



City of Trotwood
Planning and Development Department
3035 Olive Road – Trotwood, Ohio 45426

DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS VARIANCE
(March 12, 2026)

STAFF REPORT

Docket No. / Project Title: ZV-2025-43 (MotorCity Auto Care)
Staff: Tyler Hauck
Applicant: Motor City Auto Care
Property Size: 26,855 square feet
Current Zoning: GB (General Business)
Location: 521 E Main Street, in the City of Trotwood

Background Summary:

The applicant has indicated that the proposed variance is for the purpose to request a development standard variance from TCO §1185.09 (e)(3) to allow a wall sign projecting above the wall that it is attached to. The existing sign was installed without a zoning permit and the applicant is requesting the variance to allow it to remain as is. The property is located at 521 E. Main Street within the City of Trotwood.

Preliminary Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends denial of the variance request. Criteria A, B, C, E, F, and G have not been met.

The applicant installed the wall sign without first obtaining the required zoning permit, and the sign does not meet the development standards outlined in TCO §1185.09(e)(3), which prohibit wall signs from projecting above the wall to which they are attached. The applicant has not demonstrated that a practical difficulty exists that would prevent compliance with the code, as a conforming wall sign could be installed without projecting above the building wall.

Zoning Ordinance Considerations:

District Intent: The intent of the GB (General Business) zoning district is as follows: To encourage the development of areas within the city to provide for a wide variety of consumer goods and services.

Development Standards: Trotwood Zoning Ordinance Chapter §1185.09(e)(3) states that a wall sign shall not project above the top of the wall to which attached or be more than 15 feet in height, whichever is less.

Current Property Information:	
Land Use:	Auto-Oriented Use, Heavy (legal non-conforming)
Site Features:	Auto repair shop with 2 bays and a parking lot
Vehicle Access:	Stuckhardt Rd, Collector Street E Main Street, Arterial

Surrounding Zoning and Land Use:		
	Zoning:	Land Use:
North:	GB (General Business)	Vacant car wash
South:	GB (General Business)	Vacant retail
East:	GB (General Business)	Community Shopping Center
West:	GB (General Business)	Retail (Rise Up, Just Sweat Fitness)

Interdepartmental Review:	
City Engineering:	No comment from Engineering
Fire Department:	No comment from the FD
Community Improvement Corporation:	No comment from TCIC
Public Works:	No comment from Public Works

Planning Consideration(s):

The following general site considerations, planning concepts, and other facts should be considered in the review of this application:

1. The applicant is requesting a development standard variance for an existing wall sign that was installed without first obtaining the required zoning permit.
2. The requested variance would allow the wall sign to project about the top of the wall, which is not permitted under TCO §1185.09(e)(3). The sign currently placed to be entirely above the wall.

3. The sign was considered legal non-conforming. However, the sign was removed and a new sign installed (without a permit). When the old sign was removed, it lost its nonconforming status and any new sign would need to meet the current code regulations.
4. The property is located within the General Business (GB) zoning district along the East Main Street corridor, an arterial roadway that serves as a primary commercial corridor within the City.
5. The site contains an existing auto repair business, which is considered a legal non-conforming use within the district.
6. The variance request is related only to the sign's height and placement relative to the wall, and does not involve any expansion of the building footprint or the existing use on the property.
7. The sign is also too large for the building. The size must either be reduced or a variance obtained to allow the sign to be larger than permitted. The applicant was notified of the additional variance required but did not file it. Any variance regarding the size of the existing illegal sign will be heard at a separate Board of Zoning Appeals meeting.
8. Approval of the variance would allow the existing nonconforming sign installation to remain, while denial would require the applicant to modify or replace the sign to comply with the current zoning ordinance.
9. Sign regulations are intended to ensure consistency, safety, and appropriate visual scale among commercial businesses within the City.

Provisional Findings of Fact/Decision Criteria:

TCO Chapter 1129.03(c)(2) of the Zoning Ordinance states that the Board of Zoning Appeals will consider the variance request while also considering the public health, safety, and welfare of the community. Variances shall only be granted upon a determination that practical difficulties exist with respect to the property in question that would render the strict application of the Zoning Ordinance unreasonable. The Board of Zoning Appeals may only consider evidence and testimony presented at hearing, and it shall not consider other variances granted in the community, unless an applicant specifically introduces evidence and testimony regarding other variances granted in the same zoning district. In the event an applicant intends to introduce evidence at hearing as to other variances granted in the same zoning district, the applicant must provide the Planning & Zoning Administrator with notice of his intent to introduce such evidence at least seven days prior to the scheduled hearing. In determining whether practical difficulties exist that are sufficient to warrant a variance, the Board of Zoning Appeals shall consider and weight the following factors:

A. Whether the property in question will yield a reasonable return or whether there can be any beneficial use of the property without the variance;

*Provisional Findings: The property is currently being used as an auto repair business and can continue to operate without the requested variance. A conforming wall sign that meets the requirements of TCO §1185.09(e)(3) could be installed without projecting above the building wall. Therefore, the property can yield a reasonable return without the variance. **This criterion has not been met.***

B. Whether the requested variance is substantial;

*Provisional Findings: The applicant states that alternative options such as reducing the size of the sign or relocating it were considered but would limit visibility from East Main Street. The sign currently extends entirely above the wall of the building. Staff could not find any wall signs that have been approved or received a variance. The Main Street Food Market has a wall sign that is legal nonconforming and extends slightly above the wall of the building. If that sign was removed, it could not be reinstalled as is. With the buildings close proximity to the street and E Main Streets speeds not exceed 35 mph, it is highly unlikely that lowering the sign to meet the ordinance would have any impact on its visibility. **This criterion has not been met.***

C. Whether the essential character of the neighborhood would be substantially altered, or whether adjoining property owners would suffer a substantial detriment if the variance were granted;

*Provisional Findings: The applicant states the surrounding area contains other businesses with prominent signage and that the new sign represents an aesthetic improvement over the previous sign. The surrounding area is commercial in nature; however, approval of the variance could contribute to inconsistencies in the application of sign standards along the East Main Street corridor. **This criterion has not been met.***

D. Whether the variance would adversely affect the delivery of governmental services (i.e, water, sewer, garbage, fire rescue, and the like);

Provisional Findings: The variance is not expected to interfere with or place additional burden on any emergency access, utilities, waste collection, or fire and rescue operations. This criterion has been met.

E. Whether the property owner purchased the property with knowledge of the zoning restrictions;

*Provisional Findings: There is no indication that the applicant was aware of the zoning restrictions at the time of purchase. When asked, the applicant stated they were unaware that a zoning permit was required prior to installing the sign. At the same time, there is a reasonable expectation that businesses perform their due diligence before making business decisions. This includes reaching out to the Planning and Development Office, which did not occur. **This criterion has not been met.***

F. Whether the property owner’s predicament can feasibly be obviated through some method other than a variance;

*Provisional Findings: The applicant indicated that alternative options such as reducing the size of the sign or relocating it were considered but determined to be less effective for business visibility. However, a conforming wall sign that meets the requirements of the zoning ordinance could still be installed on the building without projecting above the wall. With the buildings close proximity to the street and E Main Streets speeds not exceed 35 mph, it is highly unlikely that lowering the sign to meet the ordinance would have any impact on its visibility. **This criterion has not been met.***

G. Whether the spirit and intent behind the zoning requirements would be observed and substantial justice done by granting the variance;

*Provisional Findings: The intent of the sign regulations is to maintain consistent development standards and consistent visual scale among businesses. Granting the variance after the sign was installed without the required permit could undermine the intent of the zoning regulations. **This criterion has not been met.***

H. Any other relevant factor;

Provisional Findings: The applicant indicated the sign does not obstruct sight visibility and that no concerns have been raised by neighboring properties. Additionally, the applicant has stated that if the variance is denied, they would request approximately 60 days to remove or modify the sign to bring the property into compliance. This criterion has been considered.

Board of Zoning Appeals Options:

In reviewing a request for a development standards variance, the Board may (1) approve the petition as proposed, (2) approve the petition with conditions, (3) table the petition to a future meeting of the Board, or (4) deny the petition. Failure to achieve a quorum or lack of a majority vote on a motion result in an automatic continuance to the next regularly scheduled meeting.

