

VILLAGE OF HOMEWOOD



MEMORANDUM

DATE OF MEETING: December 7, 2023

To: Members of the Appearance Commission

From: Noah Schumerth, Assistant Director of Economic and Community Development

Through: Angela Mesaros, Director of Economic and Community Development

Topic: Case 23-30, Sign Variance – The Parish of St John Neumann – 17951 Dixie Highway



DOCUMENTS FOR REVIEW

Title	Pages	Prepared by	Date
Application	1	Susan Gates	10/26/23
Narrative	1	Susan Gates	10/26/23
Sign Placement Exhibits	2	Susan Gates	10/26/23
Sign Elevations	3	Core Displays	10/20/23
Plat and Survey	3	Susan Gates	10/26/23
Staff Exhibits	2	Asst. Director of Comm./Econ. Dev.	10/27/23

BACKGROUND

The applicant, St John Neumann Parish, located at 17951 Dixie Highway, proposes to replace an existing (6' x 10') monument sign with a new sign of similar dimensions along the frontage on Dixie Highway. The proposed sign is an electronic message sign. The property is located within the B-2 Downtown Transition zoning district. Currently, the Village of Homewood Code of Ordinances does not permit electronic message board signs within the B-2 zoning district. The applicant has requested a variance from the Village Code of Ordinances to permit the construction of the sign.

The applicant proposes a 40 sq. ft. double-sided sign measuring 4 feet by 10 feet. Each face of the sign will be divided into two sections: (1) a 16 square foot lighted sign measuring 4 feet by 4 feet with a static image of the parish's logo and name, and (2) a 24 square foot electronic message board sign with a changeable copy measuring 4 feet by 6 feet. The sign will be placed on a base measuring 2 feet by 8 feet. According to the applicant, the sign would improve the visibility of the church to passers-by on Dixie Highway.

DISCUSSION

The proposed sign is currently not allowed per standards found in Section 30-4 of the Village Code of Ordinances:

“Changeable copy/reader board signs in the B-1 downtown core zoning district and B-2 downtown transition zoning district...”

According to St. John Neumann, the proposed sign would provide the parish with an opportunity to present its messages to passing motorists and pedestrians. The applicant has requested a variance for constructing the new sign to replace the existing monument sign on the site.

The existing monument sign measures 6 feet in height by 10 feet in length. The sign was constructed as an identification sign for the previous congregation (St. Joseph Parish). The church recently consolidated with other area congregations into a single building at 17951 Dixie Highway. The new parish proposes to update the existing monument sign with its new name and logo. (See Figure B.)

The new sign will be placed approximately 100’ to the south of the location of the existing sign, equidistant to the front property line along Dixie Highway. The new sign will maintain the dimensions of the existing sign. The staff has confirmed that there will be no utility conflicts caused by the movement of the sign by review of the revised utility plan to support the new placement of the sign (including easement encroachments or other issues affecting services outside of the subject site).

The new sign will have the following properties (see attachment “Proposed Sign Elevations”):

Sign Property	Description
Dimensions	10’ (L) x 22” (W) 6’ (H)
Type	Dual (digital bulletin board, double-sided cabinet identification sign)
Materials	Single cabinet (painted black), pan-formed panels (painted black or tan)
Other Properties	Powered from the primary structure, dual 120V 20W conduits

Village ordinances are laws, not suggestions, and should not be considered negotiable outside of the circumstances noted below. A variance should only be approved in situations where significant “hardship” or “practical difficulty” exists, or a specific regulation places an undue or unjust burden on a particular property owner. Variances must be based on objective rationale, and in proper responses from the applicant in response to the Standards for Variance.

Village staff has reviewed the application with the following findings related to the variance request:

- The proposed electronic message board sign would replace an existing sign that is outdated. While the sign location is being altered, the dimensions of the sign and its relationship with the public right-of-way are not being changed. Minor changes to the signage materials are proposed in response to adjustments to the type of sign being proposed. The new sign is a modernization of existing signage that is in line with proposals from other churches in Homewood, such as Faith Lutheran Church, 18645 Dixie Highway.
- Section 30-7 of the Village Code of Ordinances allows civic institutions and charitable organizations to install two types of signage: (1) identification signs; and (2) bulletin board signs that describe events or other information directly related to the use of the site. These regulations apply to places of worship.
- St. John Neumann is located within a commercial district. Churches and civic institutions are typically located within residential districts. The restriction on electronic signs within the B-1 and B-2 zoning districts is established to manage the impacts of commercial electronic signage and the general visual quality within the Village's central business district.
- The technology has evolved dramatically since the adoption of the Village's Sign Code; digital sign board technology allows for greater control of brightness, image quality, and other properties of the sign. Staff is in the process of a review and update of the Sign Code and will recommend changes in May 2024. Electronic message signs will be reviewed and discussed during this process.
- St. John Neumann is adjacent to multiple other civic uses along Dixie Highway, including the Village Hall. This building has an electronic display monument sign that is larger than the proposed sign at St John Neumann. Public buildings such as Village Hall are exempted from signage regulations.

RECOMMENDED APPEARANCE COMMISSION ACTION

The staff has reviewed the proposed sign, and the Staff recommends limitations on size, brightness, duration of message display, message transition, and movement to reduce distractions. The signage is consistent with the standards required for past electronic message signs.

The Appearance Committee may wish to consider the following motion:

Recommend approval of the proposed signage variance and electronic message board signage as proposed by Saint John Paul Neumann Parish Church on the property at 17951 Dixie Highway, The Parish of St John Neumann, subject to the following conditions:

1. Images must remain static;
2. Message display duration – minimum 12 seconds;
3. Transition between messages must be instantaneous;
4. No change in intensity, or brightness, no video displays, single messages not divided between two screens, no flashing or blinking;
5. Exterior signs shall be illuminated only during business hours or between the hours of 6:00 am and 11:00 pm, whichever is later;
6. No off-premise commercial advertising permitted;
7. Brightness limited to 0.00-foot candles at the residential lot lines;
8. In the event of a malfunction, the electronic variable message sign would be turned to a dark screen until corrected; and
9. Compliance with standards set forth by the Illinois Department of Transportation.