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CITY COUNCIL
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November 9, 2026

Planning Commission
c/o Beth Ashman, Planning Director
869 Park Ave
Cranston, RI 02910

RE: 1 Rhodes Place – Assessor's Plat 1, Lots 5 & 184
Application for Dimensional and Use Variance

Dear Ms. Ashman,

I am writing to state my concerns regarding the applicants (Shriners) request for relief per 17.92.010 – Variance; Sections 17.72.010-Signs; 17.20.100-Corner visibility; 17.88.030-Extension.

LED Signage

The applicant has proposed a 33 sq ft LED signage (which is already constructed) at Shriners in Cranston, specifically how this type of signage may affect the historic character of the surrounding area, the safety of pedestrians, and the quality of life for nearby residents.

This property is within a historic area associated with Pawtuxet Village, a community known for its historic character, walkability, neighborhood businesses, and pedestrian-friendly streets.

Pawtuxet Village is not a commercial corridor designed for large, brightly illuminated digital displays. Its identity is rooted in its historic surroundings, traditional architecture, and the relationship between its residential streets and local businesses. Introducing large LED signage risks changing that character in a way that cannot easily be reversed.

LED signs are fundamentally different from traditional signage. They introduce brightness, illumination, and potentially changing images into an otherwise subdued environment. During daylight hours, the impact may appear minimal. At night, however, the effects can be significantly different.

My greatest concern is for the residents who live near this proposed sign. Their homes should not be subjected to unnecessary light encroachment, glare, or nighttime illumination. The absence of significant surrounding commercial lighting can make a digital sign appear even brighter.

Has the Board requested a professional photometric lighting plan? Have measurements been provided showing the expected light levels at the property boundaries and, more importantly, at neighboring homes and windows? Has anyone evaluated the nighttime impact from the perspective of the residents who will experience this lighting?

There is also significant public safety concern. Pawtuxet Village is known for its walkability. Residents and visitors frequently walk throughout this area, crossing streets to access neighborhood businesses, parks, and surrounding destinations.Adding a large, illuminated digital sign introduces another visual distraction for drivers in an area where pedestrian activity is already an important part of daily life. We should be particularly mindful of children and families walking in this neighborhood.

I would ask whether the City has evaluated the number and locations of public and private school bus stops in the surrounding area. Has anyone studied how many schoolchildren are dropped off or picked up nearby? Have pedestrian crossing patterns and school-related traffic been evaluated?

A driver looking toward a changing LED display could potentially miss a pedestrian entering a crosswalk, a child crossing the street, or a vehicle stopping for a school bus. These are legitimate safety considerations that deserve investigation before approval, not after an incident occurs. Digital signs are designed to draw the eye, and studies have shown that driver distraction—even momentary—can increase the likelihood of accidents. This is especially concerning in a neighborhood setting, where pedestrians, cyclists, and families are part of the daily traffic mix. The margin for error is smaller, and the consequences of distraction can be more severe.

Has the City Traffic Engineer been asked to review this proposal? Has a traffic and pedestrian safety assessment been completed that accounts for the existing school bus activity, pedestrian crossings, and the increased attention demanded of drivers in this area?

I also believe we need to consider precedent. Once digital LED signage is permitted in a historic, walkable neighborhood, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish why similar requests should be denied elsewhere. These individual decisions can gradually change the character of an entire community. Gradually, this could lead to a corridor that feels more commercialized and less residential, changing Edgewood’s identity in a way that may not align with long-term planning goals.

To be clear, this is not opposition to Shriners or the important work the organization does. It is about ensuring that signage is appropriate for its surroundings and does not come at the expense of neighboring residents or public safety. I also opposed a LED Sign for Praise Tabernacle in April of 2026, which was given a negative recommendation by the Planning Commission and ultimately the church rescinded its application from the Zoning Board. The Church understood the importance of being a good neighbor and could see the opposition and wanted to work with the Community.

Traditional signage can communicate an organization's message without introducing the same degree of illumination and visual distraction. Additionally, in 2026 the social media platform is so large that it’s hard to make an argument that this type of signage is required or needed. While I commend Shriners for being part of our community and making it better for the children, family,

and community. I would like them to maintain this “good neighbor” status. Adding this signage is not what the community wants to see, change their small neighborhood. I am asking if they continue to be good neighbors and part of our community. But this is not how that is achieved. In closing, I urge the Board to carefully consider how LED signage aligns with Edgewood’s identity and the existing conditions at this intersection. Protecting neighborhood character and prioritizing public safety are core responsibilities of thoughtful planning. I want to ask why these signs are prohibited in the City of Cranston Zoning and only permitted with a waiver. If there are no impacts from these signs, then these would not be prohibited in all Zoning Districts. Decisions like this may seem incremental, but they shape the long-term trajectory of our communities. This will change our community and not for the better.

I respectfully ask the Board to consider the historic designation, the unique character of Pawtuxet Village, the residential impacts, and the pedestrian safety concerns. I also ask that the applicant provide a professional photometric study and that the City evaluate school bus locations and pedestrian activity before making a decision.

Ultimately, we need to ask ourselves: What kind of community do we want to preserve? Pawtuxet Village's historic character and walkability are valuable assets. We should be careful not to compromise them through signage that may be incompatible with the surrounding neighborhood.

Bar/Patio/Kitchen Area

I also oppose the proposed addition of an outdoor bar, kitchen, and patio at the Shriners.

My primary concern is that these improvements were constructed without the required building permits. The outdoor kitchen and functional components of the bar require electrical and water service, yet apparently no permits were obtained through the Building Department. Additionally all constructed roofed structures are required to meet snow load, and the footings for these structures were not inspected by a Building Official.

Now, the applicant is asking the City to approve something that has already been built. Had the proper permits been requested beforehand, the proposal would have undergone the appropriate review and, without the necessary zoning waiver, would have been denied. This is a classic case of asking for forgiveness rather than permission. That should not become an acceptable way to circumvent the City's zoning and permitting process.

Additionally, this property abuts residential homes. An outdoor bar and patio creates legitimate concerns about late-night noise, daytime activity, and residents' ability to peacefully enjoy their own backyards.

Finally, where is the stormwater management plan? With so much of the existing property covered by impervious surfaces, how will additional runoff be prevented from flowing onto neighboring properties or into the City's right-of-way? The City and abutting homeowners should not be left to deal with the consequences of inadequate drainage.

I respectfully ask the Board to issue a negative recommendation on the proposed LED signage and the Bar/Patio/Outdoor Kitchen. I have read the staff memo with recommendation and fully support their review of the proposed application and their recommendation to issue a negative finding on this matter.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Bridget Graziano
Cranston City Council, Ward 1