

City Planning Department



Memo

To: Cranston City Plan Commission
From: Amelia Lavalley – Planning Intern
Date: June 6, 2023
Re: **Dimensional Variance @ 985 Oaklawn Avenue**

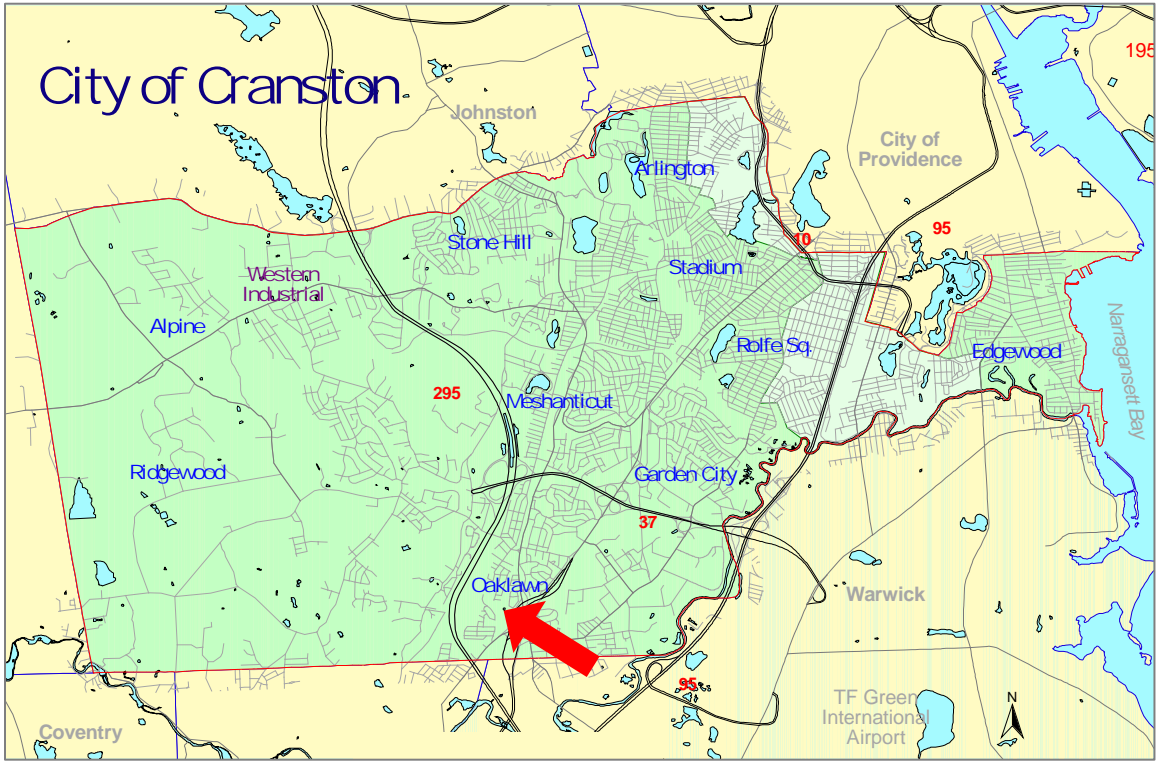
Owners: Commonwealth Associates
Applicant: J&J Gasbarro Oaklawn Liquors
Location: 985 Oaklawn Avenue, AP 18, Lot 1232
Zone: C-2 (Neighborhood Business)
FLU: Highway Commercial Services

DIMENSIONAL VARIANCE REQUEST:

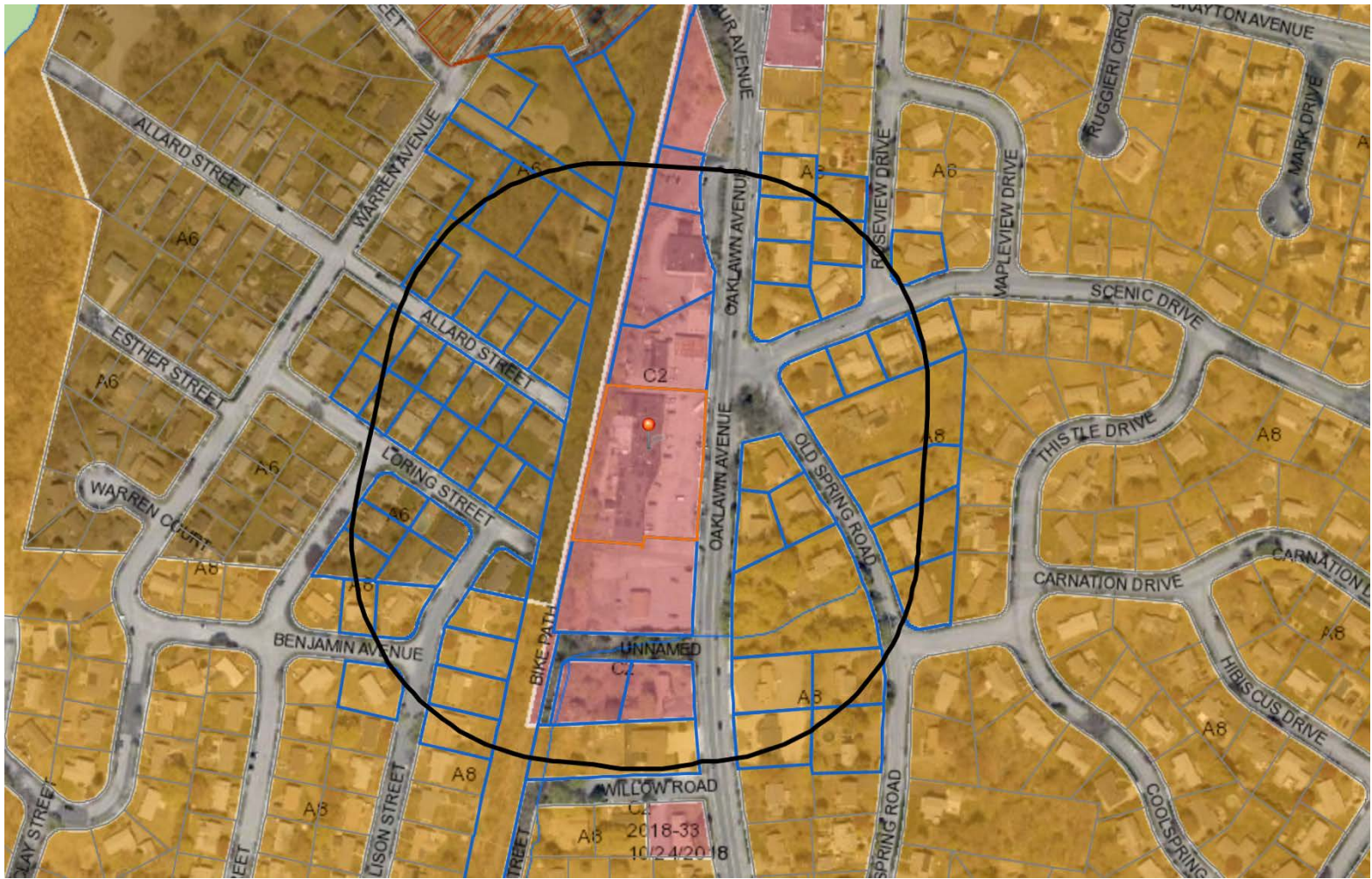
To allow a double-faced, digital electronic sign (message board) to be installed to an existing exterior sign in a retail plaza which requires relief for the following reasons: [17.72.010 – Signs]

- The pylon sign includes an electronic message board component, which is not an explicitly allowed sign type in the C-2 zone.

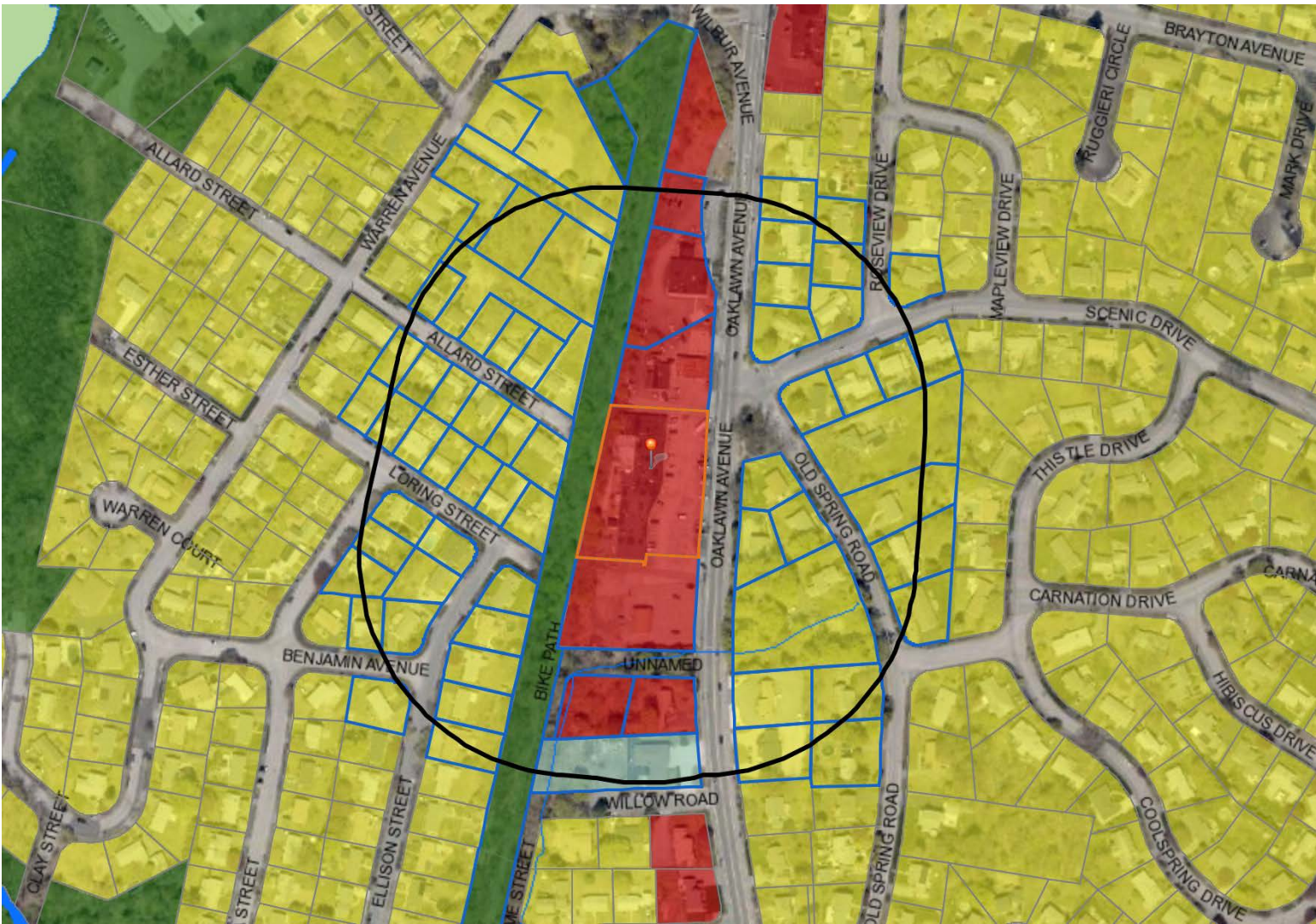
LOCATION MAP



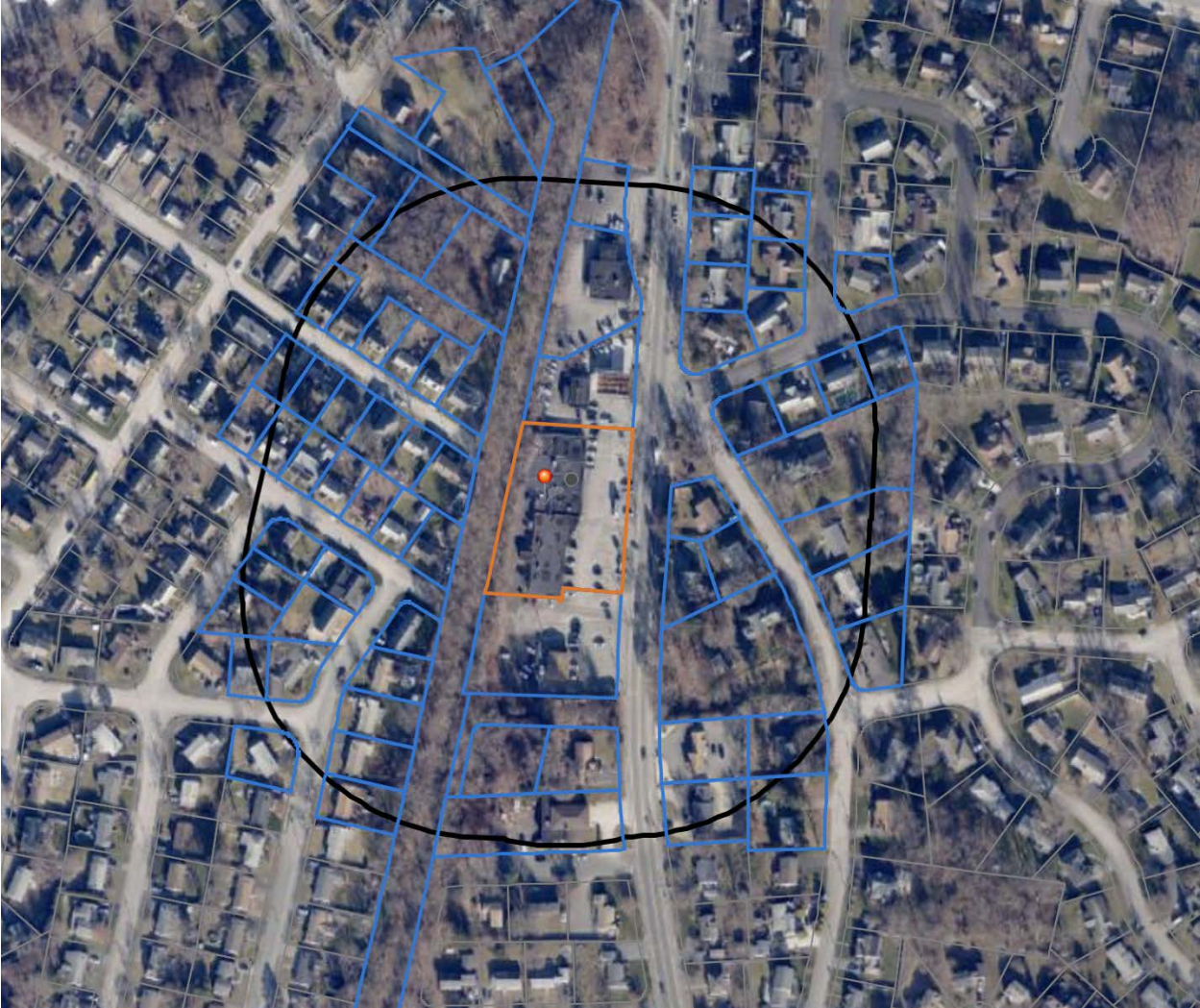
ZONING MAP



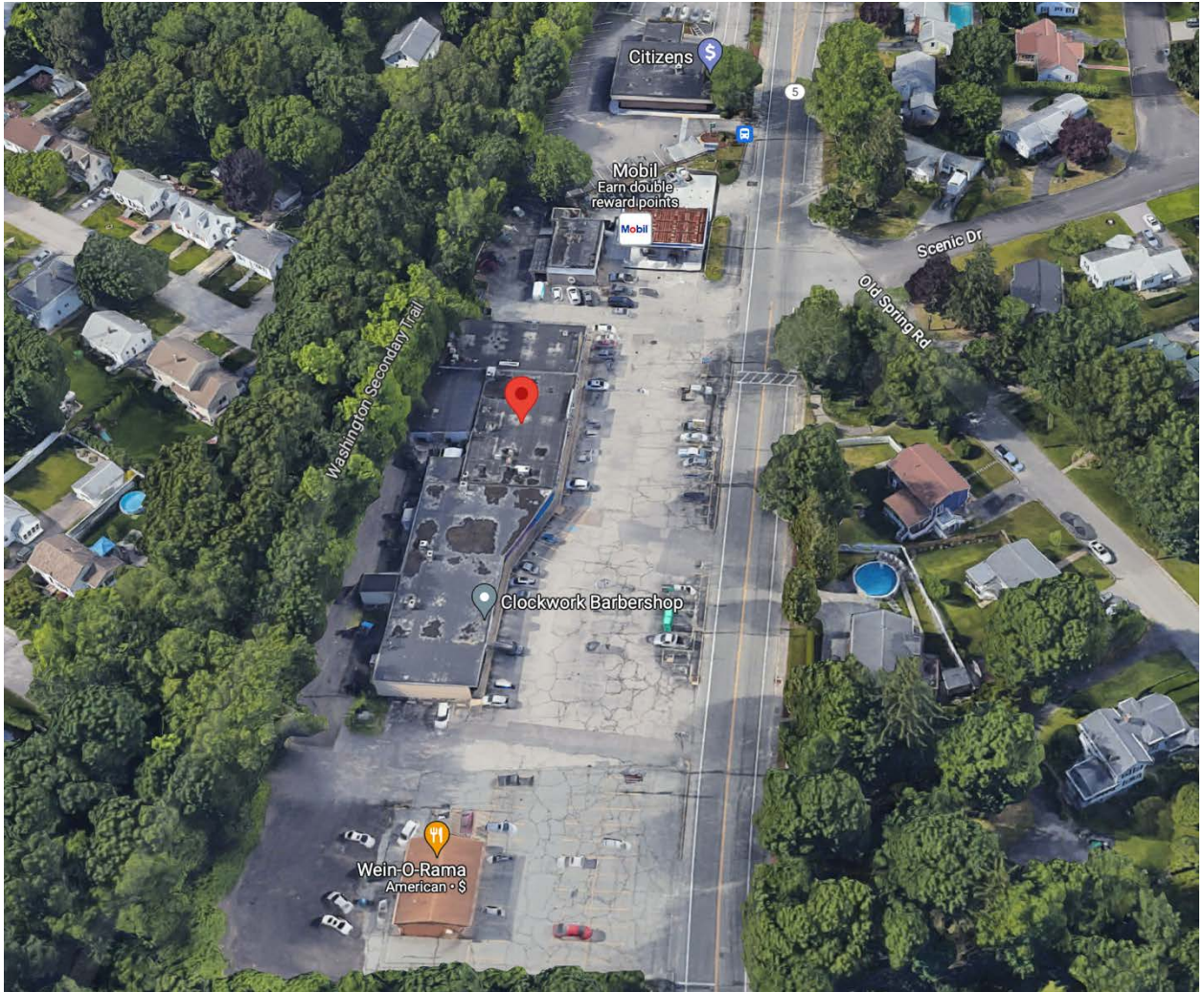
FUTURE LAND USE MAP



AERIAL VIEW



3-D AERIAL VIEW



STREET VIEW



(from Oaklawn Avenue)

STREET VIEW

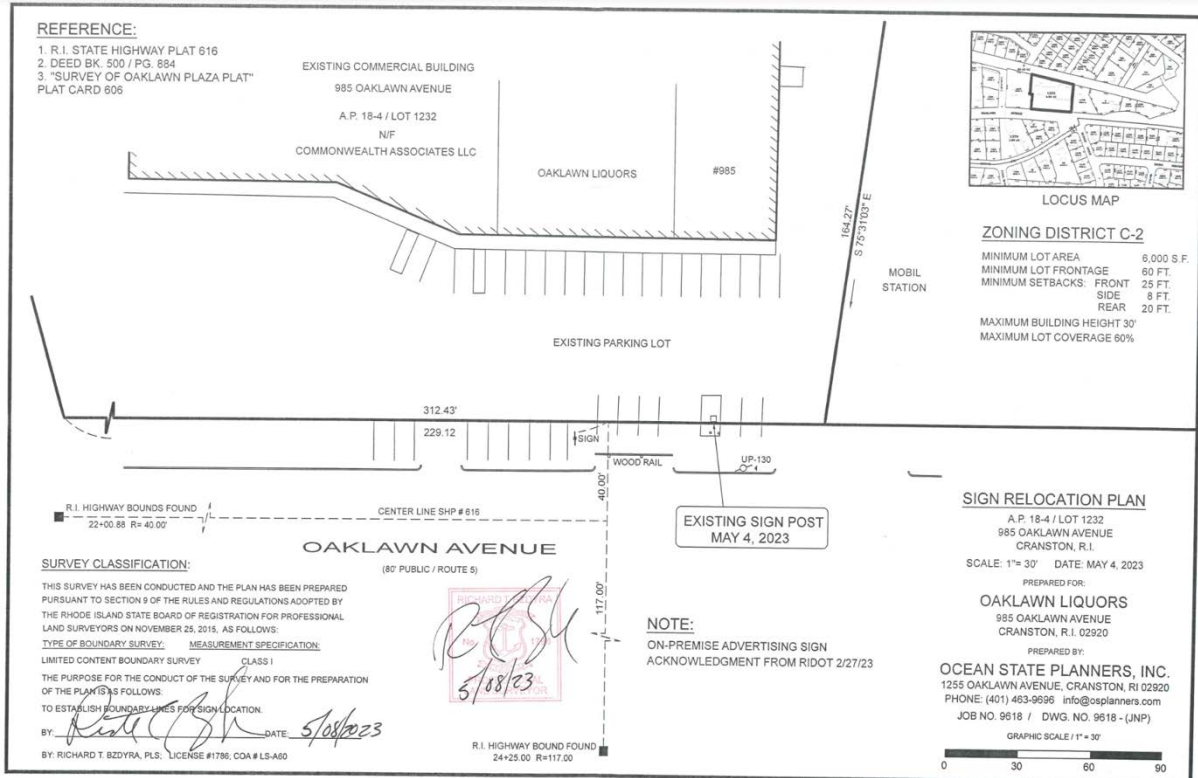


(facing south on Oaklawn Avenue)

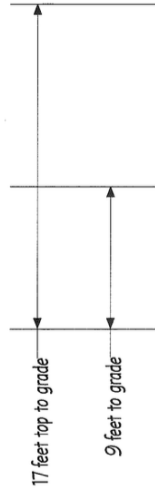
EXISTING SIGNAGE ON PROPERTY



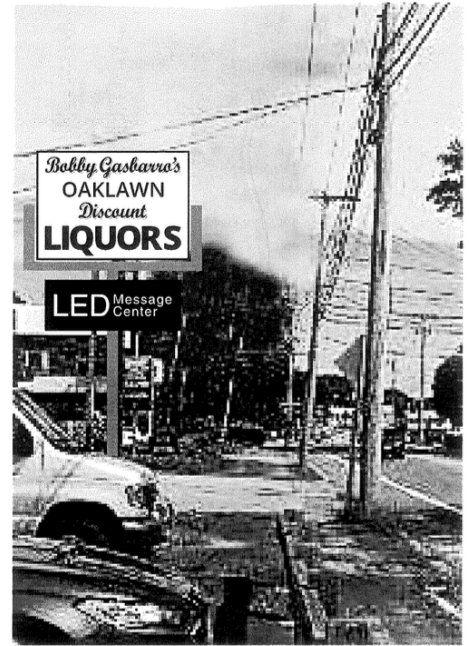
SITE RELOCATION PLAN



RENDERINGS OF PROPOSED SIGN



Existing sign - 60" X 84", total 35 sq ft.
"Ice" sign - 24" X 60", total 10 sq ft.
Total 45 sq ft.



Existing sign - 60" X 84", total 35 sq ft.
New LED sign 28" X 75", total 14.58 sq ft.
Total 49.58 sq ft.

JOB: GASBARORO LIQUORS LOCATION: 985 OAKLAWN AVE CRANSTON RI	FILE: GASBARORO LIQUORS_SIGN W LED DISPLAY_1.31.20 DATE: 1.31.20	PROJECT MANAGER: BS DESIGNED BY: KRK	CLIENT APPROVAL _____ Date _____ NOTICE TO CLIENT This drawing is a representation of how your signage will appear. By signing this drawing you are accepting the design as it is presented on this sheet.	 221 Jefferson Roadstead • Warwick, RI P 401.738.8955 F 401.738.8244
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This design proposal is the property of AA Thrifty Sign & Awning. It is furnished with the expressed understanding that it will not be copied in any manner without written permission.

PLANNING STAFF FINDINGS

1. The subject parcel (AP 18, Lot 1232) is located at 985 Oaklawn Avenue in the C-2 zone designated for Neighborhood business.
2. The applicant seeks to install a digital electronic sign (message board) to an existing exterior sign in a retail plaza on Oaklawn Avenue.
3. Per the city's sign code, in the C-2 zone "Total sign area shall not exceed the lesser of the following: one hundred (100) square feet or twenty (20) percent of the street-facing facade wall area" [17.72.010(3) – Signs].
 - a. The total sign area between the existing sign and proposed LED sign is (49.58 ft²).
4. The applicant requires relief for sign type due to the inclusion of an LED/electronic message board component.
5. The building has several existing signs that are in excess of the individual signage standards (as pictured previously on the 'existing signage' slide).
6. The applicant is only requesting zoning relief for the proposed electronic LED message sign and the existing nonconforming signs are *not* included as part of the applicant's request.
7. Electronic LED message signs of any type are not permitted in the zoning code in any zone. Per Zoning Sect 17.72.010.G. [Signs Prohibited Under This Section]: "*All signs not expressly permitted under this section or exempt from regulation hereunder in accordance with the previous section are prohibited in the city.*"
8. There are no other known "animated signs" in the nearby area. There are several nearby gas stations that do have signs with LED gas pricings, but these are technically not "animated signs" as defined by City Code as a sign must change more than eight times per day to meet the definition. It is a subjective determination as to whether the sign would be out of character with the commercial area.

STAFF ANALYSIS

The Comprehensive Plan Land Use Element states "The City should adopt design and signage guidelines along commercial corridors, such as Reservoir Avenue, Park Avenue, Elmwood Avenue, Atwood Avenue, and Oaklawn Avenue to improve the attractiveness and quality of the businesses" (p. 34). Although "attractiveness" is subjective, the applicant has not provided specific guidelines regarding the type of graphic to be displayed on the proposed LED sign (i.e., static image/logo, changing graphics/text, banner messages, color/monochrome, frequency etc.), which may be out of character with the surrounding neighborhood/businesses.

It is salient to note that the application materials included a sign design proposal that is *inconsistent* with the existing signage on the property. The existing sign does not conform to sign code standards, and there is no record of relief for the size of the existing sign, nor for any of the wall signage covering the store front.

The Comprehensive Plan's Land Use Principle 4 advises to "*Protect the natural, historic and visual resources that define the neighborhoods*" (p.34). Staff is aware of the highway-

commercial character of Oaklawn Avenue but believe that the installation of an LED sign does not conform to the surrounding neighborhood, as there is a mix of commercial and residential zones within the surrounding neighborhood in a 400' radius.

RECOMMENDATION

Due to the fact that the applicant has not provided explicit guidelines regarding the type of LED sign to be installed, both the existing freestanding signs and storefront signs violate the sign code, and due to the finding that some sign types would alter the character of the neighborhood as proposed while others would not, staff recommends the Plan Commission forward a **negative recommendation** on the application to the Zoning Board of Review.