

VILLAGE OF HOMEWOOD



MEETING MINUTES

DATE OF MEETING: **December 7, 2023**

APPEARANCE COMMISSION

6:00 pm

Village Hall Board Room
2020 Chestnut Street
Homewood, IL 60430

CALL TO ORDER:

Chair Hrymak called the meeting to order at 6:00pm.

ROLL CALL:

Members Quirke, Smith, Scheffke, Kluck, and Chair Hrymak were present. Members Kidd and Preston arrived late to the hearing. In attendance from the Village were Assistant Director of Economic and Community Development Noah Schumerth, and Director of Economic and Community Development Angela Mesaros.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

Corrections to the November 8, 2023 meeting minutes were requested. Commissioner Smith noted that a paragraph discussing the entrance of a member of the public needed to be removed due to the paragraph identifying an event that occurred at the October 19, 2023 Planning and Zoning Commission hearing. Commissioner Quirke noted that a discussion with Village President Rich Hofeld was incorrectly attributed to him, noting that Dan Kluck provided the dialogue with the Mayor. The meeting minutes were approved.

AYES: Members Smith, Scheffke, Quirke, Kluck, Chair Hrymak

NAYS: None

ABSTENTIONS: None

ABSENT: Members Preston and Kidd

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Eight members of the public were present at the meeting. No comments were given.

REGULAR BUSINESS:

CASE 23-30 – St. John Neumann Parish Church

Assistant Director of Economic and Community Development Noah Schumerth provided introductory information about the sign variance and signage design proposed for St. John Neumann Parish, including site location and current conditions on the property. Assistant Director Schumerth noted an error in the packet which stated that the new signage is to be 100' south of the existing sign; however, the sign is to be 100' north of the existing signage.

Assistant Director Schumerth presented graphics of the proposed design for the signage. Assistant Director Schumerth then discussed the arguments expressed in support of a variance from Section 30-4 of Village signage ordinances for the proposed signage, allowing the construction of an electronic changing message sign in the B-2 zoning district for a civic/charitable institution, a use which is normally allowed the construction of a civic/charitable institution by right.

Member Preston arrived to the meeting.

Assistant Director Schumerth noted that a similar variance was approved for Faith Lutheran, a place of worship located on South Dixie Highway, under similar zoning circumstances. Schumerth also identified where similar signs to the one proposed by St. John Neumann have been constructed, including at the Homewood Village Hall in the PL-1 zoning district, and identified that similar signs can be constructed for places of worship and civic institutions in other zoning districts.

Chair Hrymak requested information about the graphic depicting electronic changing message signage near the intersection of 183th and Governor's Highway. It was noted that the signage belonged to Homewood-Flossmoor Park District.

Assistant Director Schumerth noted that in 2019 after the Faith Lutheran variance approval under similar conditions, it was determined that cases on this type of variance would be heard on a "case by case" basis. Schumerth completed a description of the reasons supporting the validity of the proposed variance and noted that staff recommends approval. Conditions of approval were recommended by Assistant Director Schumerth matching the similar variance conditions proposed in approval of the sign variance at Faith Lutheran.

Susan Gates and Father Edmond Aristil provided additional information about St. John Neumann Parish Church and the purpose of the proposed signage for the church. The two representatives of the applicant team provided their proposed argument for a variance to Village signage ordinances.

Assistant Director Schumerth displayed images demonstrating the current conditions of the Faith Lutheran signage, which was built following approval for a similar variance to Section 30-4 of the Village signage ordinances.

Member Kluck noted that the new signage location will be more visible than the current location, and asked what role signage location plays in the decision to pursue a new signage design and variance for the proposed sign. Susan Gates noted that if effort was to be taken to create a new signage design, the sign should be relocated to be more visible from both directions of travel on Dixie Highway.

Member Quirke asked for information about why the staff is recommending approval when the evidence provided by the staff appears to be contrary. Director of Economic and Community Development Angela Mesaros noted the presentation provided a bulleted list of reasons staff was recommending support of the variance. Member Quirke identified that there was difficulty identifying a hardship necessary to support a variance with the previous Faith Lutheran variance making a similar argument in support of the installation of a sign, but there was even more difficulty identifying a hardship with the sign at St. John Neumann. Director Mesaros noted that there is less clarity regarding what is necessary to allow consideration of a variance from signage ordinances, which are a part of the Municipal Code yet have variance powers reserved for the Appearance Commission.

Assistant Director Schumerth noted that the adoption of the land use map included in the 2023 Zoning Ordinance created an extenuating circumstance, given that the property was zoned B-2 (Downtown Transition), but a place of worship or civic/charitable institution is not permitted in this zoning district. Additionally, the civic/charitable institution would have been allowed to build this sign type by right, should it have been located in a zoning district written to support the land use such as the district the church was previously located within. Schumerth noted that the purpose of the ordinance is to limit commercial electronic signage in the B-2 zoning district in alignment with the Downtown Master Plan.

Member Quirke asked why the 2023 Zoning Ordinance did not reflect changes following the approval of the 2019 Faith Lutheran case, which had a similar issue with a commercially zoned civic/charitable institution, and suggested that the current ordinance is designed to limit all signage of this type in the B-2 (Downtown Transition) zoning district. Schumerth replied that signage ordinances were not updated in the 2023 Zoning Ordinance update, and the ordinances requiring variance in both the 2019 Faith Lutheran case and the present case at St. John Neumann are located in the Code of Ordinances chapters regulating signage. Schumerth noted that signage ordinances are currently under review by Village staff. Schumerth also noted that this issue could not have been addressed in the 2023 Zoning Ordinance update, given civic/charitable institutions such as places of worship are not permitted in the B-2 zoning district.

Member Quirke expressed concerns about how new signage code standards and the 2023 Zoning Ordinance will avoid future contradictions. Quirke also had concerns about the precedent set should the St. John Neumann sign variance be approved.

Member Preston noted that many technological changes are occurring in Homewood and surrounding communities which are not addressed in the zoning ordinance. Preston identified the need for churches and other civic institutions to be able to market efficiently and move forward with the technology necessary to operate a modern institution. Preston expressed that it is a good idea to accept this because of the need to be accommodating of technology not yet integrated into ordinances.

Member Scheffke asked the applicant if sign messages would be duplicated on both sides of the proposed sign structure. Susan Gates stated that the signage would be duplicated. Member Scheffke expressed concerns about the north signage face being located such that a tree will be located between the new sign and travel lanes on Dixie Highway, with limited visibility for passing individuals.

Member Scheffke noted concerns about the precedent that an approval of this variance may cause, and asked whether other cases may utilize a similar argument. Assistant Director Schumerth noted that no other places of worship remain within the B-2 zoning district which have not already received a variance.

Member Scheffke asked if the original 2019 Faith Lutheran variance case with a similar argument in support of an electronic changing message sign was supposed to be a “one time approval” for a unique circumstance. Assistant Director Schumerth noted that following approval of the Faith Lutheran variance, it was expressed by members of the Appearance Commission that future cases similar to the Faith Lutheran case should be taken on a “case-by-case basis.”

Member Kluck asked for clarification regarding how future churches interested in locating in downtown Homewood may be treated by zoning use regulations. Assistant Director Schumerth noted that churches are not permitted in B-1 and B-2 zoning districts. Member Kluck asserted that this is likely the last

church to consider this type of variance case. Director Mesaros affirmed the comment made by Member Kluck.

Member Kidd arrived to the meeting.

Member Smith stated that when the sign code is updated in 2024, accommodating technology shifts in ordinances should be a high priority, and that the type of signage is essential for church communication. Member Smith stated that there is likely no distraction risk to drivers based on personal experience.

Member Preston stated support of the proposed signage and variance.

Chair Hrymak stated that his greatest concerns with previous sign variance cases has been the impact on neighbors due to light or message changes. Chair Hrymak noted that there are no neighbors which will have significant impacts from the new signage. Chair Hrymak noted that hardship is difficult to identify.

Chair Hrymak asked if non-electronic signage is more difficult to obtain. Applicant Susan Gates noted that it is increasingly difficult to acquire older letterboard signs and other non-illuminated signs.

Chair Hrymak notes the need and stated reduced concern about the case due to the location of the site in a commercial area. Chair Hrymak reinforced that updates to the sign code are necessary to avoid turning Homewood into "Las Vegas" with large numbers of electronic signs.

Applicant Susan Gates reiterated that the hardship is due to the location of the church in the commercial zone and additional restrictions placed on the church, where a church is generally not allowed by zoning. Applicant Gates identified that the church is a longstanding institution and that the sign otherwise meets zoning requirements.

Chair Hrymak asked the applicant why the sign is being moved. Applicant Edmond Aristil noted that the sign is easier to see from the road in the new location.

Member Quirke stated that other commissioners are suffering from too great of a reliance on precedent. Member Quirke noted the need to restrict the brightness of the signage at the church, citing the previous signage at Faith Lutheran and alleging potential code enforcement issues with the signage approved by variance for the church in 2019. Member Quirke asked how the Commission will say no to future signage variances when needed. Chair Hrymak noted the Appearance Commission's authority to decide variance cases in any direction, and that variance issues will be revisited in future code updates.

Director Angela Mesaros noted that an opportunity for public comment is required before a motion for action on Case 23-30. Chair Hrymak requested comment from the public. No members of the public requested an opportunity to speak.

A motion was made by Member Scheffke to approve the sign variance and proposed signage design at 17951 Dixie Highway, subject to conditions. Seconded by Member Preston.

AYES: Members Smith, Preston, Kluck, Kidd, Chair Hrymak

NAYS: Member Quirke

ABSTENTIONS: Member Scheffke

ABSENT: None

CASE 23-31 – All Nations Community Church Signage

Assistant Director of Economic and Community Development Noah Schumerth provided introductory information about the proposed signage design proposed for All Nations Community Church at 18620 Kedzie Avenue. Assistant Director Schumerth noted that the proposal includes two signs replacing the two signs currently at the front of the church property along Kedzie. The signage is proposed to have an area of backlit cabinet signage over an electronic changing message sign.

Chair Hrymak requested information about the type of review being considered by the Appearance Commission for All Nations Community Church. Assistant Director Schumerth noted the authority reserved for the Appearance Commission to determine the appropriateness of signage designs. Director of Economic and Community Development Angela Mesaros noted the language in Section 2 of the Village Code of Ordinances.

Assistant Director Schumerth noted the specifics of the proposed signage design for the church.

Member Scheffke noted that the elevations of the proposed signage made the backlit cabinet portion of the sign much larger than the backlit cabinet signage present on the current sign, and noted that the electronic changing message sign will take up a lot of area. Assistant Director Schumerth stated that the backlit cabinet identifying the name of the church at the top of the sign will be narrower than on the current sign on the property. Member Scheffke asked for the relative height of the proposed electronic signage area. Assistant Director Schumerth noted that the electronic changing message sign area will be 4' high.

Conditions of approval were recommended by Assistant Director Schumerth.

Applicant Dr. Angel Turner introduced herself as a representative of the church as the Vice President of the church's board of directors and described the purpose of the sign as an identification sign and a bulletin board sign for church events. Applicant Turner noted that the signage will allow for more people to attend the church and learn about church activities. Applicant Turner noted the presence of similar signs at Homewood-Flossmoor High School and other businesses and organizations along Kedzie Avenue.

Applicant Ken Richmond introduced himself as a representative from the contractor Signs Plus for the design of the proposed signage. Applicant Richmond stated that the signage is to be designed to have instantaneous message changes, no delays, and limited brightness. Applicant Richmond noted that the sign will be designed to conform to the conditions of approval recommended by Village staff.

Member Smith stated that while the sign will face residential areas, the impacts of illumination from the sign will be limited due to the distance of the sign. Member Smith added that the sign should not increase distraction for drivers.

Applicant Ken Richmond stated that additional software is provided to ensure that brightness and message display can be carefully controlled. The applicant also noted that landscaping will be improved to beautify the area around the sign.

Member Smith departed from the meeting.

Member Preston stated support for the sign.

Member Quirke asked Applicant Dr. Angel Turner about other types of messaging which might be displayed on the sign. Applicant Turner noted that holiday messages and other church events may be posted on the sign. Member Quirke asked if the same conditions applied to the St. John Neumann signage will be applied to signage at All Nations. Applicant Turner affirmed. Member Quirke asked who will be responsible for ensuring compliance with conditions. Applicant Turner noted that the pastor's executive assistant and other staff members will be responsible for changing messages and turning the signage on and off as required. Member Quirke noted the large size of the church congregation and facility.

Member Kluck stated support for the sign and noted the large capacity of the church.

Chair Hrymak asked whether converting the sign from two smaller signs into one larger sign would be more appropriate for the design of the sign. Applicant Turner noted that the signage will use an existing brick base for the sign, and reconfiguring the base would require more resources from the church. Chair Hrymak expressed that the signage will not cause light impacts on surrounding properties.

Chair Hrymak noted that landscaping improvements and general maintenance around the area of the sign are needed. Applicant Turner noted that the church will take on efforts to improve landscaping and yard maintenance in the area of the new sign.

Chair Hrymak requested clarification on a condition limiting the brightness of the sign.

A motion was made by Member Preston to approve the proposed signage design at 18620 Kedzie Avenue, subject to conditions. Seconded by Member Kluck.

AYES: Members Scheffke, Preston, Quirke, Kluck, Kidd, Chair Hrymak

NAYS: None

ABSTENTIONS: None

ABSENT: Member Smith

NEW BUSINESS:

Member Quirke said that a rehab facility on Halsted Street moved from the east side of the street to the west side of the street, and noted that the facility built a large double sign at the new location. Director Angela Mesaros noted that the facility has a large space, and the building may have a signage area totaling 2.5 x the length of the frontage along Halsted Street, resulting in a very large sign.

ADJOURN:

Member Kluck made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:20pm. Seconded by Member Scheffke.

AYES: Members Scheffke, Preston, Quirke, Kluck, Kidd, Chair Hrymak

NAYS: None

ABSTENTIONS: None

ABSENT: Member Smith

Respectfully submitted,

Noah J. Schumerth