

City Planning Department



Memo

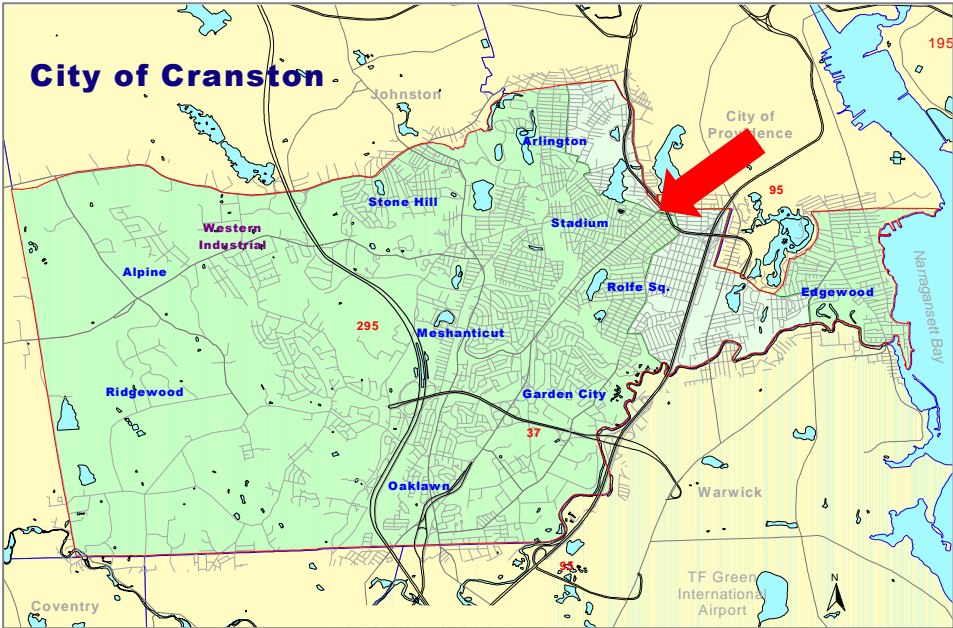
To: Cranston City Plan Commission
From: Joshua Berry, AICP, Senior Planner
Date: September 3, 2021
Re: Dimensional Variance Application for 455 Reservoir Avenue

Owner: Vasquez Properties, LLC
Applicant: Marisela Vasquez
Location: 455 Reservoir Avenue (AP 6, Lot 1011)
Zone: C-4 (Highway business)
FLU: Highway Commercial/Services

DIMENSIONAL VARIANCE REQUEST:

1. To allow two (2) wall signs that were installed without benefit of a permit to remain that are larger than the maximum wall sign allowed in a C-4 zone [17.72.010 – Signs]

LOCATION MAP



ZONING MAP



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City of Cranston

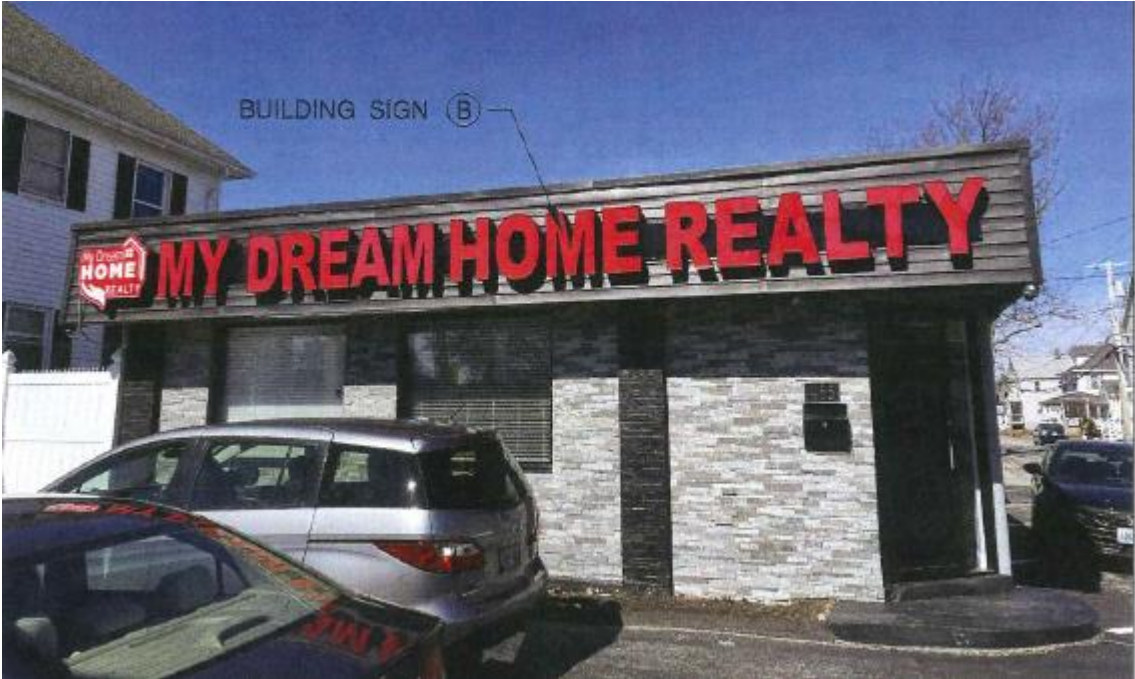
NEIGHBORHOOD AERIAL



3D Aerial (facing west)



EXISTING CONDITION (front)



EXISTING CONDITION (side)



PREVIOUS BUILDING CONDITION

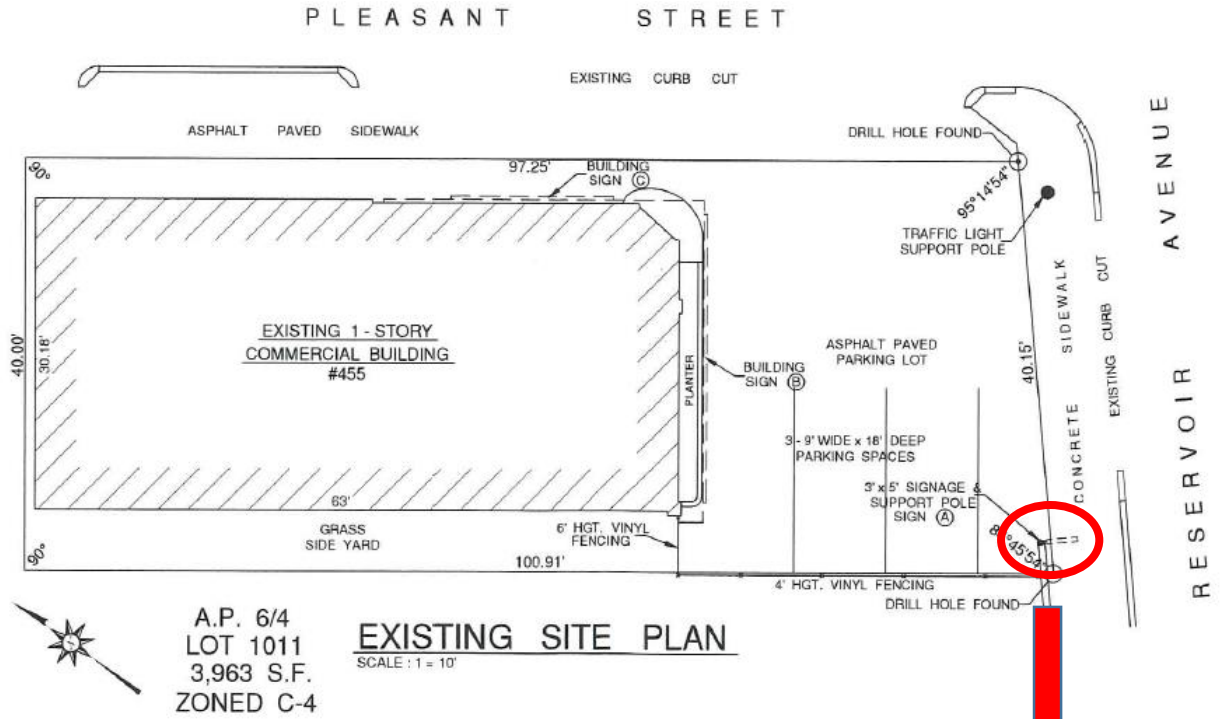


EXISTING BUILDING CONDITION

(the signs in this image are digitally imposed, see previous page for actual sign conditions)



SURVEY



**EXISTING
FREE-
STANDING
SIGN**



FINDINGS OF FACT:

1. The applicant has installed two (2) new internally illuminated wall signs for a real estate office that exceed the 30 ft² maximum in C-4 zoning. The sign facing Reservoir Avenue is 56 ft² (28' x 2') and the sign facing Pleasant Street is 43 ft² (16' x 2'-8"). Both signs were installed without benefit of a permit.
2. A freestanding sign was also installed on an existing sign pole without benefit of a permit. The sign is 30 ft² (3' x 5' per side) which complies with zoning. However, the sign hangs over the sidewalk/right-of-way and this issue is yet to be resolved, but is not part of this variance application.
3. The wall sign facing Reservoir Avenue extends for 28' of the 30' wide building and therefore is disproportionate / oversized in relationship to the building.
4. The wall sign facing Pleasant Street has a *backing* with the height of 2'-8" extending several inches above and below the lettering. The backing material is dark and generally blends into the building materials (aluminum siding), but is technically part of the sign area calculation. The height of the letters appears to be less than 2'. If the backing were not included in the calculation, the sign may comply with the 30 ft² area maximum. Additionally, this side of the building facing Pleasant Street is 63' and therefore the sign is **NOT** disproportionate / oversized in relationship to the building.
5. The applicant has stated that they believe the signs are an important component of their business plan to ensure the signs are visible to pedestrians and drivers. There is no reason to believe that compliant signage would not accomplish the desired result.
6. The Comprehensive Plan calls for guidelines for signage and streetscape improvements, but does not provide detail or clear direction on what the guidelines would regulate or prohibit. In the absence of such, there are no significant inconsistencies in the proposal with the Comprehensive Plan.

PLANNING ANALYSIS

The applicant, Marisela Vasquez, and/or My Dream Home Realty, LLC have invested significantly into the previously vacant property which, judging by historical street view images, was in disrepair. These efforts benefit the city, however, as part of the rehabilitation of this commercial property, wall signage was installed which exceeds the maximum area allowed under zoning without benefit of a permit.

Three signs have been installed as follows, only the wall signs require relief:

<u>EXISTING SIGNAGE</u>		
FREESTANDING POLE SIGN (A) (RESERVOIR AVENUE)	(A)	3' x 5' = 15 SQ. FT.
BUILDING SIGN (B)	(B)	28' x 2' = 56 SQ. FT.
BUILDING SIGN (C)	(C)	16' x 2'- 8" = 43 SQ. FT.
		<hr/>
		TOTAL SIGNAGE SQ. FTGE. = 114 SQ. FT.

The freestanding sign complies with the area maximum and is not part of this variance application. The sign was placed on an existing pole and encroaches into the city right-of-way, and issue that will need to be settled with the Building & Inspections Department.

The wall sign facing Reservoir Avenue dominates the front façade of the building. It extends for 28' of the 30' wide building and therefore staff believes that it is disproportionate / oversized in relationship to the building.

The wall sign facing Pleasant Street has a *backing* with the height of 2'-8" extending several inches above and below the lettering. The backing material is dark and generally blends into the building materials (aluminum siding), but is technically part of the sign area calculation. The height of the letters appears to be less than 2'. If the backing were not included in the calculation, the sign may comply with the 30 ft² area maximum. Additionally, this side of the building facing Pleasant Street is 63' and therefore the sign is **NOT** disproportionate / oversized in relationship to the building.

The applicant appeals for relief based on the grounds that the "*property is relatively small and set back from Reservoir Ave.*" Staff holds that compliance with the front yard building setback does **not** provide sufficient grounds for relief from the sign code, and asserts that freestanding sign along the property line (over the property line actually, but will need to be slightly relocated) would satisfy any issue related to the building location. The applicant contends that "*requiring the Applicant to maintain maximum signage size of 30 ft² could result in potential public safety hazards with passing motorists struggling to easily see the name and principal purpose of the business.*" Staff finds no evidence to support this claim and is unaware of any claim that compliant signs in the city have created safety hazards.

Comprehensive Plan calls for guidelines for signage and streetscape improvements, but does not provide detail or clear direction on what the guidelines would regulate or prohibit. There are neither significant inconsistencies nor specific consistencies between the proposal with the Comprehensive Plan. Without clear direction, staff falls back to the findings that the wall sign facing Reservoir Avenue is too large and is disproportionate with the building.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Comprehensive Plan does not provide specific guidance related to the request, however, finding that the wall sign facing Reservoir Avenue is disproportionately large, staff recommends that the Plan Commission forward a **negative recommendation** on this application to the Zoning Board of Review.