

Department of Community Planning and Economic Development – Planning Division Report

Variance Request
BZZ-3700

Date: August 9, 2007

Applicant: Opus Northwest Construction, on behalf of the University of St. Thomas

Address of Property: 1000 LaSalle Avenue

Contact Person and Phone: Joseph Downs, 952-656-4447

Planning Staff and Phone: Molly McCartney, 612-673-5811

Date Application Deemed Complete: July 16, 2007

End of 60 Day Decision Period: September 14, 2007

Appeal Period Expiration: August 20, 2007

Ward: 7 **Neighborhood Organization:** Downtown

Existing Zoning: B4S-1 Downtown Service District and HA Harmon Place Overlay District

Proposed Use: Freestanding masonry sign

Proposed Variances:

- A variance to allow for a third freestanding sign on a zoning lot, and
- A variance to increase the size of a freestanding sign from 32 sq. ft. to 45 sq. ft.

Zoning code section authorizing the requested variance: 525.520 (21)

Background: The subject site is the University of St. Thomas campus in Downtown Minneapolis, specifically the property at 1000 LaSalle Avenue, at the intersection of LaSalle Avenue and 11th Street South. The applicant is proposing to install a freestanding sign facing 11th Street South identifying the Opus College of Business. The proposed sign will be made of Mankato-Kasota stone which is similar to the design of the University of St. Thomas buildings and other signs on campus. The proposed size of the sign is 3 ft. 7 in. tall by 40 ft. wide.

The zoning lot in which the proposed sign is to be located currently has two other freestanding signs. The first is about 15 ft. east of the proposed sign at the intersection of LaSalle and 11th Street South, identifying the University of St. Thomas and the other sign is to 60 ft. the west of the proposed sign, identifying the Schulze School of Entrepreneurship. The sign to the east is on the same lot as the proposed sign and the sign to the west is on another parcel, but still on the same zoning lot. A zoning lot is defined as property owned in common with the same zoning designation.

Findings Required by the Minneapolis Zoning Code:

1. **The property cannot be put to a reasonable use under the conditions allowed by the official controls and strict adherence to the regulations of this zoning ordinance would cause undue hardship.**

Variance to allow for a third freestanding sign on a zoning lot:

The applicant is proposing to install a third freestanding sign for the University of St. Thomas. Because the property spans multiple lots and is under common ownership, the entire block is limited to one freestanding sign. Due to the large campus, a third freestanding sign is a reasonable use for the property and will assist in wayfinding.

Variance to increase the size of a freestanding sign from 32 sq. ft. to 45 sq. ft.:

The proposed freestanding sign is larger than allowed. The proposed sign is 3 ft. 7 in. by 40 ft., and will not obstruct views in or out of the campus. Due to the large size of the buildings on campus and the large size of the properties that make up the campus, a larger sign is a reasonable use for the property and will assist in wayfinding.

2. **The circumstances are unique to the parcel of land for which the variance is sought and have not been created by any persons presently having an interest in the property. Economic considerations alone shall not constitute an undue hardship if reasonable use for the property exists under the terms of the ordinance.**

Variance to allow for a third freestanding sign on a zoning lot and variance to increase the size of a freestanding sign from 32 sq. ft. to 45 sq. ft.:

The University of St. Thomas occupies the entire block bounded by LaSalle Avenue, 11th Street South, Harmon Place, and 10th Street South. Due to the larger size of the large size of the buildings on campus and the large size of the properties that make up the campus, a larger sign is a reasonable use for the property and will assist in wayfinding. While the University has designed the campus layout, the large super block configuration is a unique circumstance that warrants relaxation of the requirements for number and size requirements of the zoning code.

3. **The granting of the variance will be in keeping with the spirit and intent of the ordinance and will not alter the essential character of the locality or be injurious to the use or enjoyment of other property in the vicinity.**

Variance to allow for a third freestanding sign on a zoning lot and variance to increase the size of a freestanding sign from 32 sq. ft. to 45 sq. ft.:

Granting the variances will be in keeping with the spirit and intent of the ordinance and will not alter the character of the surrounding area. Due to the larger size of the large size of the buildings on campus and the large size of the properties that make up the campus, a larger sign is a reasonable use for the property and will assist in wayfinding. The proposed sign material is compatible with the design of the existing signs and buildings on the campus and the sign will not obstruct views in or out of the campus.

4. **The proposed variance will not substantially increase the congestion of the public streets, or increase the danger of fire, or be detrimental to the public welfare or endanger the public safety.**

Variance to allow for a third freestanding sign on a zoning lot and variance to increase the size of a freestanding sign from 32 sq. ft. to 45 sq. ft.:

Granting the variances would not likely increase congestion in the area or increase the danger of fire safety, nor would the proposed parking reduction variance be detrimental to welfare or public safety. The height of the sign will not obstruct views or pedestrians in the public sidewalk or private walkway in campus.

Findings Required by the Minneapolis Zoning Code for a sign adjustment:

1. **The sign adjustment will not significantly increase or lead to sign clutter in the area or result in a sign that is inconsistent with the purpose of the zoning district in which the property is located.**

Variance to allow for a third freestanding sign on a zoning lot and variance to increase the size of a freestanding sign from 32 sq. ft. to 45 sq. ft.:

The proposed sign will not lead to sign clutter, even with the other two freestanding sign on the zoning lot. The proposed sign is much smaller in scale than the surrounding buildings and campus. The campus does not have wall signs or projecting signs in the immediate vicinity of the proposed sign.

2. **The sign adjustment will allow a sign of exceptional design or style that will enhance the area or that is more consistent with the architecture and design of the site.**

Variance to allow for a third freestanding sign on a zoning lot and variance to increase the size of a freestanding sign from 32 sq. ft. to 45 sq. ft.:

The proposed sign will be made of Mankato-Kasota stone, similar to the other freestanding signs and buildings on the University of St. Thomas campus and compliments the Neo-Gothic architecture style of the campus buildings.

Recommendation of the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development Planning Division:

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development Planning Division recommends that the Board of Adjustment adopt the findings above and **approve** the following variances:

- A variance to allow for a third freestanding sign on a zoning lot, and
- A variance to increase the size of a freestanding sign from 32 sq. ft. to 45 sq. ft. at 1000 LaSalle Avenue in the B4S-1 Downtown Service District and HA Harmon Place Overlay District, subject to the following conditions:
 1. CPED–Planning Division review and approve the final sign plan. All drawings will be measured to an architect or engineer’s scale.