CITY PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Memorandum

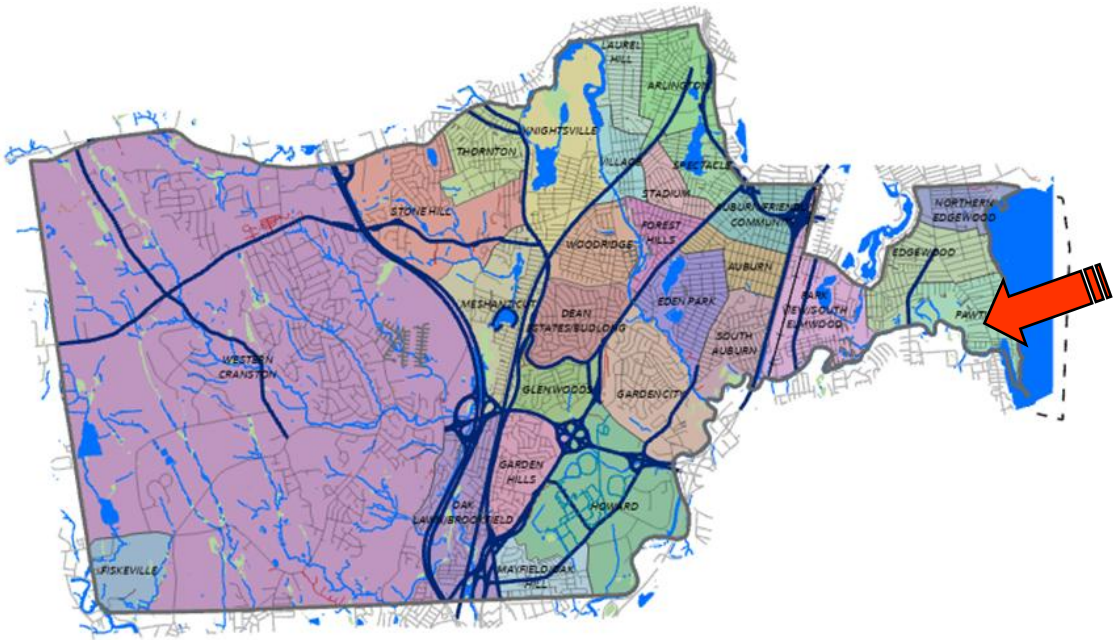
To: City Plan Commission
From: Jamie Ray | Planner Technician
Date: November 10, 2026
RE: 1 Rhodes Place – Assessor's Plat 1, Lots 5 & 184
Application for Dimensional and Use Variance

Owner:	Shriners of Rhode Island Charities Trust
Applicant:	Frank Dimascio
Location:	1 Rhodes Place
Neighborhood:	Pawtuxet
Zoning:	A-6: Single-family dwellings on lots of minimum areas of six thousand (6,000) square feet.
FLUM Designation:	Single Family Residential 7.26 To 3.64 Unit Per Acre

Subject Property:
The subject property is located at 1 Rhodes Place, identified as Plat 1, Lot 5 & 184, and has a combined land area of 0.6130 ± acres, (26,704 sf).

Request:
To construct an LED message center within the corner yard setback and construct an outdoor patio with covered food and beverage areas expanding an already non-conforming use. Applicants seek relief per Applicant seeks relief per 17.92.010 – Variance; Sections 17.72.010-Signs; 17.20.100-Corner visibility; 17.88.030-Extension.

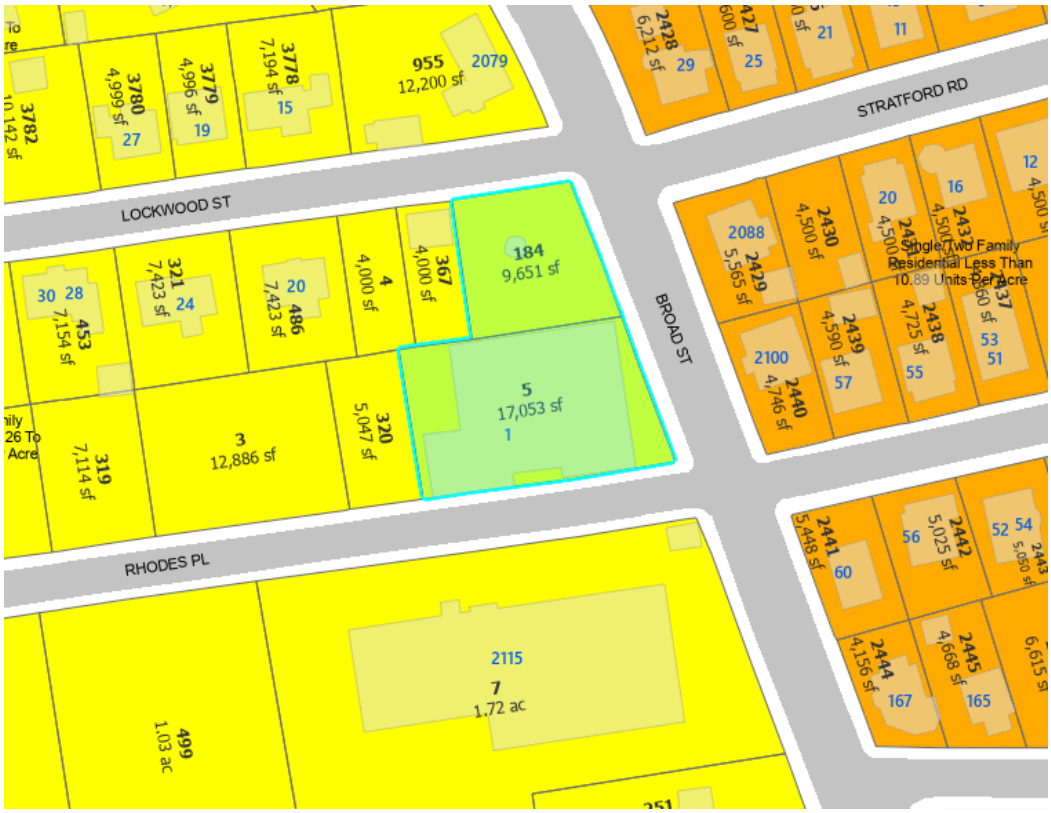
LOCATION MAP



ZONING MAP



FUTURE LAND USE MAP



AERIAL VIEW



STREET VIEW

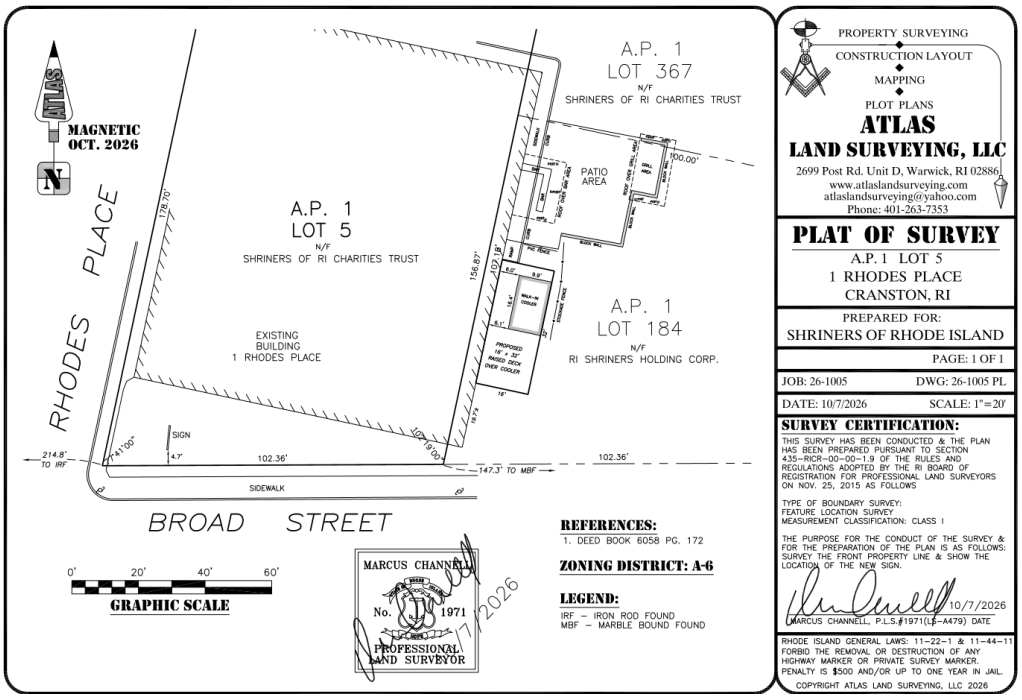


(Old sign – August 2023)

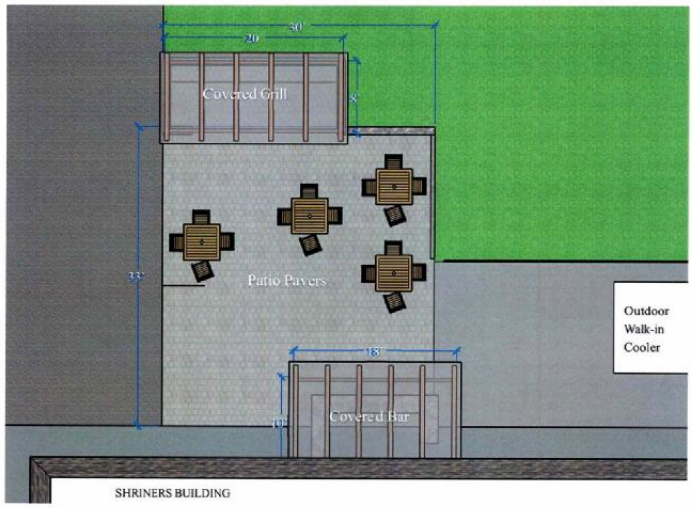


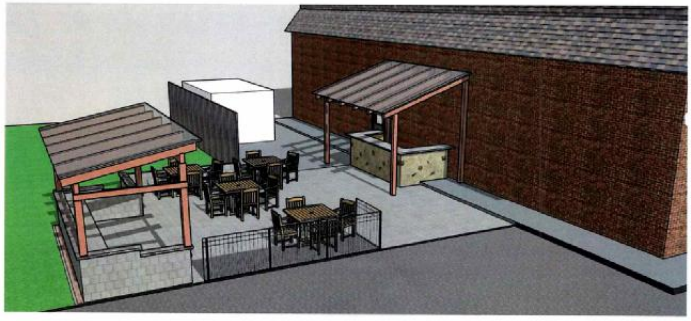
(New Sign – August 14, 2026)

SITE PLAN

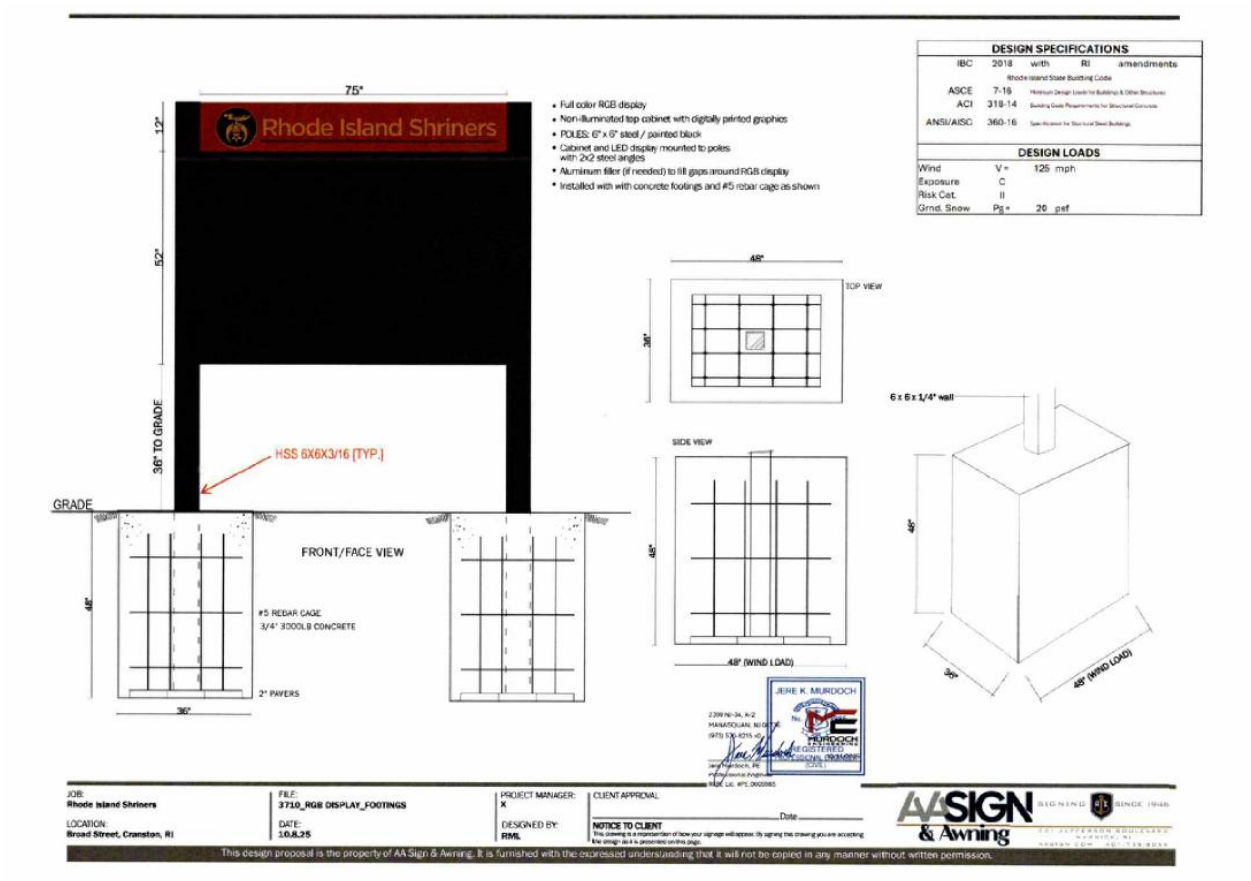


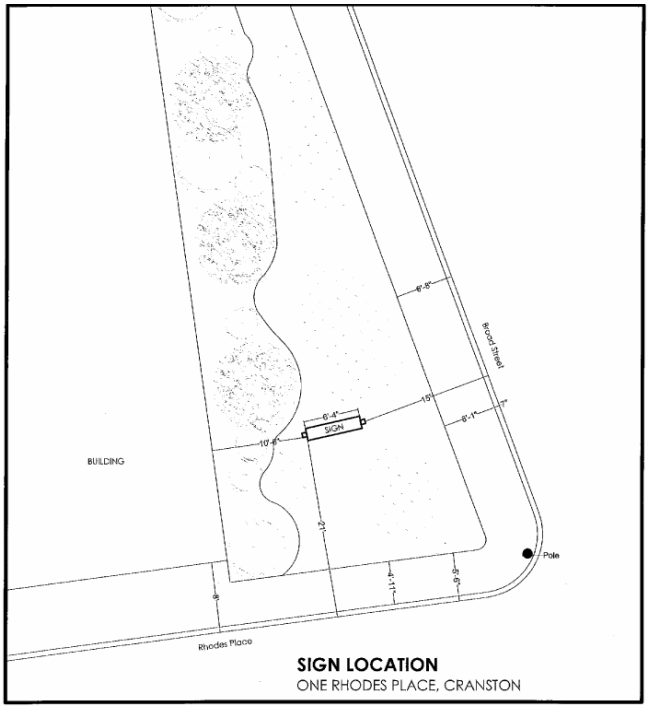
PATIO PLAN





SIGN PLAN


DESIGN SPECIFICATIONS
IBC 2018 with RI amendments
Rhode Island State Building Code
ASCE 7-16
ACI 318-14
AISI/AISC 360-16
DESIGN LOADS
Wind V= 125 mph
Exposure C
Risk Cat. II
Grnd. Snow Pg= 20 psf
75"
12"
52"
36" TO GRADE
Rhode Island Shriners
HSS 6X6X3/16 [TYP.]
GRADE
FRONT/FACE VIEW
#5 REBAR CAGE
3/4" 3000LB CONCRETE
2" PAVERS
48"
36"
• Full color RGB display
• Non-illuminated top cabinet with digitally printed graphics
• POLES: 6" x 6" steel / painted black
• Cabinet and LED display mounted to poles with 2x2 steel angles
• Aluminum filler (if needed) to fill gaps around RGB display
• Installed with with concrete footings and #5 rebar cage as shown
TOP VIEW
SIDE VIEW
48" (WIND LOAD)
6 x 6 x 1/4" wall
JERE K. MURDOCH
JOB:
Rhode Island Shriners
LOCATION:
Broad Street, Cranston, RI
FILE:
3710_RGB DISPLAY_FOOTINGS
DATE:
10.8.25
PROJECT MANAGER:
X
DESIGNED BY:
RML
CLIENT APPROVAL
Date
NOTICE TO CLIENT
AA SIGN & Awning
This design proposal is the property of AA Sign & Awning. It is furnished with the expressed understanding that it will not be copied in any manner without written permission.


BUILDING
SIGN
6'-4"
10'-6"
15'
6'-1"
6'-8"
Broad Street
21'
Pole
8'
4'-11"
6'-6"
Rhodes Place
SIGN LOCATION
ONE RHODES PLACE, CRANSTON

Findings of Fact:

The Applicant has requested specific relief in their application, namely:

- 17.20.100.(A) - Corner visibility
- 17.72.010(P) - Signs
- 17.88.030 - Extension

Dimensional Relief Sought:

A-6 Zone	Required	Proposed	Relief Sought
Corner Visibility	On a corner lot, nothing shall be erected, placed, planted or allowed to grow in such a manner as to materially impede vision between a height of two and one-half and ten (10) feet above the centerline grades of the intersecting streets in the area bounded by the street lines of such corner lots and a line joining points along such street lines **thirty (30) feet from the point of the intersection.**	Less than 30 feet from Intersection	Sign within corner visibility setbacks
LED Signs	Signs not shown on the zone table shall not be allowed in that specific zone represented by that table.	LED sign in A-6 Zone	LED signs are not listed in ANY zone as a permitted sign type.
Extension of Non-conforming Use	A nonconforming use of a building or land shall not be expanded or extended	Operation of an outdoor food and beverage area in an A-6 zone constitutes an expansion of existing nonconforming uses.	Extension of non-conforming use

Background Information/Timeline:

Restaurant Use:

1. There is a legal non-conforming restaurant use within the Shriners building. Without obtaining a city building permit, the Shriners built an outdoor bar and patio on the site in mid-2026. This event space was used multiple times, even having events advertised on the LED sign. In addition to the lack of a building permit, this new construction also requires zoning relief for the expansion of a non-conforming use. The legal non-conforming use on the site is the operation of a restaurant and the utilization of a Class B liquor license in an A-6 zone.

Sign Timeline:

1. The original sign permit application was filed by the Rhode Island Shriners in November 2025. The application did not clearly indicate that a variance was needed, due to LED signs requiring a variance in all zones. The permit was issued in error, and the new LED sign was installed in February 2026.
2. Residents contacted the building official, who directed the Shriners to submit a variance application to legalize the sign.
3. Councilperson Bridget Graziano and The Pawtuxet Village Association sent correspondence to city officials in early 2026, objecting to the sign. Neighbors also launched a petition requesting that the City enforce its sign ordinance. The petition is signed by 138 people and submitted to the City and Councilor Graziano.
4. In August, the sign was documented advertising an off-site event. The sign was now meeting the definition of a billboard, defined in our code as: “Outdoor advertising, billboards means a sign that directs attention

to a business, commodity, service, or entertainment conducted, sold or offered at a location other than the premises on which the sign is located." Billboards are only allowed in industrial zones.

5. The City has issued notices of violation for constructing an outdoor patio area with no building permit or variance request, as well as erecting a sign that was "non clearly represented in the approved drawings and is not an allowed type".

Staff Analysis:
Staff has reviewed this Application in consideration of the compatibility with the general character of the surrounding neighborhood, and the request is out of character beyond any uses on this site or within the surrounding area.

Analysis:
Neighborhood Context:

- This sign is located directly next to multiple districts listed in the National Historic Register. It abuts the Pawtuxet Village and Taft Estate Plat National Historic Districts.
- Pawtuxet Village is one of the most historic and well-preserved scenic streetscapes in Rhode Island. As such, LED signs do not match the historic character of the neighborhood. There are no other "animated signs" in the direct nearby area.
- Additionally, residents have complained about the bright flashing lights created by this sign in this mixed residential and commercial area.

LED Signage:

- The following will restate several issues that have previously been stated by City Planning Department staff in regard to past analyses of digital LED signage.
- Digital LED signage can be visually overwhelming and may create a sense of clutter or sensory overload for passerby drivers. This can distract from the overall visual aesthetic of an area, even if it is an industrial zone located near a highway. It is in planning staff's view that LED signage distracts from the overall visual aesthetic of the City of Cranston.
- Staff provides reference to the following articles with consideration to the safety of LED signage:
    - *"Driver Visual Behavior in the Presence of Commercial Electronic Variable Message Signs (CEVMS)"* by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) states that LED signage can create minimal distractions Article linked here.
    - *"A Peer-Reviewed Critique of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Report Titled: "Driver Visual Behavior in the Presence of Commercial Electronic Variable Message Signs (CEVMS)""* Article linked here, states that the FHWA report has significant flaws in its methodology and produces conclusions that are not reflected in the data.
    - "Compendium of a Decade's Worth of Research Studies on Distraction from Digital Billboards…" Article linked here provides more recent and comprehensive evidence demonstrating that digital signage are more distracting than traditional signage and thereby are associated with more crashes.

Expansion of Restaurant/Bar Use:

- The operation of a restaurant is a legal, pre-existing use that had previously been conducted inside of the Shriners building. Expanding this land use outdoors creates potential nuisances, such as noise, especially given its location immediately next to a residential area.
    - Multiple homes are located about 100-feet from the newly built outdoor patio and bar.

Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan and FLUM

- The Future Land Use Map (FLUM) designates the subject property as "*Single Family Residential 7.26 To 3.64 Unit Per Acre.*"
    - Per the Comprehensive Plan, the A-6 zoning district being a exclusively residential zoning district is **not** an appropriate zoning classification for restaurant/bar uses and billboards.

    - The restaurant and bar is a pre-existing non-conforming use but has been extended beyond what has been historically permitted to an outdoor area where it is more likely to create nuisances that could affect the neighboring residential uses.
    - The billboard use is identified as an industrial use in the Zoning Ordinance and therefore is inconsistent with the FLUM designation. LED signs are not permitted in any zone, but variances have historically only been given out in areas zoned for commercial and industrial uses.
    - Staff finds that the Application is inconsistent with the Future Land Use Map designation.

- The Comprehensive Plan outlines goals, policies, and action items pertaining to commercial/ institutional use which Staff find support the **denial** of this Application, specifically:
    - Policy LU-7: Implement policies that protect residential neighborhoods from commercial encroachment through regulation, appropriate buffers, development design standards, traffic planning, and site plan review.
    - Goal TC-1: Improve and maintain an efficient flow of traffic, particularly in commercial centers and along major arterials.
    - Policy TC-16: Reduce speeding and cut-through traffic and accidents.
        - The installation of a digital LED free-standing sign could potentially create a distraction for drivers and affect traffic safety, which could refute the goal of maintaining an efficient flow of traffic in addition to reducing the number of accidents related to visual obstruction from LED signage.
- There are no guidelines for signage development which would allow the LED signage to aesthetically fit in with the existing commercial centers of highway/arterial commercial areas, which can bring consideration to factors such as sign visibility, dwell time, and intensity of illumination. Thus, the installation of the LED signage is inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan's economic development goals and polices.
- LED signs that were approved by the Zoning Board of Review in the past are violating the conditions of approval set by the Zoning Board and enforcement action is not being taken against them.

Summary
Staff conclude that the proposed sign and outdoor patio is not compatible with the general character of the neighborhood and does not support the goals and policies of the comprehensive plan.

Recommendation
ZBR-26-48 (1 Rhodes Place):
In accordance with RIGL § 45-24-41(b) and Section 17.92.010(A) of the Zoning Ordinance, Staff finds this Application to be inconsistent with the goals and purposes of the Comprehensive Plan and determines that it is not compatible with the general character of the surrounding neighborhood. Staff therefore recommends that the City Plan Commission adopt the Findings of Fact documented above and forward a ***NEGATIVE RECOMMENDATION*** on the Application to the Zoning Board of Review.

Respectfully Submitted,

James S. Ray

Jamie Ray
Administrative Officer | Planner Technician