

CITY PLANNING DEPARTMENT



Memorandum

To: City Plan Commission
From: Jamie Ray | Planner Technician
Date: August 4, 2026
RE: 2050 Plainfield Pike – Assessor's Plat 36, Lot 117
Application for Signage Relief

Owner /Applicant: Colbea Enterprises, LLC
Location: 2050 Plainfield Pike
Neighborhood: Western Cranston
Zoning: C-5 – (Heavy Business/Industry)
FLUM Designation: Industrial

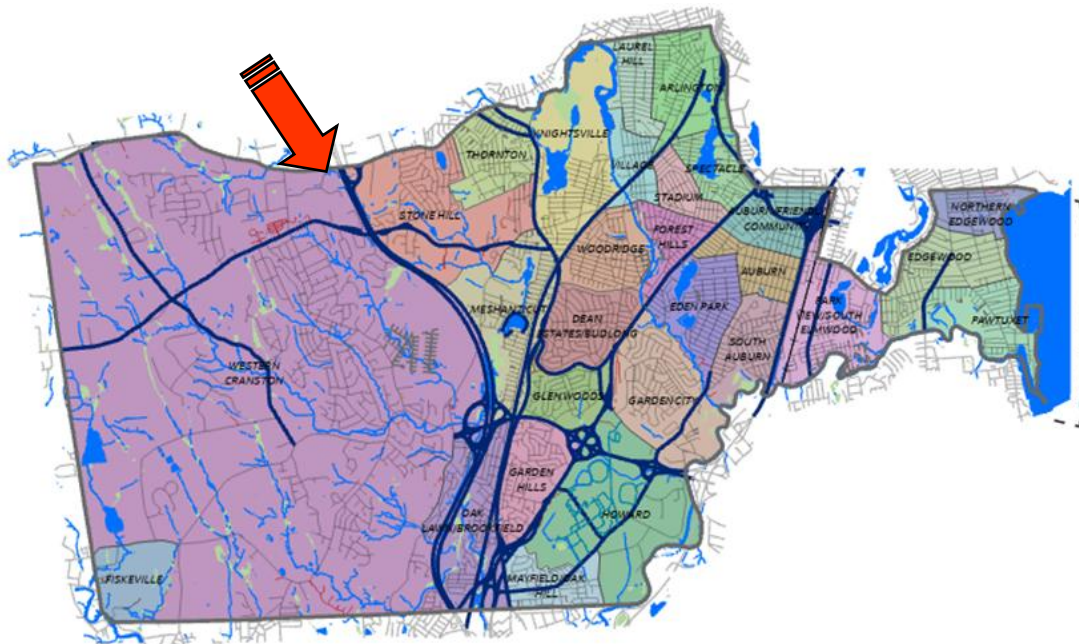
Subject Property:

The subject property is located at 2050 Plainfield Pike, identified as Plat 36, Lot 117 and has a land area of 1.6675 ± acres, (72,638 sf).

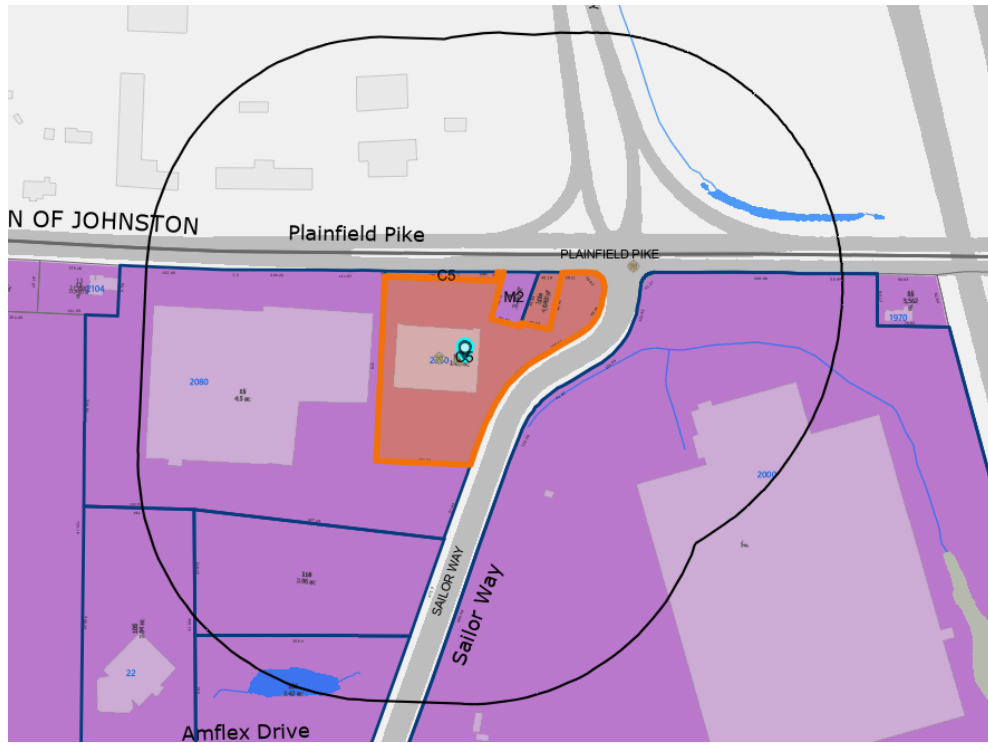
Request:

The applicant has applied for permission to install a new electronic message center on an existing free-standing sign. Applicant seeks relief per Section 17.92.010- Variances; Sections 17.72.010 - Signs.

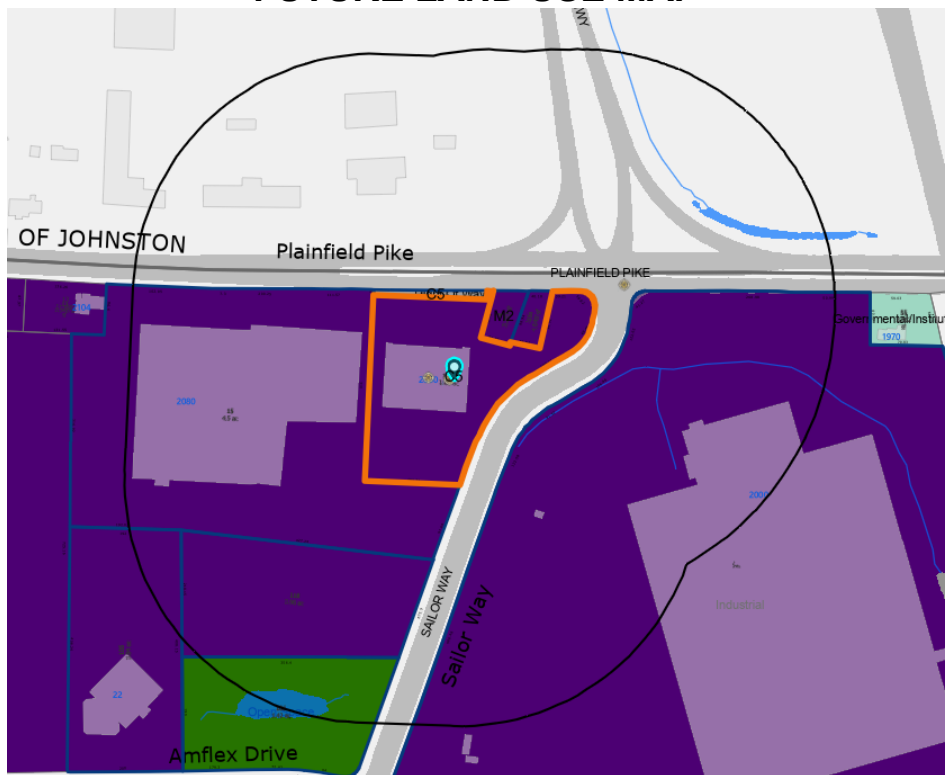
LOCATION MAP



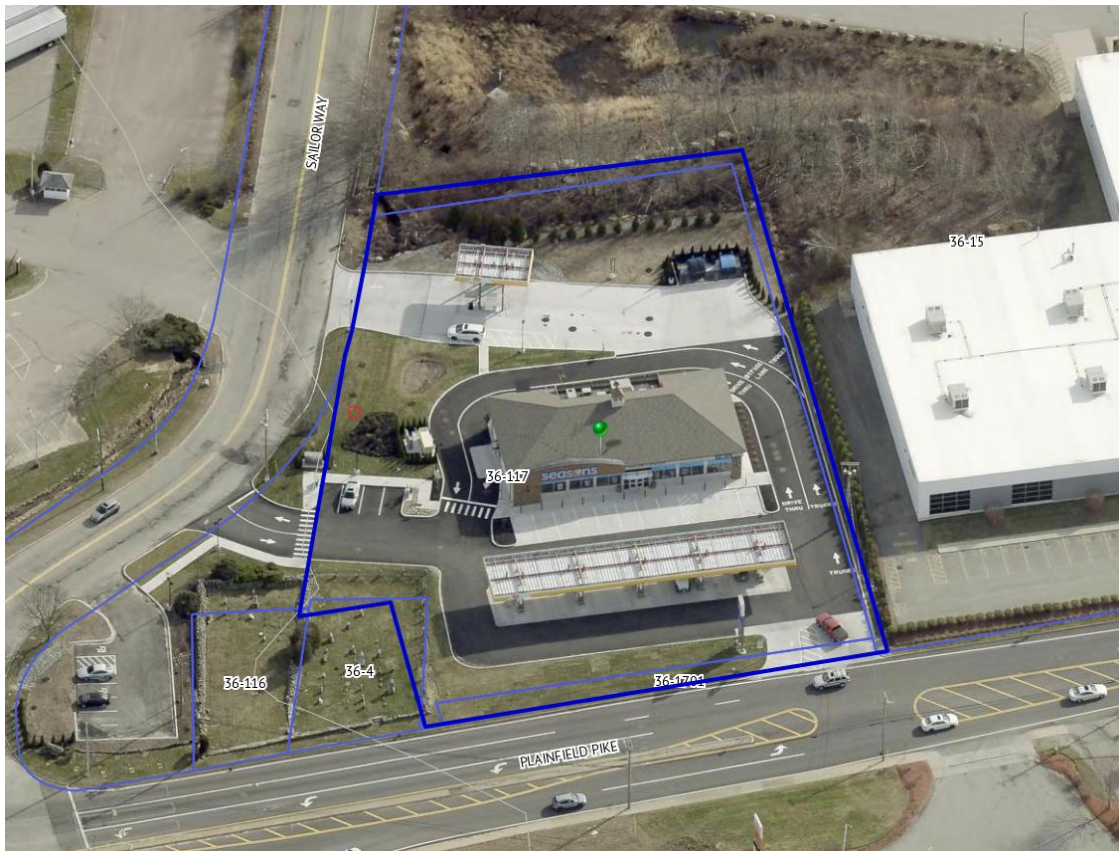
ZONING MAP



FUTURE LAND USE MAP



AERIAL VIEW



STREET VIEW



(GOOGLE STREET VIEW SEPTEMBER 2025)

Project Narrative provided by Applicant:

Applicant/Owner proposes to update an existing freestanding I.D. sign on the Premises through replacement of a portion of the existing static sign panels with a smaller electronic message center / digital sign. This update aims to more effectively provide information about the services and products provided.

Findings of Fact:

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

- 17.72.010.G. Signs Prohibited Under This Section
 - *"All signs not expressly permitted under this section or exempt from regulation hereunder in accordance with the previous section are prohibited in the city."*
- Electronic LED message signs of any type are not permitted in the zoning code in any zone as per Section 17.72.010.G. [Signs Prohibited Under This Section] of the Zoning Ordinance.
 - Other LED billboards have been approved by the Zoning Board of Review through Use Variances and installed throughout the City of Cranston, but none are found near the subject property.
- The Comprehensive Plan is silent on LED signage specifically as an appropriate use.

Staff Analysis:

Consistency with the Surrounding Area:

Staff has reviewed this Application in consideration of the compatibility with the general character of the surrounding neighborhood.

- The existing signage is consistent with nearby gas station signs. Large signs in the area do not include digital/LED elements.
- 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.

Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan and FLUM

- The Comprehensive Plan outlines goals, policies, and action items pertaining to commercial (re)development which Staff find support the denial of this Application, specifically:
 - 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 policies.

Summary

Staff conclude that the proposal is incompatible with the general character of the neighborhood and is not supported by the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan.

Recommendation:

ZBR-26-33 (2050 Plainfield Pike):

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 recommend 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