **Adjournment:**

**Motion:** Chairman Hemingway motioned to adjourn.

**Second:** Member Mayer seconded the motion.

**Vote:** Yes – 4 No – 0 Abstain – 0. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 6:43 pm

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Chairman Brad Hemingway  
Board of Zoning Appeals

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Date of Approval

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Executive Secretary Sergio Mendoza  
Board of Zoning Appeals

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Date of Approval