

BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS DIVISION I

June 2, 2026

Case Number: 2026-DV1-023
Property Address: 4000 Michigan Road (approximate address)
Location: Washington Township, Council District #7
Petitioner: Art Association of Indianapolis Indiana, by Brent Bennett
Current Zoning: SU-7

Request: Variance of Development Standards of the Consolidated Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance to provide for the location of two monument signs along the 38th Street frontage and one monument sign along the Michigan Road frontage, being the second and third primary freestanding signs along 38th Street (maximum two signs permitted) with heights of 9 feet and 12 feet (maximum 5 feet permitted) and with a separation of 75 feet between the 38th Street signs (300-foot separation required), and a canopy sign with a projection from the wall exceeding 18 inches (maximum 18 inches permitted).

Current Land Use: Art Museum
Staff Recommendations: Staff recommends **approval** of the requested variances.
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 requested variances.

PETITION OVERVIEW

4000 Michigan Road is a part of a 152-acre campus that currently contains the Newfields Art Museum as well as garden and nature preserve areas to the west. The art museum portion of the site has an access point from 38th Street to the south as well as two (2) access points from Michigan Road to the east. Current signage advertising the museum use visible from those public rights-of-way includes a freestanding pylon sign at the 38th Street entrance (see photos 3-4) as well as a sign at the northwest corner of the intersection of 38th and Michigan (see photo 8).

Approval of this petition would allow for the placement of four (4) new signs: one sign would be a canopy sign suspended from an existing architectural feature on the main art museum structure (S1), one would be placed on an existing wall at the southernmost Michigan Road entrance (S3), and the final two would be placed on either side of the 38th Street entrance (S2), per below plans.

Variances would be required for placement of each of those new signs:

- **S1:** The canopy sign proposed (a type of primary building sign) would have a separation of more than 18 inches from the wall of the primary building itself. A maximum projection of 18 inches for canopy signs would be allowed.
- **S2:** These two monument signs would be the second and third overall primary freestanding signs along the 38th Street frontage (the 'Newfields' sign at the corner of 38th and Michigan would be the first), and a maximum of two primary freestanding signs per shared frontage would be allowed. A distance of 300 feet is required between primary freestanding signs on the same frontage, and the two new S2 signs would be approximately 75 feet apart. Additionally, the sign heights of 9 feet would exceed the maximum 5-foot height for the district.
- **S3:** Placement of this monument sign would result in a sign height of 12 feet (5-foot maximum).

The existing pylon sign along 38th Street near the proposed S2 signs would be removed as a part of this scope of work, and would therefore not impact the proximity calculation above.

This property is zoned SU-7 to allow for charitable, philanthropic and not-for-profit uses such as the art museum, gardens, and associated structures that exist at the property. Similarly, the Comprehensive Plan recommends the site for Regional Special Uses as well as placing it within an Environmentally Sensitive Areas overlay. The Plan does not offer any specific guidance related to signage; additional information is available within the 'Comprehensive Plan Analysis' section below.

The design and placement of the proposed canopy sign would not allow for it to be classified as a wall sign per the Ordinance, since the sign itself would be suspended from an architectural feature as opposed to being attached to the building façade. This is a somewhat unique situation, and the current building form would not allow for placement of a canopy sign that would meet the Ordinance standard of being placed within 18 inches of the wall while also still being visible for patrons of the museum. Staff feels that the proposed canopy sign would serve a similar function to a wall sign or other primary building sign, and the canopy sign comfortably meets other standards for sign size, width, etc. Staff therefore recommends **approval** of the requested variance for the canopy sign affixed to the primary building.

Findings of Fact provided by the applicant indicate that the proposed S2 and S3 signs would be of a similar scale and intensity to signs already existing along the busy 38th Street and Michigan Road frontages. Staff would note that the existing sign at the corner of 38th and Michigan would have substantial separation from the newly proposed signs, to the extent that the existing sign would not be visible from either of the newly proposed locations. Staff also feels that utilizing existing decorative walls for placement of the monument signs would be preferable to establishment of new primary freestanding signs, even if deviating from the maximum height of 5 feet. For these reasons, staff recommends **approval** of the variances related to sign separation, number and height for the proposed S2 and S3 signs.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Existing Zoning	SU-7	
Existing Land Use	Art Museum	
Comprehensive Plan	Regional Special Use	
Surrounding Context	Zoning	Surrounding Context
	North: SU-7 / SU-2	North: Park / Church
	South: SU-34	South: Country Club
	East: SU-10	East: Cemetery
	West: SU-7	West: Park
Thoroughfare Plan		
38 th Street	Primary Arterial	130-foot existing right-of-way and 114-foot proposed right-of-way
Michigan Road	Primary Arterial	100-foot existing right-of-way and 88-foot proposed right-of-way
Context Area	Compact	
Floodway / Floodway Fringe	No	
Overlay	Yes	
Wellfield Protection Area	No	
Site Plan	04/21/2026	
Site Plan (Amended)	N/A	
Elevations	04/21/2026	
Elevations (Amended)	05/11/2026	
Landscape Plan	N/A	
Findings of Fact	04/21/2026	
Findings of Fact (Amended)	N/A	

Comprehensive Plan

- Marion County Land Use Plan Pattern Book

Pattern Book / Land Use Plan

- The Regional Special Use non-typology land use category provides for public, semi-public and private land uses that serve a specific institutional purpose for a significant portion of the county. Examples are large-scale, generally stable institutional uses such as cemeteries, hospitals, universities, high schools, government complexes, large museums, the Indiana State Fairgrounds, and the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.
 - The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ES) overlay is intended for areas containing high quality woodlands, wetlands, or other natural resources that should be protected.

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

2018HOV024, Variance of development standards of the Consolidated Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance to provide for a 10-foot tall, 532-square foot freestanding sign, with a seven-foot front setback (maximum 240-square foot sign and 15-foot setback required), **approved**.

2010DV2016, Variance of development standards of the Sign Regulations to provide for a seven-foot tall sign within 100 feet of the PK-1 protected district to the south (maximum four-foot tall sign permitted within 600 feet of a protected district) and within the right-of-way of the west-bound exit ramp from West 38th Street (signs not permitted in the right-of-way), **approved**.

2004HOV032, Variance of development standards of the Sign Regulations to provide for three fifteen-foot tall, 108-square foot triangular rotating pylon signs (not permitted) and a 51-square foot wall sign resulting in 12.10 percent façade coverage of an architectural landscape wall (maximum three percent façade coverage permitted) with a 1.5-foot setback from the existing right-of-way of West 38th Street and Michigan Road (minimum fifteen-foot setback from the existing right-of-way required), and to provide for a 52.5-square foot wall sign resulting in 5.4 percent façade coverage of an architectural landscape wall (maximum three-percent façade coverage permitted) with a five-foot setback from Michigan Road (minimum fifteen-foot setback from the existing right-of-way required), and to provide for a 25.50-square foot wall sign resulting in 13.40-percent façade coverage (maximum three-percent façade coverage permitted) with a 1.82-foot setback from the existing right-of-way of Michigan Road (minimum fifteen-foot setback from the existing right-of-way required), **approved**.

2001ZON069, Rezoning of 7.996 acres from D-S to SU-7, **approved**.

67-Z-20, Rezoning of approximately 42.712 acres, being in D-S district, to Special Uses (7) classification to provide for the construction and operation of an art museum and theater/auditorium for musical, dramatic, literary and other culture events and civic purposes, **approved**.

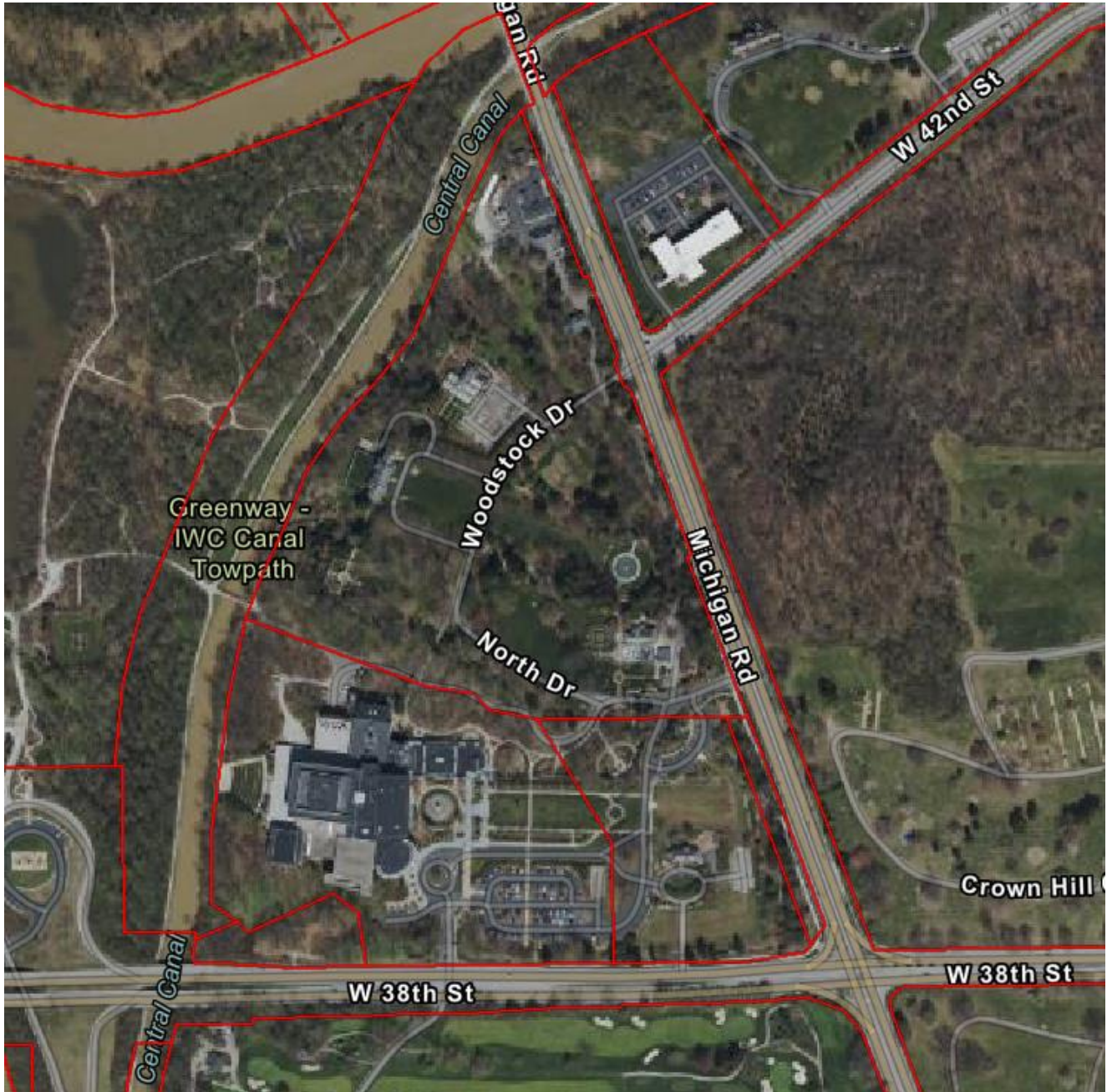
ZONING HISTORY – VICINITY

2008ZON026 ; 1850 East 38th Street (west of site), Rezoning of 80 acres, being in the D-A (FW)(FF) District, to the SU-7 classification to provide for an art and nature park associated with an existing museum, **approved**.

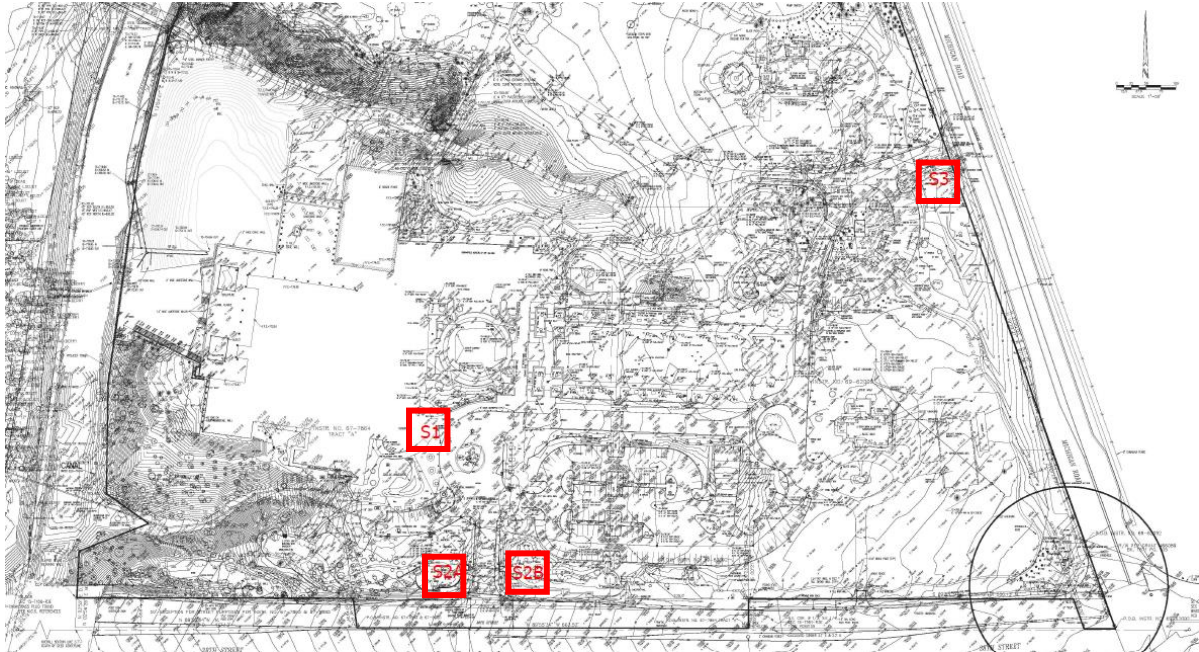
2008DV2001 ; 3402 Boulevard Place (southeast of site), Variance of Development Standards of the Sign Regulations to provide for a sixteen-foot tall, 112.375-square foot pole sign, with a two-foot front setback (minimum fifteen-foot front setback required), **approved**.

EXHIBITS

2026DV1023 ; Aerial Map

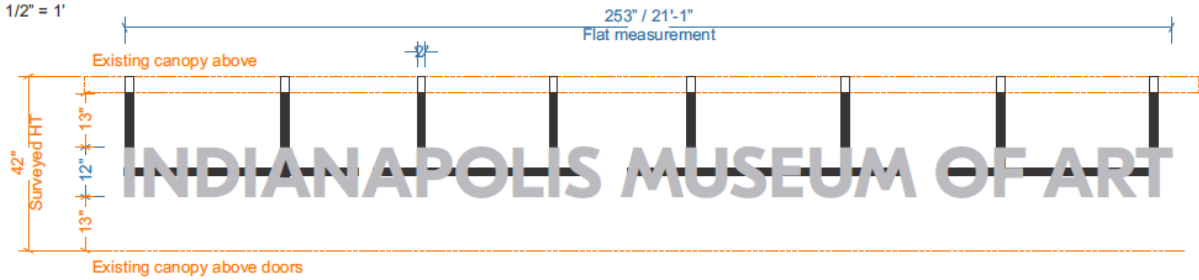


2026DV1023 ; Site Plan (Partial)

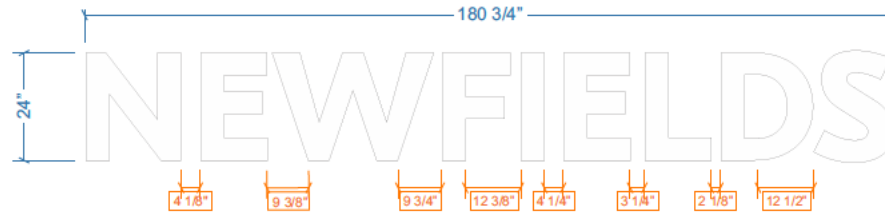


2026DV1023 ; Elevations (S1 – Canopy Sign)

Scale: 1/2" = 1'



2026DV1023 ; Elevations (S2 – 38th Frontage)



Scale: 1/2" = 1'

S2A and S2B • EXTERIOR

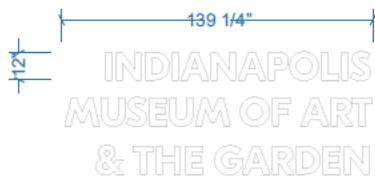
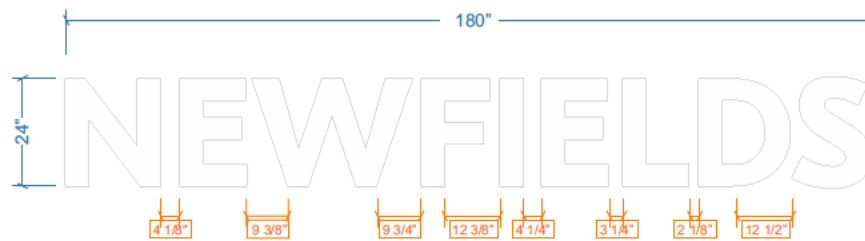
Fabricate and install qty (2) sets of non-lit letters • 1/2" flat-cut acrylic letters painted White
Stud-mounted via custom aluminum "L" brackets (site survey to determine curvature and conditions of install locations)



Scale: 1/4" = 1'



2026DV1023 ; Elevations (S3 – Michigan Frontage)





2026DV1023 ; Findings of Fact

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

Granting approval of this petition will not be injurious to the public health or general welfare of the community. The proposed signage is not much taller than the existing signage it is to replace.

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:

There will be no adverse manner to the adjacent property's. The proposed signage is meant to help the general public find these locations.

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

These signs will be used as a wayfinding purpose for this Museum. The strict application of the ordinance could lead to difficulty of people not finding this site. This is already a very busy section of road through the City of Indianapolis.

2026DV1023 ; Photographs



Photo 1: Primary Building Viewed from South



Photo 2: S1 Sign Location Viewed from West

2026DV1023 ; Photographs (continued)



Photo 3: Western S2 Location Viewed from South

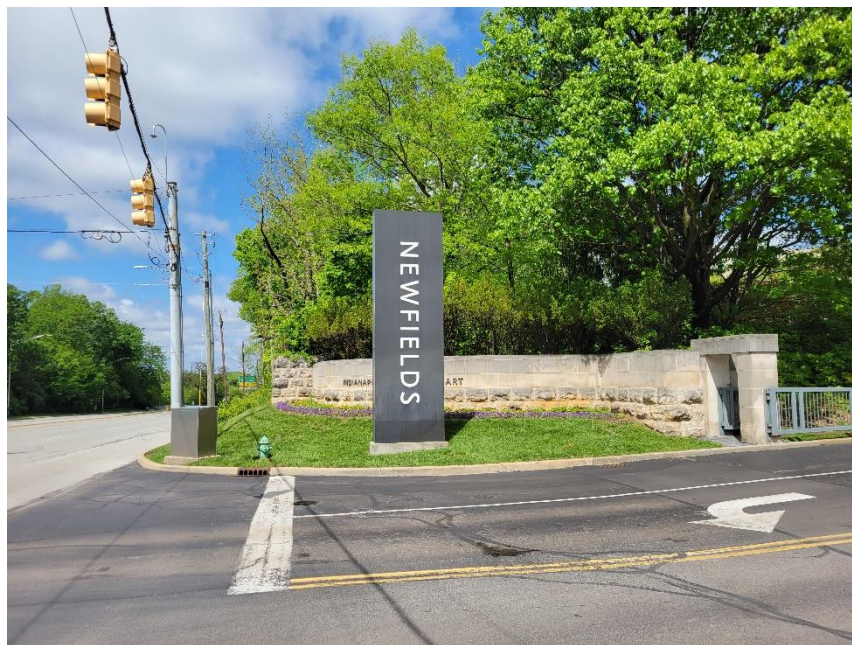


Photo 4: Western S2 Location Viewed from East

2026DV1023 ; Photographs (continued)



Photo 5: Eastern S2 Location Viewed from South



Photo 6: Eastern S2 Location Viewed from West

2026DV1023 ; Photographs (continued)



Photo 7: S3 Sign Location Viewed from East



Photo 8: Existing Signage at 38th/Michigan Intersection