

**Department of Community Planning and Economic Development – Planning
Division
Variance
BZZ-4870**

Date: August 16, 2010

Applicant: Hennepin County Medical Center (HCMC), Attn: Thomas Bravo, 701 Park Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55415, (612) 873-9128

Addresses of Property: 2810 Nicollet Avenue South and 2815 Blaisdell Avenue South

Project Name: Whittier Clinic (HCMC)

Contact Person and Phone: Visual Communications, Attn: Richard Lang, 475 Cleveland Avenue North, Suite 223, St. Paul, MN 55416, (651) 644-4494

Planning Staff and Phone: Becca Farrar, (612)673-3594

Date Application Deemed Complete: June 30, 2010

End of 60-Day Decision Period: August 28, 2010

End of 120-Day Decision Period: Not applicable for this application.

Ward: 6 **Neighborhood Organization:** Whittier Alliance

Existing Zoning: C3A (Community Activity Center) District and Nicollet Franklin Area Pedestrian Oriented (PO) Overlay District

Proposed Zoning: Not applicable for this application

Zoning Plate Number: 25

Lot area: 133,052 square feet or approximately 3.05 acres

Legal Description: Not applicable for this application.

Proposed Use: Signs for a new medical clinic.

Concurrent Review:

- Variance to allow more than one freestanding sign on a zoning lot. The applicant is proposing to locate five freestanding signs on the premises.

Applicable zoning code provisions: Chapter 525, Article IX, Variances.

Background: The applicant proposes to located five freestanding signs for the new Hennepin County Medical Center (HCMC) - Whittier Clinic, on the block bounded by Nicollet Avenue on the east, Blaisdell Avenue on the west, West 28th Street on the north and West 29th Street on the south. The approximate 3 acre site is zoned C3A and is located in the Nicollet Franklin Area Pedestrian Oriented (PO) Overlay District. The site was recently rezoned from the I1 (Limited Industrial) district to the C3A district as part of the Midtown Greenway Rezoning Study. With the exception of the number of freestanding signs, the signs as proposed meet the applicable Chapter 543 standards. The wall signs that are included within the submitted materials do not require Planning Commission review and are merely included for reference purposes. Typically, only one freestanding sign is permitted on a zoning lot with an allocation of one square foot of signage per one foot of frontage subject to the zoning district sign area limitations. The C3A district has a maximum sign area of 80 square feet and a maximum height of 8 feet. As proposed, all signs are under the maximum area and height allowed. The applicant is proposing the following freestanding signs: (1) the freestanding sign referred to as B2.3 is located near the intersection of Nicollet Avenue and West 29th Street is single-faced, 4 feet tall and 20 square feet in size. This sign is permitted and the applicant is not applying for a variance for this specific sign; (2) the freestanding sign referred to as B2.1 is located along the West 29th Street frontage, is double-faced, 4 feet tall and 18 square feet in size; (3) the freestanding sign referred to as B2 is located along the Blaisdell Avenue frontage, is double-faced, 4 feet tall and 18 square feet in size; (4) the freestanding sign referred to as B1 is also located on the Blaisdell Avenue frontage, is single-faced, 4 feet tall and 18 square feet in size; (5) the freestanding sign also referred to as B1 is located on the West 28th Street frontage, is single-faced, 4 feet tall and 18 square feet in size.

A two-phase Planned Unit Development (PUD) was approved for the site in December of 2008. Phase one included the construction of an approximate 60,960 square foot medical clinic on the north half of the site with underground parking for 68 vehicles, as well as a temporary surface parking lot for 104 vehicles. At the time of the initial application, phase two was conceptual and therefore requires further action from the Planning Commission prior to any building permit issuance. The preliminary plans for phase two included the construction of a 4-story structure on the southeast side of the site. The structure would have approximately 8,700 square feet of ground floor retail space facing Nicollet Avenue with an additional 27,000 square feet of office space located above. Another structure proposed on the southwest side of the site would be 3-stories tall and include a 3-level (1 level underground, two above grade) parking ramp with residential units lining the ramp. As proposed a total of 26 residential units would be provided and a total of 239 off-street parking spaces within the parking ramp to be shared between HCMC and the other future functions on the premises. With completion of both phases of the PUD, the applicant is proposing to locate a total of 330 off-street parking spaces (68 underground on the HCMC site, 23 surface parking stalls and 239 within the parking ramp proposed as part of phase two) on the premises. Development of the second phase of the PUD would be expected to result in the elimination of the majority of the proposed

surface parking and bring the site into compliance with the minimum FAR of 1.0 required in the Nicollet Franklin Area PO standards.

The City of Minneapolis also finalized a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City and HCMC following the land use application approval process. Essentially, the document outlines the responsibilities that both the City of Minneapolis and HCMC have moving forward with development on the subject site. Ultimately, the City will be responsible for the phase two development on the site and HCMC will be responsible for the maintenance of the site in the interim between phase one and phase two construction.

The project was originally scheduled for the August 2, 2010, Planning Commission meeting. The applicant requested that the application be continued until the August 16, 2010, Planning Commission meeting due to a conflict and also in order to meet with the Whittier Alliance prior to the public hearing.

Staff has not received official correspondence from the Whittier Alliance prior to the printing of this report. All emails/letters received prior to the Planning Commission meeting will be forwarded on for consideration.

VARIANCE –

Findings as Required by the Minneapolis Zoning Code for the Variance:

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

Due to the use of the site as a medical clinic and the wide array of family services and urgent care services that are provided on the premises it would be an undue hardship to not allow additional way-finding and directional signage in the form of freestanding signs on the premises. Further, the clinic is located on a large 3-acre site with frontage on four public streets, three of which are one-way (Blaisdell Avenue, West 28th Street and West 29th Street. It would be unreasonable to not allow adequate freestanding identification signs on the premises. However, Planning Staff believes that two of the proposed freestanding signs located at the corner of Blaisdell Avenue and West 28th Street can be combined into one sign by merely situating the sign at an angle. It is Staff's opinion that a single sign in this location located at an angle would still have visibility from both intended vantage points while limiting the potential of sign clutter in this location.

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.

The circumstances are unique to the parcel of land for which the variance is being sought as the clinic is situated on a large 3-acre parcel with frontage on four public streets, three of which are one-way. The geographical circumstances necessitating this request have not been created by the applicant.

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.

The granting of the variance to allow more than one freestanding sign on the premises would be in keeping with the spirit and intent of the ordinance and would not alter the essential character of the locality or be injurious to the use and enjoyment of other property in the vicinity. The clinic is situated on a large 3-acre parcel with frontage on four public streets, three of which are one-way. Due to the configuration of the site and the distance between freestanding signs, Planning Staff believes that allowing additional freestanding signs on the premises is supportable. As previously mentioned, Planning Staff would recommend that two of the freestanding signs located at the corner of Blaisdell Avenue and West 28th Street be combined into one sign by situating the sign at an angle. A reduction in one sign would result in a total of 4 freestanding signs on the premises, three of which require a variance.

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.

The granting of the variance to allow more than one freestanding sign on the premises would not be expected to have any impact on the congestion of the public street, an increase in the danger of fire, be detrimental to the public welfare or endanger the public safety. In fact, allowing additional directional signage to a clinic that offers urgent care would be expected to enhance public safety.

Additional Findings required for a Sign Variance:

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.

Provided the Planning Commission concurs with Planning Staff, and approves the reduction of overall freestanding signs from the requested five, to the suggested four freestanding signs, Planning Staff does not believe that request would result in sign clutter on the premises. Further, based on the proposed height and overall area of each of the signs, Planning Staff believes that the design of the signs takes into consideration the intent of the Nicollet Franklin Area Pedestrian Oriented Overlay District which applies to the subject site.

- 2. The sign adjustment will allow a sign that relates in size, shape, materials, color, illumination and character to the function and architectural character of the building or property on which the sign will be located.**

Planning Staff believes that the signs that are proposed on the site are of high-quality materials (individually illuminated letters on opaque aluminum backgrounds) and are consistent with the architecture on the site. Further, the signs relate in size, shape, color and illumination to the building and the subject site.

RECOMMENDATION:

Recommendation of the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development – Planning Division for the variance:

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development – Planning Division recommends that the City Planning Commission adopt the findings above and **deny** the variance to allow a total of five freestanding signs on the zoning lot and in lieu thereof **approve** the application for a variance to allow a total of four freestanding signs on the zoning lot located at 2810 Nicollet Avenue South and 2815 Blaisdell Avenue South.

Attachments:

1. Correspondence
2. Zoning map
3. Sign Plan
4. Photos