

BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS DIVISION I

September 1, 2026

Case Number:	2026-UV1-023
Property Address:	1002 East 25 th Street (approximate address)
Location:	Center Township, Council District #8
Petitioner:	Global Preparatory Academy Monon LLC, by Alex Intermill
Current Zoning:	I-2
Request:	Variance of Use and Development Standards of the Consolidated Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance to provide for a internally illuminated monument sign with digital display (internal illumination and digital display not permitted) within 25 feet of a protected district (600-foot separation required), and with a front setback of 2 feet (5 feet required).
Current Land Use:	School
Staff Recommendations:	Staff recommends approval of the variances related to setback and internal illumination, and denial of the digital display variance.
Staff Reviewer:	Michael Weigel, Principal Planner I

PETITION HISTORY

This is the first public hearing for this petition.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends **approval** of the variances related to setback and internal illumination, and **denial** of the variance related to digital display. If the EVMS variance were to be approved over staff's negative recommendation, it should be subject to the below nine (9) commitments to limit negative externalities:

1. The sign and digital display shall be constructed in substantial conformity with the elevation file-dated July 1, 2026.
2. There shall be no blinking, scrolling, flashing, or video type messages on the proposed EVMS sign. All messages shall change instantaneously.
3. All messages on the digital display shall remain static for at least 15 seconds.
4. All messages on the digital display shall relate to school activities. No messages on the digital display shall serve a commercial or advertising function unrelated to educational uses.
5. The digital display shall be turned off completely between the hours of 9:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.
6. The digital display shall be programmed to automatically dim the level of brightness via auto-dimming tech during hours that the sign is permitted to be on after sunset and before sunrise.
7. A photometric plan showing lighting level created by the sign for the subject site and surrounding areas to the south shall be submitted for administrative approval prior to the issuance of a Sign permit.

8. The primary color of any monochromatic message on the digital display (including background) shall not be red, yellow, or green.
9. The variance shall only be applicable for the Global Preparatory Academy or for other elementary, middle, or high school uses that might occupy the property in the future. The variance shall automatically terminate if educational uses cease at the site.

PETITION OVERVIEW

1002 East 25th Street is a parcel with a size of 1.64 acres containing an industrial structure (footprint of approximately 20,500 square feet) that previously housed a paper manufacturer use. Surrounding land uses include countertop and roofing supply stores to the north and northwest, residences and a church to the west, land zoned for residential use to the south, and the Monon Trail to the east of site.

In 2025, a variance petition was approved in relation to internal conversion of the structure for educational uses which allowed for a reduced front yard setback, deficient landscaping, and for front-yard parking areas maneuvering within right-of-way. Additionally, the sign permit SGN26-00222 was approved earlier this year to allow for the installation of wall signs advertising the school use (see photo 5 within Exhibits).

Approval of this variance petition would allow for placement of a monument sign matching the site plan and elevations within Exhibits below. The proposed sign would have a size of around 75.83 square feet, would be oriented towards 25th Street, and would be visible from the Monon Trail to the east as well as from property to the south and southwest recently rezoned for residential use. Additionally, the sign would have digital display installed on both the eastern and western face of the monument, making this an electronic variable message sign (EVMS). The size of the digital display panels would be around 23.13 square feet, making it around 30.5% of the overall size of the sign.

Multiple Variances of Development Standards would be required to permit legal installation of the sign as currently designed:

- The leading edge of the sign would have a 2-foot setback from the right-of-way of 25th Street to the south. A 5-foot minimum setback would be required by the I-2 zoning district.
- Internal illumination of signage (regardless of if the sign is an EVMS or not) is not permitted within the I-2 zoning district.
- Digital display on primary freestanding signage is disallowed within the I-2 zoning district.
- Additionally, for districts in which digital displays *are* allowed, a separation of at least 600 feet from protected zoning districts is required. The proposed separation of this sign would be around 25 feet, which is only around 4.2% of the minimum required separation.

This property is zoned I-2 (Light Industrial District) to allow for placement of industries that present minimal risk and typically do not create objectionable characteristics (such as dirt, noise, glare, heat, odor, etc.) that extend beyond the lot lines. The I-2 district only allows for educational uses per the passage of House Bill 1515 by the State of Indiana in 2025, but the overall intent of the district to limit potential negative externalities would still be relevant for consideration of this land use petition even though the proposed used is not industrial in nature.

The Comprehensive Plan recommends the western section of the site to the Traditional Neighborhood land use typology, and the eastern section to the Village Mixed Use typology (additional information within the Comprehensive Plan Analysis section of the report below). These typologies typically integrate smaller-scale, less intense commercial uses and signage into residential and neighborhood areas (either in close proximity or directly integrated via mixed-use zoning districts).

With regards to the setback variance request, staff would note that the areas of the site already paved and designed for vehicle area and maneuvering would limit feasible alternate locations for placement of a primary freestanding sign oriented to 25th Street. Shifting it to the east would likely violate the 10-foot side setback requirement, and placement further to the west would interfere with traffic and would potentially violate the required clear-sight triangle formed by the intersection of 25th and Winthrop as well. For this reason and since the total deviation from the requirement would only be 3 feet in total, staff recommends **approval** of the requested variance to allow for a 2-foot front yard setback for the sign.

For the internal illumination variance request, staff would note that districts where internal illumination is permitted are required to have a separation of 50 feet from protected districts unless there is an abutting street between them (this parcel would meet that standard). Additionally, the proposed use at this property (a school) is not typically a use found within the I-2 zoning district, and staff would note that the Special Use district designated for school uses (SU-1) permits internal illumination. If the property were zoned in a manner matching the proposed land use, no variance for internal illumination would be required. For these reasons, staff would consider the request to be minor in nature and would recommend **approval** of the requested variance to allow for internal illumination of the sign.

Findings of Fact provided by the applicant indicate that approval of the variances to allow for digital display should be approved since the installation would not create hardship for surrounding properties, that the separation requirement wouldn't allow for placement in an alternate location, and that the digital sign would be needed to allow for advertising of events. Staff would emphasize that **(a)** per photographs taken while visiting the site the sign location would be easily visible from land that was recently rezoned for residential development; **(b)** the existence of the 600-foot separation requirement is not a hardship justifying variance approval but rather a standard meant to provide a visual buffer between digital signs and protected districts; and **(c)** that alternate, Ordinance-compliant methods to advertise the use and related events (including but not limited to online messages and advertisement or placement of non-digital wall and monument signage utilizing changeable copy) would be viable options.

The proposed digital display would be 24 times closer to residentially zoned areas than is contemplated by the Ordinance, and staff would view this as an extreme deviation. Additionally, the risk of distracted driving or negative pedestrian-vehicle interaction from either display content, display changes or anticipation of display changes may be increased given the placement of the Monon Trail around 130 feet away from the proposed sign location. DMD staff is committed to eliminating all traffic fatalities and serious injuries as a part of the City's Vision Zero framework, and limiting potential distractions for motorists is an important part of that long-term goal.

Staff also notes that during the last round of substantial amendments to the Sign Ordinance (in 2018-2019), a primary point of public feedback provided was a desire for separation between people's homes and digital display signage. Instances where the Ordinance does contemplate digital display signs are

along commercial corridors without direct sightlines from residences, and not within a neighborhood or mixed-use context with homes and pedestrians; the intensity of signage should be reflective of and appropriate for the surrounding context. The location of the proposed sign meets none of the above criteria for EVMS placement.

Therefore, staff recommends **denial** of the EVMS requests due to the extremity of the deviation sought, the lack of hardship or site-specific practical difficulty, and the likely negative externalities that would result for both future residential development to the south and southwest as well as to reduce driver distraction near the greenway area to the east. If approved over staff's negative recommendation, approval should be subject to the eight (8) commitments above to limit adverse effects.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Existing Zoning	I-2	
Existing Land Use	School	
Comprehensive Plan	Traditional Neighborhood / Village Mixed-Use	
Surrounding Context	<u>Zoning</u>	<u>Surrounding Context</u>
	North: I-2	North: Industrial
	South: D-8	South: Undeveloped
	East: I-2	East: Monon Trail
	West: I-2	West: Industrial / Residential / Religious
Thoroughfare Plan		
East 25 th Street	Secondary Arterial	50-foot existing right-of-way and 56-foot proposed right-of-way
Winthrop Avenue	Local Street	53-foot existing right-of-way and 48-foot proposed right-of-way
Context Area	Compact	
Floodway / Floodway Fringe	No	
Overlay	No	
Wellfield Protection Area	No	
Site Plan	07/01/2026	
Site Plan (Amended)	N/A	
Elevations	07/01/2026	
Elevations (Amended)	N/A	
Landscape Plan	N/A	
Findings of Fact	07/01/2026	
Findings of Fact (Amended)	08/07/2026	

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ANALYSIS

Comprehensive Plan

- Marion County Land Use Plan Pattern Book

Pattern Book / Land Use Plan

- The western portion of the site is recommended to the Traditional Neighborhood typology, which includes a full spectrum of housing types, ranging from single family homes to large-scale multifamily housing. The development pattern of this typology should be compact and well-connected, with access to individual parcels by an alley when practical. Building form should promote the social connectivity of the neighborhood, with clearly defined public, semi-public, and private spaces. Infill development should continue the existing visual pattern, rhythm, or orientation of surrounding buildings when possible. A wide range of neighborhood-serving businesses, institutions, and amenities should be present. Ideally, most daily needs are within walking distance.
- The eastern portion of the site is recommended to the Village Mixed-Use typology, which creates neighborhood gathering places with a wide range of small businesses, housing types, and public facilities. This typology is intended to strengthen existing, historically small town centers as well as to promote new neighborhood centers. Businesses found in this typology serve adjacent neighborhoods, rather than the wider community. This typology is compact and walkable, with parking at the rear of buildings. Buildings are one to four stories in height and have entrances and large windows facing the street. Pedestrian-scale amenities such as lighting, landscaping, and sidewalk furniture also contributes to a walkable environment in this typology. Uses may be mixed vertically in the same building or horizontally along a corridor. Public spaces in this typology are small and intimate, such as pocket parks and sidewalk cafes.

Red Line / Blue Line / Purple Line TOD Strategic Plan

- Not Applicable to the Site.

Neighborhood / Area Specific Plan

- Not Applicable to the Site.

Infill Housing Guidelines

- Not Applicable to the Site.

Indy Moves

(Thoroughfare Plan, Pedestrian Plan, Bicycle Master Plan, Greenways Master Plan)

- Not Applicable to the Site.

ZONING HISTORY

ZONING HISTORY – SITE

2025HOV003, Variance of Development Standards of the Consolidated Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance to provide for the redevelopment of an existing building for a school use, including an addition, resulting in an 11-foot front yard setback from Winthrop Avenue (20-feet required), parking within the front yards of Winthrop Avenue and 25th Street exceeding ten percent of the total setback area, lack of edge buffering requirements and parking with maneuvering within the right-of-way (not permitted), **approved**.

90-UV3-10, Variance of use and development standards of the Industrial Zoning Ordinance to permit a food extrusion manufacturing plant with two bulk flour tanks 45 feet in height (35 feet allowed), **approved**.

ZONING HISTORY – VICINITY

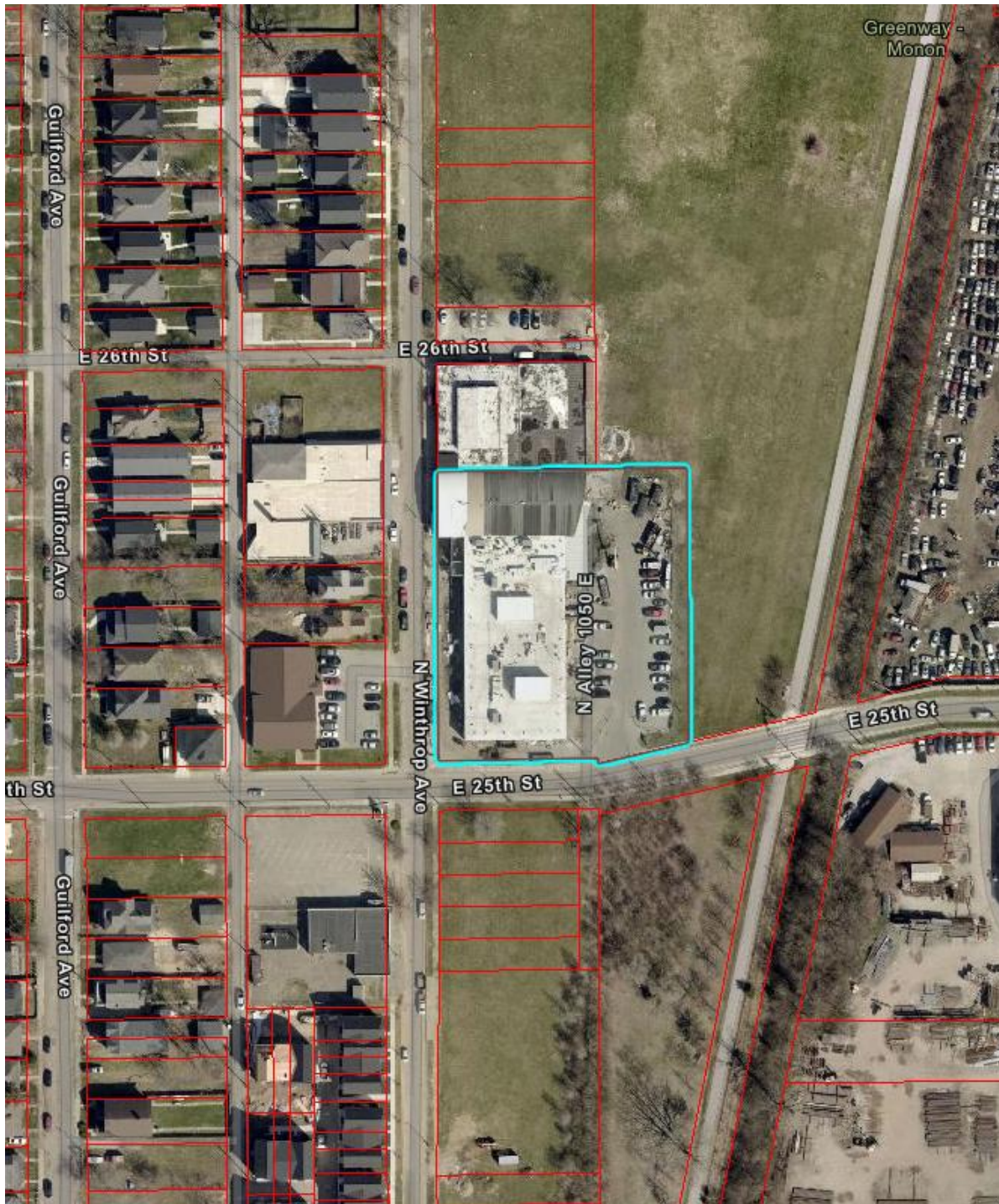
2024DV2006 ; 1212 E 25th Street (east of site), Variance of Development Standards of the Consolidated Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance to provide for the location of a 20-foot-tall internally illuminated pole sign (not permitted), **withdrawn**.

2020ZON048 ; 1123 E 25th Street (south of site), Rezoning of 1.435 acres from the I-4 district to the D-8 district, **approved**.

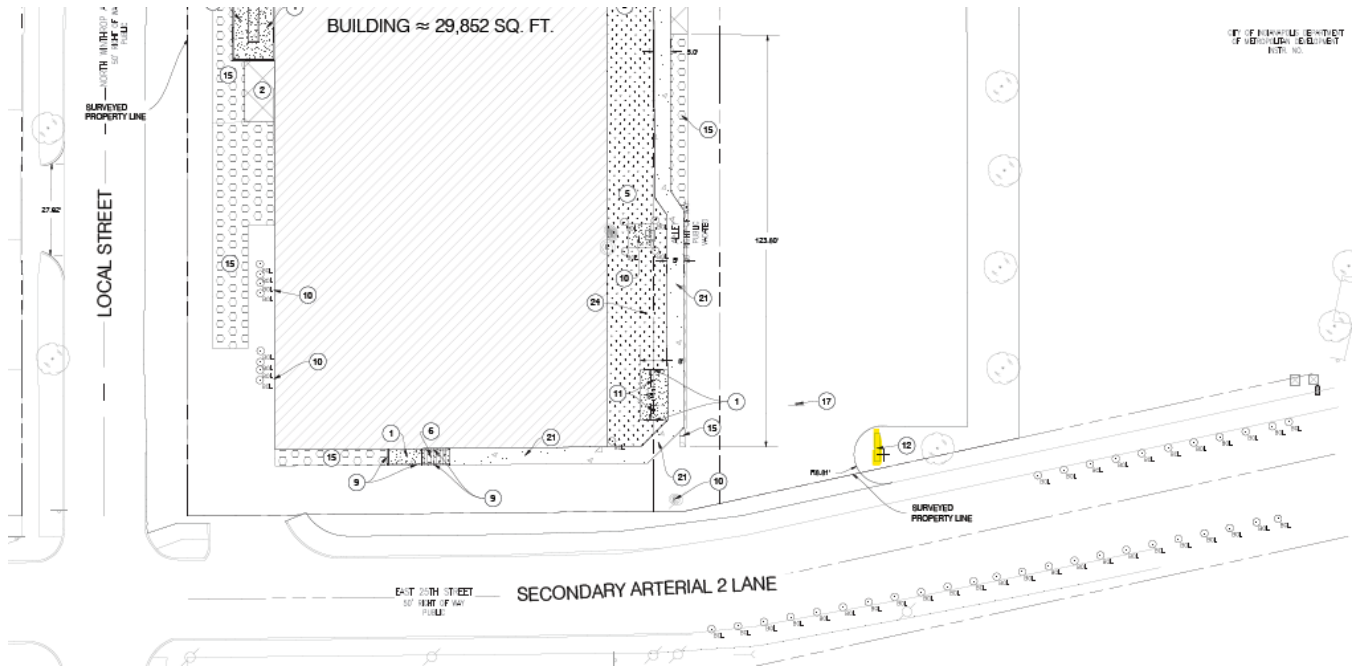
2018ZON002 ; 2401 Winthrop Avenue (south of site), Rezoning of 2.04 acres from the I-4 district to the D-8 classification, **approved**.

EXHIBITS

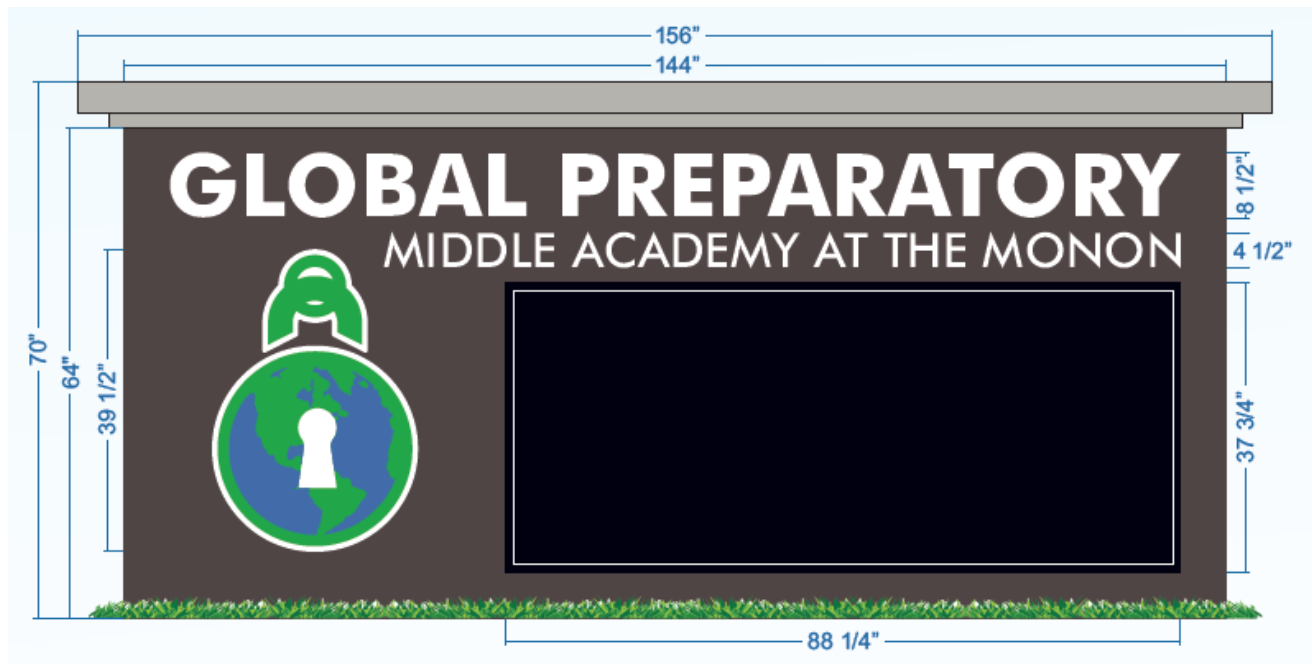
2026UV1023 ; Aerial Map



2026UV1023 ; Site Plan (Zoomed; Sign Location Highlighted)



2026UV1023 ; Sign Elevation



2026UV1023 ; Findings of Fact (Use)

1. THE GRANT WILL NOT BE INJURIOUS TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH, SAFETY, MORALS, AND GENERAL WELFARE OF THE COMMUNITY BECAUSE

the sign will operate under the digital display standards of Section 744-907.C, showing only static messages with no motion or flashing, adjusting its brightness automatically to ambient conditions, and going dark on any malfunction. Through its web-based controls, the school will commit to shutting the display off or substantially dimming it during overnight hours. These operating limits, alongside the display's directional illumination, prevent glare and driver distraction.

2. THE USE AND VALUE OF THE AREA ADJACENT TO THE PROPERTY INCLUDED IN THE VARIANCE WILL NOT BE AFFECTED IN A SUBSTANTIALLY ADVERSE MANNER BECAUSE

no display face is directed at a residence. The sign fronts East 25th Street, with the D-8 district across that right-of-way to the south, the Monon greenway to the east, and non-residential I-2 uses to the west. Directional illumination confines light toward the street, and the overnight shutoff or dimming commitment ensures dark evening hours for nearby properties. A school identification sign in an area with diverse uses will not diminish the use or value of adjacent property.

3. THE NEED FOR THE VARIANCE ARISES FROM SOME CONDITION PECULIAR TO THE PROPERTY INVOLVED BECAUSE

the parcel carries an industrial I-2 classification while housing a public charter school, a use the district's sign standards do not contemplate. Every point on the site falls within the regulated distance of the adjacent dwelling district, and a survey of the site and adjacent properties identifies the southeast corner along East 25th Street as the only placement visible to traffic in both directions. No alternate placement would meet the five-foot setback while remaining effective.

4. THE STRICT APPLICATION OF THE TERMS OF THE ZONING ORDINANCE CONSTITUTES AN UNUSUAL AND UNNECESSARY HARDSHIP IF APPLIED TO THE PROPERTY FOR WHICH THE VARIANCE IS SOUGHT BECAUSE

without the variance, the school cannot communicate effectively with its students, families, and the public from its own property. The I-2 standard bars the digital display and internal illumination that monument signs in the I-3 and I-4 districts may carry, leaving only manually changeable copy or scattered secondary signs, which invite vandalism, add clutter, and serve the school poorly. Holding an established school to sign standard written for industrial operations works an unusual an unnecessary hardship

5. THE GRANT DOES NOT INTERFERE SUBSTANTIALLY WITH THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN BECAUSE

the Marion County Land Use Plan recommends a Mixed-Use pattern for the property and the corridor along the Monon Trail, a typology that contemplates institutional and community-serving uses such as the school. The grant does not change the use of the property; the school remains a neighborhood-serving institution, and the relief runs only to its identification sign and the related illumination, proximity, and setback standards. An accessory sign identifying a consistent use does not interfere with the plan.

2026UV1023 ; Findings of Fact (Development Standards)

1. The grant will not be injurious to the public health, safety, morals, and general welfare of the community because:

the proposed sign is an on-premise primary freestanding monument sign located at the southeast corner of Global Preparatory Academy's property along East 25th Street. Its faces are oriented to eastbound and westbound 25th Street traffic rather than any adjacent residence. The digital display will be operated in conformance with Section 744-907.C. It will show only static messages, with no movement, scrolling, or flashing; it will adjust its brightness to ambient light conditions; and it will show "full black" in the event of a malfunction. In addition, the sign meets current industry and ordinance standards for construction, safety, and operation.

2. The use or value of the area adjacent to the property included in the variance will not be affected in a substantially adverse manner because:

the sign is an accessory to the established school use and identifies that use on its own premises. It is not off-premise advertising. The adjacent property to the south is zoned D-8 dwelling district, separated from the sign by the public right-of-way of East 25th Street, and the property to the east is greenway open space zoned as I-2. The adjacent parcels to the west also include established non-residential uses zoned as I-2, including the Acts Supply store and the Rock of Ages Church, so the surrounding area is mixed in character. In addition, the sign faces are oriented to East 25th Street traffic so the display is not directed toward the D-8 dwelling district. A freestanding monument that identifies an established institutional use is consistent with that mixed character.

3. The strict application of the terms of the zoning ordinance will result in practical difficulties in the use of the property because:

the property is zoned I-2 but is occupied and used as a public charter middle school. That institutional use has identification needs different from the industrial uses that I-2 sign standards contemplate. A freestanding monument sign in the I-2 district may not include a digital display or internal illumination, though both are permitted in the I-3 and I-4 districts. The property lies entirely within the regulated distance of the adjacent dwelling district, so the sign cannot be relocated to avoid that proximity. In addition, the strict application of these standards would deny the school a customary, well-controlled means of identifying its premises and result in a practical difficulty in the use of the property.

2026UV1023 ; Photographs



Photo 1: Sign Location Viewed from West



Photo 2: Sign Location Viewed from East

2026UV1023 ; Photographs (continued)



Photo 3: Sign Location Looking West



Photo 4: Sign Location Looking East

2026UV1023 ; Photographs (continued)



Photo 5: Building Viewed from Southeast



Photo 6: Building Viewed from Southwest

2026UV1023 ; Photographs (continued)



Photo 7: Adjacent Property to South

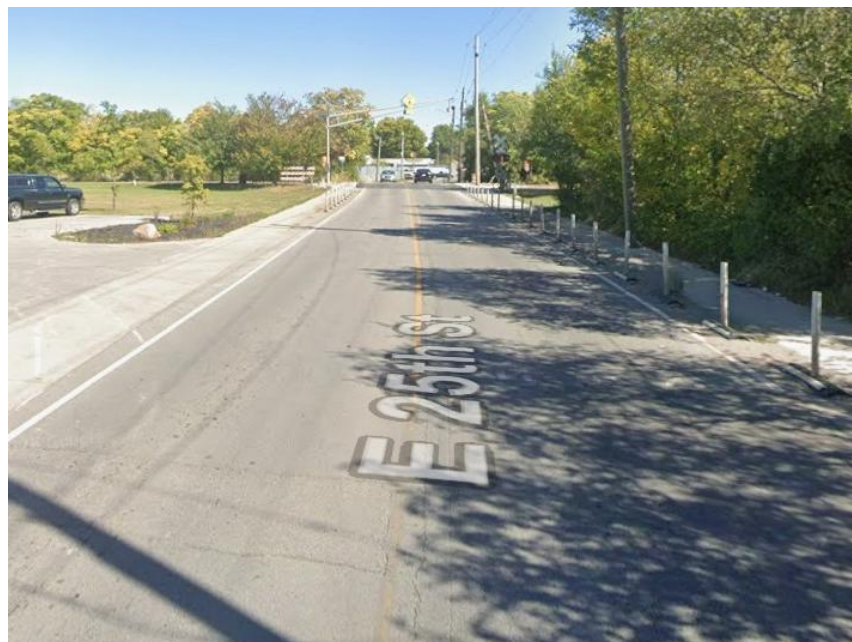


Photo 8: Sign Location from 25th Street to West (October 22)

2026UV1023 ; Photographs (continued)



Photo 9: Adjacent Sign to Northwest (2530 Winthrop)



Photo 10: Adjacent Sign to East (1130 E 25th)