

City Planning Department



Memo

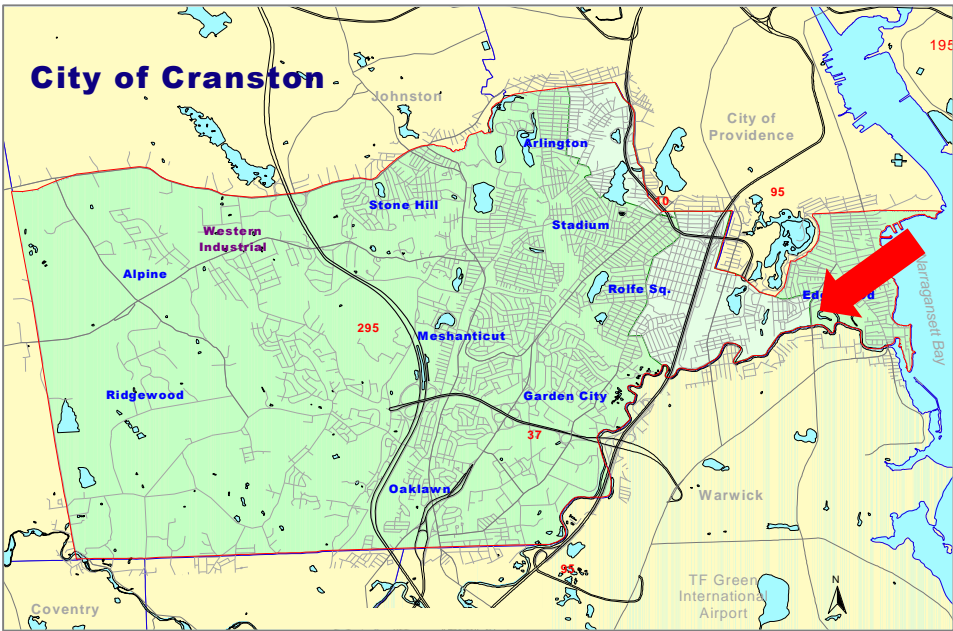
To: Cranston City Plan Commission
From: Doug McLean, AICP, Principal Planner
Date: September 30, 2021
Re: Dimensional Variance Application for 250 Warwick Avenue – Front Setback and Signs

Owner: WDP Warwick, LLP
Applicant: First Hartford Realty
Location: 250 Warwick Avenue, AP 2, Lots 1049-1052, 1054-1055, 1096-1103, 1105-1113, and 3984
Zone: C-5 (Heavy business, industry)
FLU: Highway Commercial/Services

DIMENSIONAL VARIANCE REQUEST:

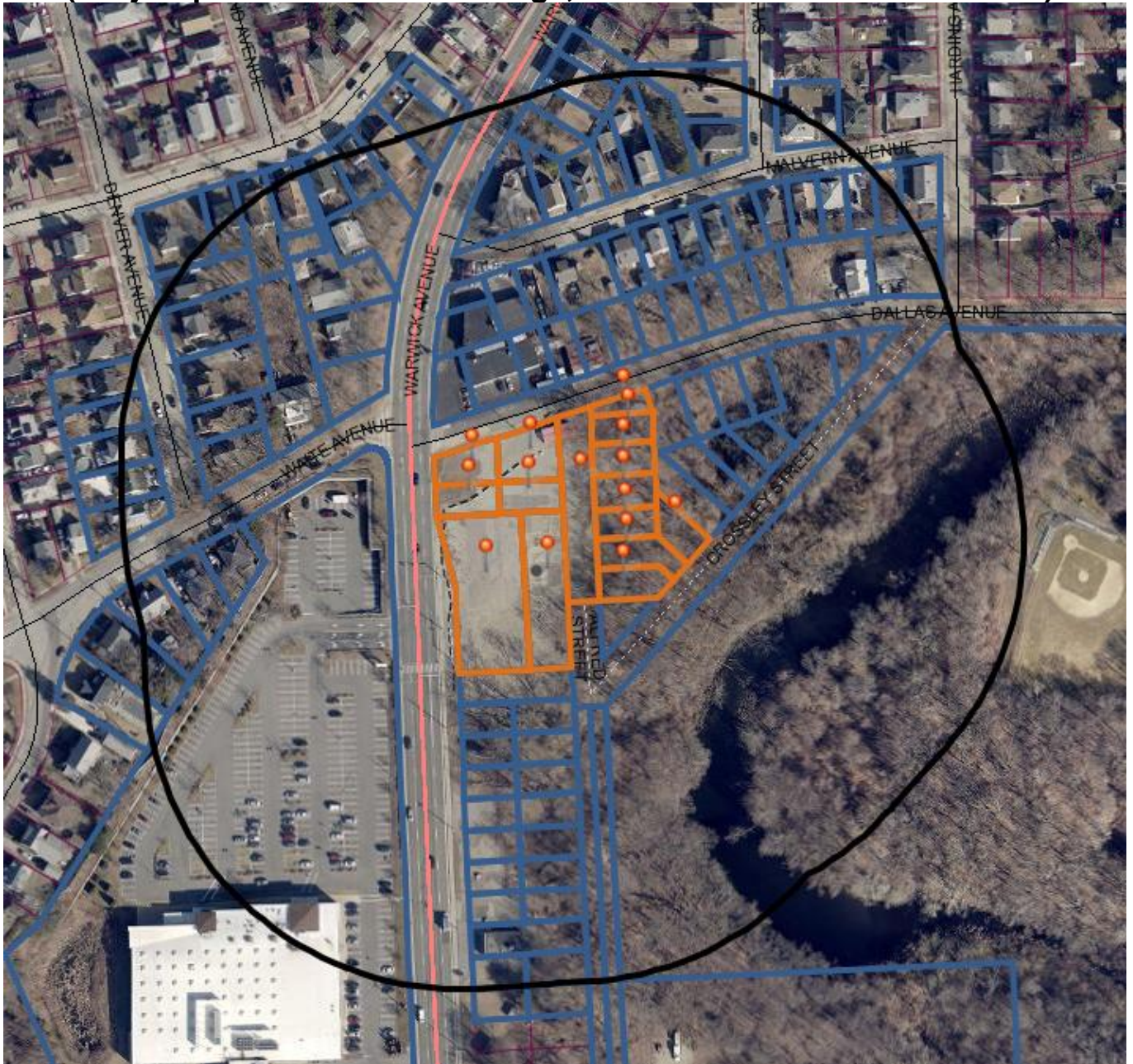
1. To allow the construction of an overhead drive-thru awning that extends 4 feet into the front setback. The structure will be 26 feet from the front property line whereas 30 feet is required. [17.20.120 – Schedule of Intensity]
2. To allow three (3) signs that are larger than allowed in a C-5 zone [17.72 – Signs]

LOCATION MAP



NEIGHBORHOOD AERIAL

(subject parcels marked in orange, 400 foot radius marked in black)



AERIAL CLOSE UP



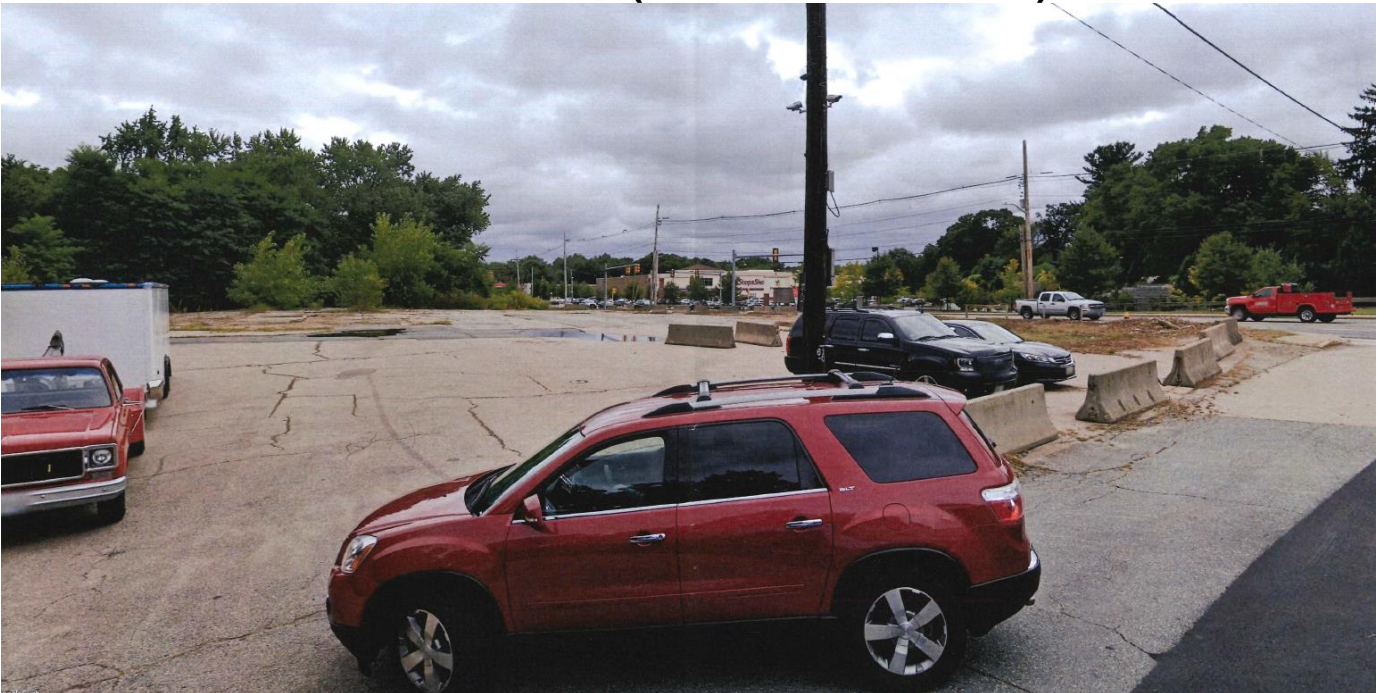
3-D VIEW (facing east)



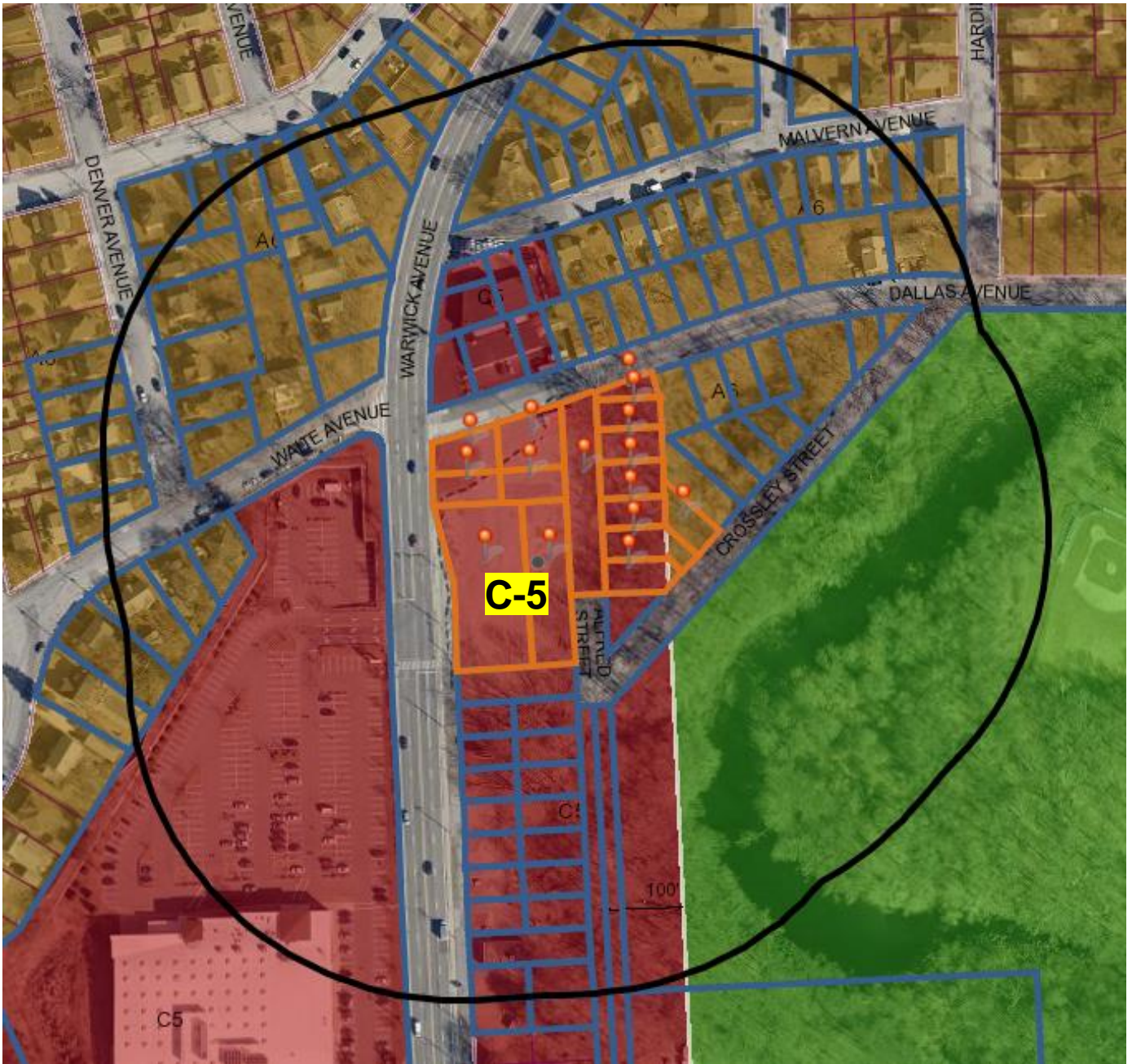
STREET VIEW (from Warwick Ave)



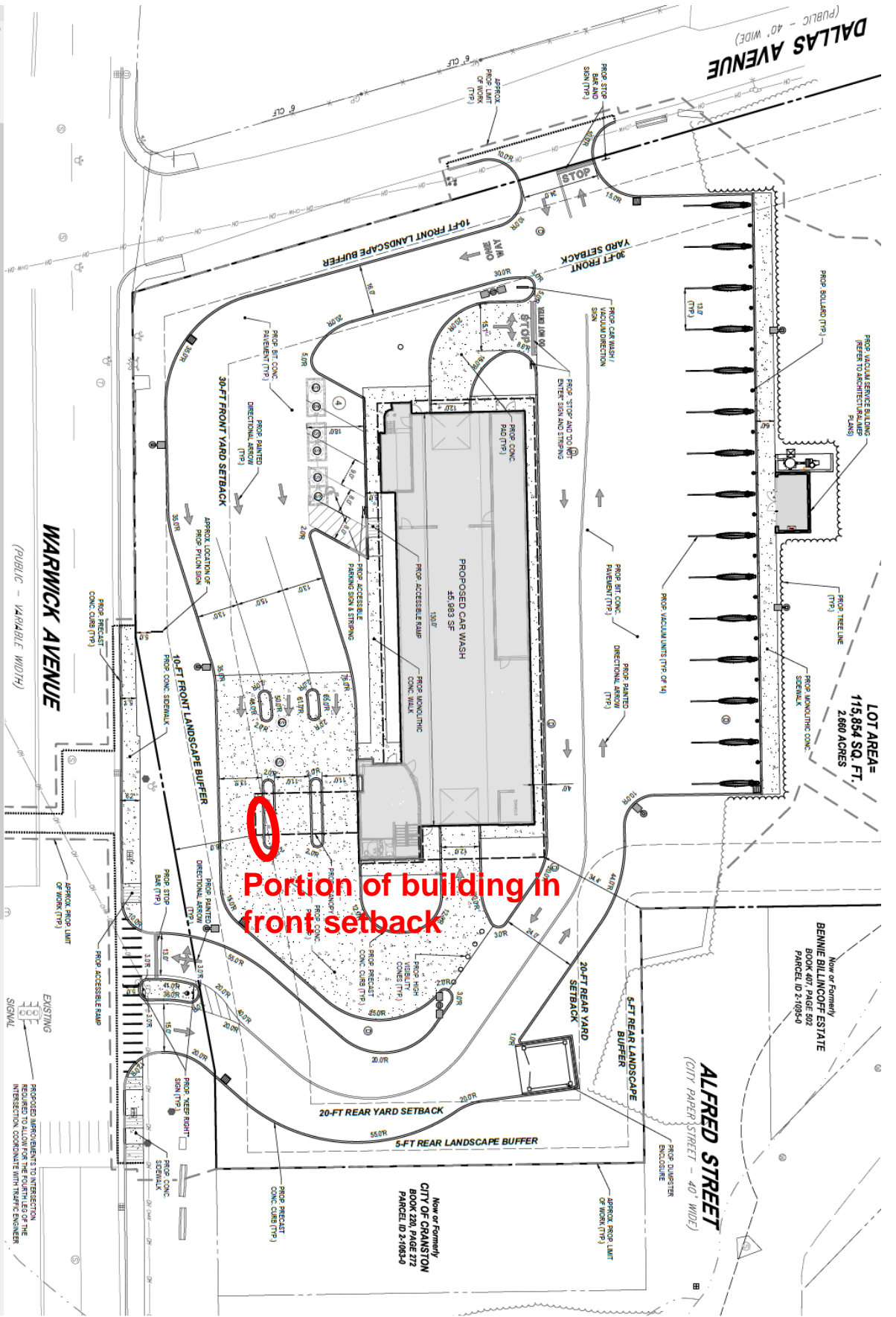
STREET VIEW (from Dallas Avenue)



ZONING MAP



SITE PLAN



Portion of building in
front setback

PROPOSED SIGNS REQUIRING VARIANCES



O-1 Proposed West View
Scale | NTS

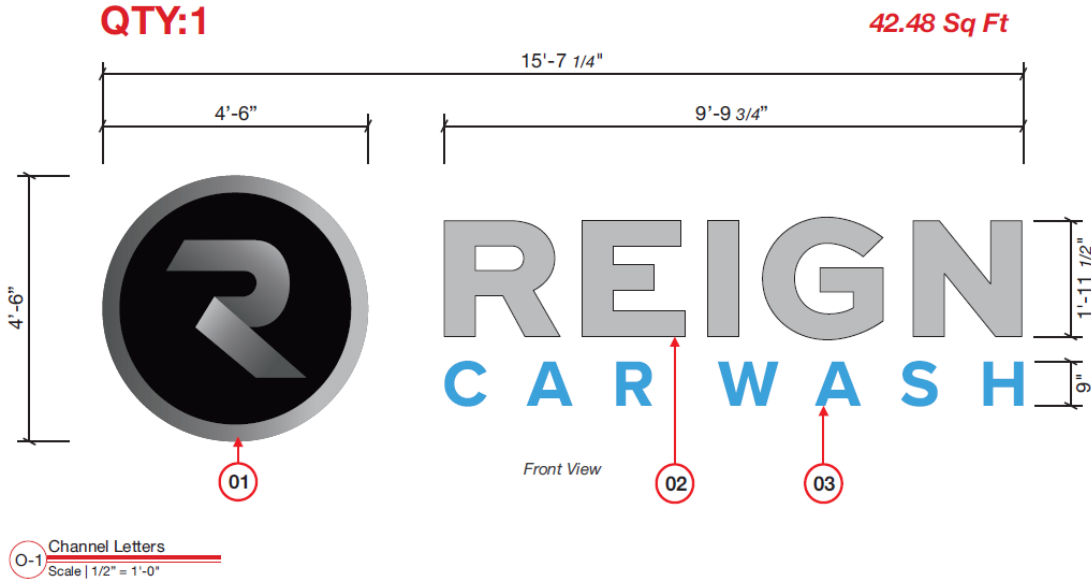


O-2 Proposed South View
Scale | NTS

PROPOSED SIGNS DIMENSIONS

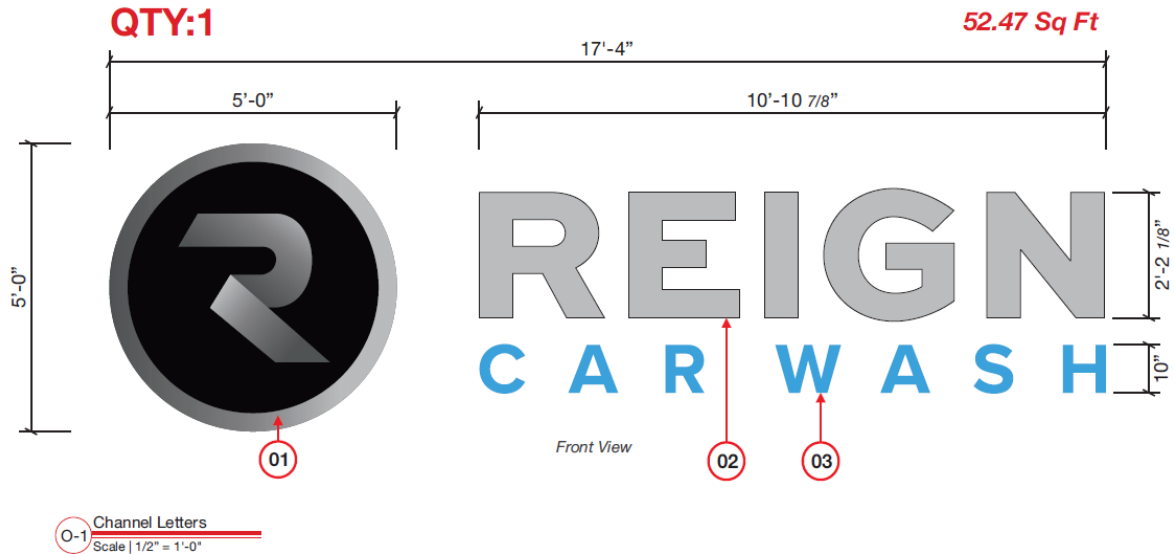
SIGN FACING SOUTH TOWARD UNDEVELOPED LOT:

SIGN 2 - SMALL CHANNEL LETTERS



SIGN FACING WEST TOWARD WARWICK AVE.:

SIGN 3 - LARGE CHANNEL LETTERS



PROPOSED MONUMENT SIGN REQUIRING VARIANCE



FINDINGS OF FACT:

General

- The applicant proposes to redevelop the parcel with a 5,983± square foot drive-thru carwash. The development is within a C-5 commercial zone where a carwash use is allowed by right.
- The site is currently comprised of a vacant paved area and no existing structures.
- The site access improvements include two new curb cuts, one at Dallas Avenue to the north and one at Warwick Avenue to the west. The redevelopment of this property also includes intersection improvements at the proposed Warwick Avenue curb cut to include a signalized four-way intersection with Warwick Avenue and the driveway to the existing retail development on the west side of Warwick Avenue (Stop and Shop).
- A Traffic Impact Study has been prepared by McMahon Associates, and a physical Alteration Permit Application including same has been approved by the Rhode Island Department of Transportation on August 10, 2021.
- The overall redevelopment of the property also includes substantial landscaping improvements.

Front Setback Variance

- There is a proposed awning over the drive-up order points that extends 4 feet into the front setback. This portion of the structure will be 26 feet from the front property line whereas 30 feet is required.
- The applicant's initial design for this property did not include a variance for the setback as the building was initially sited towards the rear of the property with the car vacuum facilities located along the Warwick Ave right-of-way. Staff's initial comments to the applicant included a request to relocate the vacuum facilities to the rear of the property to better account for the streetscape aesthetic along the public right-of-way. The applicant obliged staff's comment by re-designing the site to move the vacuums in the rear, but as a result the proposed building had to be moved closer to the front of the property with setback relief needed.
- Staff finds that the proposed front setback relief will not detract from the streetscape aesthetics along Warwick Avenue and, in fact, this is the Planning staff's preferred layout of this type of use as compared to siting the vacuum facilities along a public right-of-way.
- Staff finds that the quantifiable percentage of relief requested is minimal. The applicant seeks 4 feet of relief compared to a 30 foot front setback requirement, which equates to being short by approximately 13% of the required standard.
- Staff finds that only a small portion of the building will be located within the front setback as illustrated on page 7 of this memo.
- The Comprehensive Plan Land Use Element; Principle 4 reads: *"Protect and stabilize existing residential neighborhoods by basing land use decisions on neighborhood needs and quality of life. Protect the natural, historic and visual resources that define the neighborhoods"* (p. 34). Staff finds that relief in this case would not detract from the visual resources that define the area and therefore the application is generally consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

Signage Variance

- The applicant proposes two (2) new wall signs that are approximately 71 sqft. and 87 sqft respectively. The maximum allowed area for a wall sign in the C-5 zone is 30 sqft so both wall signs require relief.
- The applicant proposes a monument sign that is 60 sqft. in size whereas 45 feet is the maximum area and the monument sign is 6 feet high whereas the maximum height for a monument sign in the C-5 district is 4 feet.
- Staff finds that the proposed wall signs are suitable because they are proportionate to the larger scale of the proposed structure (see graphics on page 8 of this memo).
- Staff finds that the proposed monument sign is not a community character or safety concern because the sign is designed in such a way that it does not detract from the streetscape aesthetic or create vehicle/pedestrian safety issues based on the following findings:
 - The proposed monument sign is located 5 feet from the property line whereas only 2 feet is required. This added distance between the sign and the property line ensures that vehicle sightlines are clear and the sign's massing does not overwhelm the aesthetic of the street or sidewalk.
 - The proposed monument sign is located over 80 feet away from the nearest curb-cut to ensure clear sightlines from vehicle turning movements.
 - The monument sign is 30 sqft. per side (60 sqft. total) whereas 45 sqft. is the maximum. In this instance, staff finds that the quantifiable percentage of relief requested is not substantial (approximately 33% of the required standard) and the sign's overall size does not present a concern to staff regarding the sign's aesthetics or vehicle safety issues.
- No LED/animated signs are being proposed as part of this development.
- The proposal does not exceed the total amount of signage allowance for the property in a C-5 district. The property may not exceed 300 sqft. of total signage and in this instance only
- Staff has reviewed this application in relation to the Comprehensive Plan and finds no significant inconsistencies. 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. Staff could not find any language within the Cranston Comprehensive Plan that provides for reason to oppose the application. Therefore, this application is believed to be generally consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

RECOMMENDATION:

Due to the findings that the proposed variance requests are generally consistent with the Cranston Comprehensive Plan, and that relief would not detract from the character of the surrounding area or create potential safety concerns, staff recommends the Plan Commission forward a **positive recommendation** on the application to the Zoning Board of Review.