



# PLAINFIELD CHARTER TOWNSHIP COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

6161 Belmont Avenue NE • Belmont, MI 49306 • 616.364.1190 • plainfieldmi.org

## MEMO

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TO: Zoning Board of Appeals  
FROM: Community Development Department  
DATE: March 11, 2026  
RE: 4020 West River Drive - Variance Requests

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## PROPERTY INFORMATION

Owner/Applicant	Hall's Sport Center
Property Address	4020 West River Drive
Parcel Number	41-10-31-326-014
Zoning	LI, Light Industrial
Zoning Ordinance Sections	Section 31.11 (1) (Sign Size) Section 31.11 (1) (Sign Height) Section 31.11 (2) (Sign Setback)
Public Hearing	<b>Public hearing was held on January 20, 2026</b>

### Update

At the Zoning Board of Appeals meeting held on January 20th, 2026, this request was postponed to the next available meeting to ensure that the full board could consider it. Since then, there have been no changes. For your review, staff has enclosed the staff report from the January meeting.

### January 20, 2026 Staff Memo

#### Intro & Request Details

Hall's Sport Center, represented by Brian Burmania of Legend Sign, is seeking approval for three variances to install a ground-mounted sign measuring 50 sq. ft. in area and 8 ft. in height, located at or near the front property line. If approved, the applicant will remove their existing nonconforming pole sign located off-premises within White Pine Trail right-of-way, which is owned by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), and install this new ground mounted sign on their own property. The property is located on south easterly side of West River Drive and the White Pine Trail

between School Street (west side of West River Drive) and Lamoreaux Drive to the south.

The existing pole sign has been located on the MDNR's property at 3840 Mill Creek Avenue since at least 2003. Hall's Sport Center acquired the property in 2024. The ground sign is proposed to be located to the right of the entry (see photo page 2 of the Sign Renderings). If approved, the applicant will need to demonstrate that it does not create a vision obstruction at this location for internal vehicle traffic. This is a manageable issue addressable during the building permit review process and potential alternative locations exist.

The following variances from the Zoning Ordinance (ZO) are requested for the proposed ground mounted sign:

- A request for an 18 sq.ft. variance from Section 31.11 (1) of the ZO to allow a 50 sq.ft. ground mounted sign, where 32 sq.ft. is the maximum size permitted for a sign.
- A request for a 4-foot. variance from Section 31.11 (1) of the ZO to allow an 8-foot tall ground sign where the maximum height permitted is 4 feet.
- A request for a variance from Section 31.11 (2) of the ZO to allow a ground sign at, or near the front property line, where there is a minimum setback of 10 feet required.

### **VARIANCE STANDARDS / REVIEW OF PRACTICAL DIFFICULTIES**

When considering this analysis, the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) may conclude that an applicant has established a practical difficulty, if the following variance standards have been met. The variance standards are listed followed by a description. Staff comments(SC) are described below each variance standard description.

In this instance, the staff has consolidated all variances into a single review summary, as these items are largely interrelated; for example, the requested sign dimensions directly correspond to the height variance request.

#### **1. Unique Features**

*The need for the variance is due to unique circumstances or physical conditions, such as narrowness, shallowness, shape, water, or topography of the property involved, and that the practical difficulty is not due to the applicant's personal or economic hardship (state specific circumstance).*

SC: The property has roughly 180 feet of West River right of way and the MDNR's White Pine Trail in front of it, plus about a 4-foot grade drop to 4020 West River Drive. The ZBA may view these as practical difficulties due to sight distance, unique circumstances, and/or physical conditions.

#### **2. Self-created**

*The need for the variances is not the result of actions of the property owner (self-created) or previous property owners.*

SC:. In staff's opinion, the need for the variance was not created by this property owner or previous property owner's actions. Rather, the need for the variance is due to grade elevation and distance from the traveling lanes from West River Drive.

#### **3. Unnecessarily Burdensome**

*That strict compliance with area, setback, frontage, height, bulk, density, or the other dimensional requirements will unreasonably prevent the property owner from using the property for a permitted*

*purpose or will render conformity with those regulations unnecessarily burdensome. (Because a property owner may incur additional costs in complying with this Ordinance does not automatically make compliance unreasonably burdensome.)*

SC: Signs for commercial properties are considered an accessory use permitted by right within the LI, Light Industrial zoning district. In this instance, strict adherence to the Zoning Ordinance would either perpetuate an existing nonconforming sign or result in a new ground sign that would not be legible from the West River Drive right-of-way. Generally, signs are set back from rights-of-way to ensure clear visibility, safety, and aesthetic quality; in this situation, the presence of the White Pine Trail further increases the setback by 90 feet. As a condition of approval, the property owners have agreed to remove the existing pole sign currently located on MDNR property.

#### **4. Substantial Justice**

*The requested variance will do substantial justice to the applicant as well as to other property owners in the district, or whether a lesser relaxation that [than] applied for would give substantial relief to the owner of the property involved and be more consistent with justice to other property owners.*

SC: In staff's opinion the proposed variances provide substantial justice to the property owner, primarily due to the unique circumstances that are limited to this specific stretch of West River Drive. One of the key aspects is the removal of a nonconforming depreciated sign from another property, which will help protect that property owner's rights. Additionally, these changes will enhance the aesthetics of this property, as well as giving them the visibility afforded by other properties along West River Drive, benefiting all stakeholders (and drivers) in the area.

#### **5. Ordinance Amendment**

*The requested variance will not permit the establishment within a district any use which is not permitted by right, or any use for which a conditional use or temporary use permit is required. Further, the proposed variance is not of a recurrent nature and an amendment to the zoning ordinance is necessary.*

SC: The proposed variance is not of a recurrent nature and unique to less than a handful of properties in this general vicinity.

### **RECOMMENDATION and SUGGESTED MOTION**

Staff finds that the unique circumstances of this request meet the requirements necessary to grant all three variances.

For your consideration, staff has prepared a sample motion in favor of granting these variances with a condition should the ZBA grant the proposed variances. Alternatively, should the ZBA seek to deny this variance request, we have provided a sample motion for denial.

#### **Motion to Approve the Variance Request:**

"I move to grant the following variances:

- A request for an 18 sq. ft. variance from Section 31.11 (1) of the ZO to allow a 50 sq. ft. ground sign;
- A request for a 4-foot. variance from Section 31.11 (1) of the ZO to allow an 8-foot tall ground sign; and

- A request for a variance from Section 31.11 (2) of the ZO to allow a ground sign at or near the front property line.

Subject to the following condition of approval:

1. The applicant shall permanently remove its pole sign located on the MDNR property located at 3840 Mill Creek Avenue prior to the installation of the new sign.”

Based upon the following findings of fact:

1. The property fronts an approximately 180 foot wide right-of-way for West River Drive and the MDNR’s White Pine Trail, along with an approximately 4-foot grade drop to 4020 West River Drive, creating a practical difficulty due to distance and grade change.
2. The conditions of the site are not self-created by the applicant.
3. The strict compliance with the Zoning Ordinance standards size, height, and setback distances for a ground sign in the LI, Light Industrial zone district are unnecessarily burdensome in this case.
4. Granting the variances would provide substantial justice to the property owner, the property owner of 3840 Mill Creek Avenue, and adjacent property owners.
5. The variances are not of a recurrent nature and unique to less than handful of properties in this general vicinity.
6. The proposed variance requests are supported for those reasons set forth by members of the Zoning Board of Appeals as reflected in the entire record of this matter, including the meeting minutes.”

#### **Motion to Deny the Variance Request:**

“I move to deny the following variances:

- A request for an 18 sq. ft. variance from Section 31.11 (1) of the ZO to allow a 50 sq. ft. ground sign where 32 sq.ft. is the maximum size permitted for a sign
- A request for a 4 ft. variance from Section 31.11 (1) of the ZO to allow an 8 ft. tall ground sign where the maximum height permitted is 4 feet.
- A request for a variance from Section 31.11 (2) of the ZO to allow a ground sign at or near the front property line where there is a minimum setback of 10 feet required.

Based upon the following findings of fact:

1. A practical difficulty does not exist, and the property has sufficient distance and adequate visibility from the street.
2. The strict compliance with the Zoning Ordinance standards size, height, and setback distances for a ground sign in the LI, Light Industrial zone district are not unnecessarily burdensome.
3. Granting the variances would not provide substantial justice to the property owner, the property owner of 3840 Mill Creek Avenue, or any other adjacent property owner.
4. This denial is supported by those reasons set forth by the members of the Zoning Board of Appeals as reflected in the entire record of this matter, including the meeting minutes.”

Attachments



Charter Township of Plainfield  
6161 Belmont Avenue NE, Belmont, Mi 49306

## Regular Meeting Minutes

January 20, 2026

### 1. Call to Order

Chair Keen called the meeting to order at 6:00p.m.

### 2. Approve Agenda

a. Staff Memo

ZBA Member Ellerthorpe moved, with support from Vice Chair Tarwater, to approve the agenda.

*The motion carried unanimously.*

### 3. Election of Officers

a. Chair

Vice Chair

Secretary

ZBA Member Ellerthorpe moved, with support from Vice Chair Tarwater, to approve Mr. Koster as ZBA Secretary, Mr. Keen as ZBA Chair, and Mr. Tarwater as ZBA Vice Chair.

*The motion carried unanimously.*

### 4. Approve Consent Agenda

a. Approve the November 19, 2024 Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting Minutes

b. Approve the 2026 ZBA Meeting Dates

ZBA Member Ellerthorpe moved, with support from Vice Chair Tarwater, to approve the consent agenda.

*The motion carried unanimously.*

### 5. Public Comments

Chair Keen opened the public comments portion of the agenda, and upon hearing no one who wished to speak, closed the public comments portion of the agenda.

### 6. Agenda Items

a. Variance Request - Public Hearing

4020 West River Drive

Sections 31.11(1) (two parts) and 31.11(2)

Brian Burmania, Legend Sign on behalf of Hall's Sport Center

ZBA Member Ellerthorpe read the applicant information.

Applicant Brian Burmania gave an overview of his client's request for a variance, including additional height for the sign due to the topographical area and the trail running in front of the lot, and more sign square footage. He noted that there would not be an issue with traffic visibility.

Chair Keen opened the public hearing, and upon hearing no one who wished to speak, closed the public hearing.

Senior Planner Peter Elam gave an overview of the site history and history of the existing pylon sign. He noted that staff was supportive of the request.

ZBA Member Ellerthorpe thought that the grade was not a significant drop-off to the site and asked for clarification on the existing and proposed wall signage. He had no issues with the variance requests.

Vice Chair Tarwater had a question about the wording of the variance request and the flexibility built into the suggested motion.

Chair Keen had a question about the nonconforming nature of the existing pylon sign on the trail property, the permitted wall signs, and the grade drop-off. He noted that he was not in favor of the variance requests due to the fairly even grade existing on site, and that the larger sign size would be requested by multiple other light industrial properties.

ZBA Member Ellerthorpe noted that he was in favor of the additional square feet.

Vice Chair Tarwater noted that the cleanup of the existing nonconforming sign is valuable.

ZBA Member Ellerthorpe moved, with support from Vice Chair Tarwater, to grant the following variances:

A request for an 18 sq. ft. variance from Section 31.11 (1) of the ZO to allow a 50 sq. ft. ground sign;

A request for a 4-foot. variance from Section 31.11 (1) of the ZO to allow an 8-foot tall ground sign; and

A request for a variance from Section 31.11 (2) of the ZO to allow a ground sign at or near the front property line.

Subject to the following condition of approval:

1. The applicant shall permanently remove its pole sign located on the MDNR property located at 3840 Mill Creek Avenue prior to the installation of the new sign.

Based upon the following findings of fact:

1. The property fronts an approximately 180 foot wide right-of-way for West River Drive and the MDNR's White Pine Trail, along with an approximately 4-foot grade drop to 4020 West River Drive, creating a practical difficulty due to distance and grade change.

2. The conditions of the site are not self-created by the applicant.

3. The strict compliance with the Zoning Ordinance standards size, height, and setback distances for a ground sign in the LI, Light Industrial zone district are unnecessarily burdensome in this case.

4. Granting the variances would provide substantial justice to the property owner, the

property owner of 3840 Mill Creek Avenue, and adjacent property owners.

5. The variances are not of a recurrent nature and unique to less than handful of properties in this general vicinity.

6. The proposed variance requests are supported for those reasons set forth by members of the Zoning Board of Appeals as reflected in the entire record of this matter, including the meeting minutes.

*The motion did not pass at 2 aye votes (Ellerthorpe & Tarwater) to 1 nay vote (Keen).*

Mr. Elam noted that because the ZBA board is usually 5 members, 3 members were needed to pass a motion.

Vice Chair Tarwater moved, with support from ZBA Member Ellerthorpe, to postpone the item until the next available meeting.

*The motion carried unanimously.*

**7. Staff Comments**

Mr. Elam noted that staff was looking for an additional alternate ZBA member.

**8. ZBA Comments**

There were no comments.

**9. Adjournment**

Chair Keen adjourned the meeting at 6:26p.m.

**Application for Consideration by the  
Zoning Board of Appeals**

**Applicant:** Brian Burmania, Legend Sign on behalf of Hall's Sport Center

**Project Address:** 4020 West River Drive

**Permanent Parcel #:** 41-10-31-326-014

**Size of Site:** Approximately 3.74 acres

**Zoning:** LI, Light Industrial

**Zoning Ordinance Sections:**

- Section 31.11 (1) (two parts)
- Section 31.11 (2)

**Action Requested of the ZBA:** The applicant is requesting multiple variances to permit the placement of 50 square foot, 8 foot tall ground sign at or near the property line.

# ZONING VARIANCE APPLICATION

**For Office Use Only:** Filing Date: December 02, 2025 Parcel ID Number 41-10-31-326-014

Escrow # [REDACTED] Escrow Fee \$ 300.00 Invoice # 17622 Check # [REDACTED]  
PZE # PVAR25-0001 Application Fee \$ 200.00 Invoice # 17621 Date Received: 12/17/2025

1. **APPLICANT (S) INFORMATION**

Name(s) Halls Sport Center Phone [REDACTED]

Address 759 E Broadway Ave. Muskegon, MI 49444

Representative(s) Name(s): Brian Burmania Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address 5120 Plainfield Ave. Grand Rapids, MI 49525

Owner of Property (if different) Name(s) Harold F. Hall Phone [REDACTED]

Address 759 E Broadway Ave. Muskegon, MI 49444

2. **ADDRESS OF SUBJECT PROPERTY:** 4020 W River Dr NE Comstock Park, MI 49321

Current Zoning: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Use of Property: BOAT STORAGE SERVICE

3. **TYPE OF APPEAL**

Variance  Interpretation  Appeal

**Description of Variance Request**

Setback  Sign  Screening  Lot Size, Width or Access  
 Other Please Describe \_\_\_\_\_

Section(s) of the Ordinance relating to the request:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_

4. **STATE NATURE OF APPEAL** APPEAL TO ADD HEIGHT TO NEW MONUMENT SIGN.

OWNER IS WILLING TO REMOVE NON CONFORMING PYLON SIGN

5. **STATE PRACTICAL DIFFICULTY** THIS SITE HAS AN EXTENSIVE RIGHT-OF-WAY DUE

TO THE RAILS TO TOWN PROGRAM, IS SUBSTANTIALLY LOWER THAN THE ROAD, AND DUE TO  
ZONING CHANGE, THE LOWER HEIGHT WOULD MAKE THE SIGN LESS VISIBLE

Date property will be staked if necessary: \_\_\_\_\_

**ADVISORY STATEMENT/RIGHT OF ENTRY**

I hereby attest that the information on this form is, to the best of my knowledge, true and accurate. I hereby grant permission for members of the Township Zoning Board of Appeals and Township staff to enter the subject property for the purpose of viewing site and gathering information related to this request.

Property Owner's Signature Donald F. Hall Date 11-24-25

Applicant's Signature Donald F. Hall Date 11-24-25

## Tips for a Successful Variance Application

1. Determine if the variance is absolutely necessary.
2. Talk to the Staff in the Community Development Departments and review alternatives.
3. When you file your application, take time to state specifically what your hardship is and how the ordinance appears to unfairly affect you.
4. Avoid, if possible, submitting new information to the Zoning Board of Appeals during the hearing.
5. If you cannot submit documentation until the hearing itself, consider an adjournment until the next scheduled meeting.
6. The Zoning Board of Appeals members will likely inspect the site before the hearing. **Clean up** the property/site before inspection. (If necessary, the Board can attach a condition to an approved variance that nuisances such as junk, trash and debris be addressed).
7. Talk to your neighbors about the variance you are requesting.
8. If you are able to get support from your neighbors, get a brief, concise, written statement and submit it to the Community Development Department, or have them appear at the hearing.
9. If you expect opposition, examine the Community Development Department files a day or two before the hearing, as any written opposition will be on file.
10. Listen to the Zoning Board of Appeals members; both their questions and discussion may be an attempt to steer you to a compromise.
11. Dress appropriately.
12. Be concise and have your presentation prepared/rehearsed prior to the meeting.

# General Location Map - 4020 West River Drive



West River Drive

School Street

131

4020 West River Drive

Lamoreaux Drive

# Site Layout - 4020 West River Drive

School Street

4020 West River Drive

131

Location of Off-Premise Sign  
(3840 Mill Creek Avenue)





Please check for any errors (i.e. Spelling, Logos, Phone Numbers, etc.).  
 131 Electric is not responsible for any errors in artwork after proof is approved.  
 If changes are made after this proof is approved there will be additional cost on final invoice.



5120 Plainfield Ave. NE Suite A Grand Rapids, MI 49525  
 616.447.7446

Project Name: Hall's Sports Center - CL

Date: 9.9.25

Contact: Brian

Workmanship of installation is guaranteed for 6 months. Most vinyl graphics are meant to be viewed from 5-10ft away. Vinyl installations may result in small imperfections/variations including but not limited to: color variations from design layout, bubbles, wrinkles, seams, alignment and patches. ALL SALES ARE FINAL.

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Project Name: Hall's Sports Center - Monument Date: 9.9.25 Contact: Brian

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