

City Planning Department



Memo

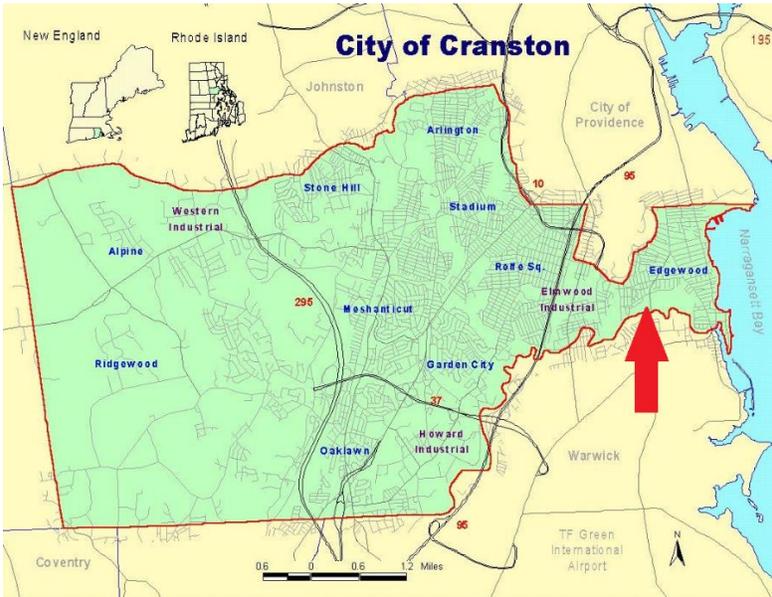
To: Cranston City Plan Commission
From: Alex Berardo, Planning Technician
Date: December 3, 2021
Re: Dimensional Variance Application for 275 Warwick Avenue - Signage

Owner: Vereit Real Estate L.P.
Applicant: Volta Charging, LLC
Location: 275 Warwick Ave, AP 4, Lot 2659
Zone: C-5 (Heavy Business)
FLU: Highway Commercial/Services

DIMENSIONAL VARIANCE REQUEST:

1. To allow two new electric vehicle charging stations that exceed multiple dimensional standards within the zoning code for a C-5 zone [17.20 – Permitted Uses]. The monument-style charging stations will also include an LED advertisement signage component, which is not allowed per the zoning code. [17.72 – Signs]

LOCATION MAP



NEIGHBORHOOD AERIAL

(subject parcel marked in orange; 400-foot radius marked in black)



AERIAL CLOSE UP



3-D VIEW (facing southwest)



STREET VIEW (from parking lot)



PROPOSED MONUMENT SIGN REQUIRING VARIANCE



PROPOSED CHARGING STATION DIMENSIONS

Volta Gen4 L2 Station

Volta provides turn-key Electric Vehicle (EV) charging services for premium retail and entertainment destinations. We install and maintain the charging amenity at no cost to site partners as well as EV drivers, driving increased property value and attracting more customers who stay longer.

VOLTA STATION BENEFITS

- Installation, equipment and maintenance is paid by Volta
- Charges all electric vehicles
- Free electricity supported through third party content on displays
- Volta stations are occupied 80% of the retail day
- Volta has provided 88M free sponsored electric miles, delivered 25 gigawatt hours and eliminated over 39M pounds of CO2 emissions

CHARGING UNIT INFORMATION (Single Charging Units)

- Size: H 85.0" x W 36.5" x D 15.5"
- Display Size: H 48" x W 27"
- Power Type: 208/240VAC, 48A, 10kW max; UL 2202
- Plug: SAE J1772 compliant connector

POWER REQUIREMENTS

- Charging unit: 60A/2P, 208/240 breaker
- Display/connectivity: 20A/1P, 120V breaker

INSTALLATION REQUIREMENTS

- Wire Diameter: #6 AWG minimum. Larger for longer conduit runs
- Conduit Diameter: 1.5" minimum per station. Larger conduit required for runs over 250'



- 55" Media Display
- Charges up to 30 miles per hour
- Universal J1772 connections
- Cable Management
- Fully Networked

SITE PLAN



SITE PLAN CLOSE-UP



EXISTING CONDITIONS/OTHER SIGNS ON PROPERTY



FINDINGS OF FACT:

- The applicant proposes to install two new monument-style electric vehicle charging stations in the Stop & Shop parking lot which trigger relief from use requirements within Section 17.20 (Permitted Uses) of the zoning code as well as dimensional requirements within Section 17.72 (Signs) of the zoning code.
- The applicant itemized specific relief requests in their application form, namely the following elements:
 - Permitted Uses (Sections 17.20.010 and 17.20.030)
 - Electric vehicle charging stations are not named as a permitted use in the Schedule of Uses for the C-5 zone. The applicant argues that the charging stations should be considered full-service fuel stations, which is a permitted use in the C-5 zone.
 - Signs (Sections 17.72.010 and 17.72.010(6))
 - The charging units, by virtue of their built-in LED screen to be used for advertising, also function as monument signs; the height of the units (7 feet) exceeds the 4-foot maximum height allowed for monument signs in a C-5 zone. Additionally, animated LED signs are not explicitly allowed under the zoning code.
- The applicant also clarified that the animated LED signage component of the charging units would display static images that change every 8 seconds, in keeping with FHA guidelines. The LED screens would be backlit, similarly to flat-screen televisions.

ANALYSIS:

The applicant, Volta Charging, LLC, proposes to install two electric vehicle charging stations in the Stop & Shop parking lot and reserve the two adjacent parking spaces for electric vehicle parking only. This applicant requires relief from Sections 17.20 and 17.72 of the zoning code.

The applicant's business model is to sell advertising space to fund the purchase of the electricity it provides for free to EV drivers. To this end, both sides of each charging unit feature substantial LED screens (48" tall x 27" wide) that display stationary image advertisements, which change every 8 seconds.

The City's sign code makes no reference to or allowance for animated LED signs in any zone; furthermore, Zoning Sect 17.72.010.G. ("Signs Prohibited Under This Section") states that "All signs not expressly permitted under this section or exempt from regulation hereunder in accordance with the previous section are prohibited in the city." Staff understands that signage influences the character and aesthetic of the City, and as such it seeks to maintain a reasonable standard for assessing requests for animated LED signs.

Staff would note that the City has done little to encourage electric vehicle charging stations in spite of the fact that its Comprehensive Plan directs it to "plan for and enhance alternative transportation modes" (Comprehensive Plan Goal CG-6). In this instance, the private sector is taking the lead on incentivizing the use of electric vehicles by providing this amenity to the public.

Staff recognizes the nature of the applicant's business model and finds that allowing animated LED signs at this site in exchange for the provision of free electric power constitutes a reasonable trade-off. Additionally, staff agrees with the applicant's contention regarding the charging stations' minimal adverse impact on the aesthetics of the area, as the nearer of the two charging units will be set back some 80 feet from Warwick Avenue.

RECOMMENDATION:

Due to the findings that the proposed improvement is generally consistent with the Cranston Comprehensive Plan, but that there are potential safety concerns with the sign's massing and location as it relates to vehicle sightlines, staff recommends the Plan Commission forward a **positive recommendation** on the application to the Zoning Board of Review contingent upon the following conditions:

- The frequency of static images changing on the animated LED screens be reduced from every 8 seconds (as currently proposed) to every 20 seconds.
- No animated images of any kind shall be displayed on the screens.
- The animated LED screens' brightness must be dimmed during evening hours to ensure they do not interfere with motorists' ability to see pedestrians or other vehicles.