



SIGN VARIANCE REQUEST REVIEW

Date: September 2, 2027

Project: **Short Mama's Bistro**
101 College Street
Dripping Springs, TX 78620

Applicant: Patrick Fox, Owner

Submittals: ☒ Variance Application
☒ Sign Permit Application
☐ Master Signage Plan (if applicable)
☐ Planned Develop District/Development Agreement Signage Regulations (if applicable)

Variance Request(s): Allow two pole signs, which are a prohibited type of sign.

The following review has been conducted for the City of Dripping Springs to determine compliance and consistency with the City of Dripping Springs CODE OF ORDINANCES, Title 2 BUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS, Chapter 26 SIGNS, Article 26.03.003 VARIANCES

Short Mama's Bistro is located in the Mercer Street Historic District and has frontage on US 290, College St., and Wallace St. This property is a multi-unit complex with a restaurant and some offices on the second story. The applicant is requesting a variance to allow the installation of two pole signs on the property in lieu of a monument sign. Chapter 26.01.009 9b)(17) of the City's Code of Ordinances prohibits pole signs.

Multi-unit complexes are allowed to have a monument sign that is 6 feet in height and up to 48 square feet in sign area. The proposed pole signs will be located along College St. and Wallace St. They will have a height of 6 feet, and their sign area will be 6 square feet. The signs will hang from a decorative arm extending from the top of a decorative pole. The combined signable area of the two signs is 12 square feet.

There are several factors in the Mercer Street Historic District that make a pole sign appealing. Historically, many of the buildings in the District had pole signs. Several of these pole sign structures are still in use. Some properties in the district have reduced or have no setbacks which do not allow a compliant monument sign. Parking is generally on street in front of buildings making visibility of a monument sign difficult. The district is increasingly becoming more

pedestrian friendly. And monument signs are not compatible with many of the properties in the historic districts because they would appear overly large and are not from the era of significance.

The Sign Ordinance is currently being rewritten and includes a section on historic districts and historic character areas. This draft section is attached. These changes are based on historic district business and property owner feedback and are supported by Staff. The changes, if approved, will allow pole signs similar to those proposed by the applicant in the historic districts.

The variance request to allow two pole signs relates to the considerations for granting variances as follows:

Considerations in granting variances (Sec. 26.03.003 (e))

- (1) Special or unique hardship because of the size or shape of the property on which the sign is to be located, or the visibility of the property from public roads.
☐ Applicable ☒ Not Applicable
- (2) Hardship claim based on the exceptional topographic conditions or physical features uniquely affecting the property on which a sign is to be located.
☐ Applicable ☒ Not Applicable
- (3) Proposed sign location, configuration, design, materials and colors are harmonious with the hill country setting.
☒ Applicable ☐ Not Applicable
- (4) Natural colors (earth tones) and muted colors are favored. Color schemes must be compatible with the surrounding structures. Predominate use of bold and/or bright colors is discouraged under this section.
☒ Applicable ☐ Not Applicable
- (5) The sign and its supporting structure should be in architectural harmony with the surrounding structures.
☒ Applicable ☐ Not Applicable
- (6) Mitigation measures related to the sign in question or other sign on the same premises.
☒ Applicable ☐ Not Applicable
- (7) Demonstrated and documented correlation between the variance and protecting the public health and safety.
☐ Applicable ☒ Not Applicable
- (8) The stage at which the variance is requested. The city will be more inclined to consider a variance request when it is sought during an earlier stage of the construction approval process, for instance, when the responsible party is submitting/obtaining a plat, planned development district, development agreement, or site plan.
☒ *Applicable ☐ Not Applicable

*Applicant brought up the request for a pole sign early in the process. He waited to apply for a variance because staff told him that the draft Sign Ordinance would allow pole signs in the historic districts and the ordinance would likely be considered by City Council before he needed to order a sign.

(9) Whether the sign could have been included in a master signage plan. Master signage plans are highly encouraged. The city will be more inclined to favorably consider a variance request when the variance is part of a master signage plan. There will be a presumption against granting variances piecemeal, ad hoc, on a case-by-case basis when the sign for which a variance is sought could have been included in a master sign plan and considered in the course of a comprehensive review of the entire project's signage.

☐ Applicable ☒ Not Applicable

(10) The sign administrator may authorize the remodeling, renovation, or alternation of a sign when some nonconforming aspect of the sign is thereby reduced.

☐ Applicable ☒ Not Applicable

Recommendation

Based on the variance request meeting the above indicated considerations for granting a variance, I recommend approval of allowing the two proposed pole signs with the condition that no monument sign may be installed on the property.

Please let me know if you have any questions about this report.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michelle Fischer

Michelle Fischer, Sign Administrator

Draft Sign Ordinance Rewrite

Section 26.02.008. Historic districts and historic character areas

- (a) Signs in a historic district or other area subject to historic preservation standards shall comply with this Chapter and the applicable historic preservation ordinance, design standards, and historic preservation implementation manual.
- (b) When reviewing a sign in a historic district, the City may consider whether the sign's materials, scale, color, lighting, placement, mounting method, and design are compatible with the historic character of the building, streetscape, and district.
- (c) Preferred historic district sign features include:
 - (1) wood, metal, stone, masonry, painted, carved, or externally illuminated signs;
 - (2) pedestrian-scale wall, hanging, window, or monument signs;
 - (3) muted and natural colors;
 - (4) sign mounting that avoids unnecessary damage to historic materials; and
 - (5) lighting that is shielded, warm, low-intensity, and compliant with the outdoor lighting ordinance.
- (d) **Historic post, bracket, and similar pedestrian-scale freestanding signs.**
In a historic district, one historically compatible pedestrian-scale freestanding sign supported by a post and arm, a bracket, one post, or two posts with a suspended or mounted sign panel may be approved by sign permit without a variance if the sign:
 - (1) uses wood, metal, masonry, or another material compatible with the historic building or site;

- (2) is not internally illuminated;
 - (3) does not exceed eight square feet in signable area unless a smaller size is required by adopted historic district standards; provided, however, that the sign administrator may approve without a variance a historically compatible sign described in this subsection up to twelve square feet in signable area if the administrator finds that the larger sign remains compatible with the historic building, site, and streetscape and otherwise complies with this Section;
 - (4) does not exceed eight feet in total height, measured to the top of the post or support, unless a variance or master sign plan authorizes additional height;
 - (5) provides at least seven feet of pedestrian clearance if located above a walkway;
 - (6) is located outside the right-of-way unless right-of-way authorization is obtained;
 - (7) does not obstruct sight distance, parking circulation, sidewalks, accessible routes, doors, windows, or character-defining architectural features;
 - (8) is mounted in a manner that avoids unnecessary damage to historic materials;
 - (9) receives any certificate of appropriateness or historic preservation approval required by City ordinance; and
 - (10) is limited to one such sign per business or tenant frontage unless a variance or master sign plan authorizes additional signs.
- (e) The City Council may adopt additional historic district sign illustrations, pattern books, or administrative design examples showing acceptable post, bracket, hanging, window, wall, and awning signs.
- (f) If a certificate of appropriateness or other historic preservation approval is required by City ordinance for a sign in a historic district, that approval shall be obtained as required by the applicable historic preservation ordinance. The sign administrator may consult with the historic preservation officer, historic preservation staff, or the Historic Preservation Commission as

authorized by City ordinance, but no additional advisory or approval requirement is created by this Chapter unless expressly stated by ordinance.

- (g) The City shall apply historic district sign standards without regard to viewpoint.
- (h) A lawfully existing nonconforming pole sign or pole sign structure in a historic district may continue subject to Article 26.04 [*Existing, Nonconforming, Abandoned, and Damaged Signs*]. Continued lawful use of such a sign or sign structure does not require a variance solely because the sign or structure exceeds the default height or form otherwise allowed by this Section.
- (i) An existing pole sign structure in a historic district that is taller than the default height otherwise allowed by this Section, or that does not currently display sign copy, may be considered for administrative variance approval under Section 26.03.006 [*Administrative variances*] if the structure was lawfully erected, has not been abandoned, is structurally sound, and the proposed sign remains historically compatible and does not increase the height, location, footprint, number of supports, signable area, or overall degree of nonconformity.