



PLAN SNAPSHOT REPORT DSIAPP-000317-2026 FOR CITY OF SAINT PAUL

Plan Type: DSI Appeals

Work Class: City Council

Description: An appeal of a decision by the Board of Zoning Appeals denying a variance request to convert an existing lit, freestanding sign to a dynamic display sign at 1305 7th Street West. Section 64.405 of the Zoning Code requires dynamic display signs to be located at least 75 feet from residential districts measured along the road and 50 feet measured radially; the proposed sign would be located 50 feet measured along the road and 47 feet measured radially from a residential district, for variances of 25 feet and 3 feet.

Parcel: 112823430014	Main	Address: 1305 7Th St W Saint Paul, MN 55102	Main	Zone: RM2(Medium-Density Multiple-Family Re: B2(Community Business)
Other Steve Lawrance	Appellant Joe Bennett	Other Think Digital Signs Matthew Duffy		

Plan Custom Fields

Code Citation(s) ZONING CODE CITATION: Sec. 64.405(a) - Location and orientation. Business signs with dynamic display shall be at least seventy-five (75) feet, as measured along the road, from a residential district, and shall be at least fifty (50) feet from a residential district, measured radially. Signs with dynamic display intended to be read from a freeway shall be at least six hundred sixty (660) feet as measured along the freeway from any other sign with dynamic display designed to be read by drivers heading in the same direction. Signs with dynamic display shall not interfere with traffic and road safety due to placement and orientation as determined by the city traffic engineer.
 Sec. 64.207. - Variances. Applications for variance from the strict enforcement of the provisions of this chapter shall be filed and reviewed according to the provisions in chapter 61, administration and enforcement. In addition to the requirements for variances in section 61.601, the applicant shall demonstrate that such variance is needed due to unusual conditions pertaining to sign needs for a specific building or lot, and that the sign would not create a hazard, would not be objectionable to adjacent property owners, would not adversely affect residential property through excessive glare and lighting, and would be in keeping with the general character of the surrounding area.

Grounds for Appeal The Board of Zoning Appeals was divided in its consideration of Bennett's variance request, and because the vote did not reach the required level of approval, the application was denied. The City Planning Department formally recommended approval of the variance. In its written report, the Planning Department cited the applicable zoning code, evaluated the request against each of the required variance criteria, and concluded that the application satisfied all applicable standards. A practical hardship exists in that there is no location on Bennett's property that would allow the sign to meet the required setback from residential property. Without the ability to modernize signage, properties are often left with aging and deteriorating signs that negatively impact the visual character of the corridor. The proposed sign is smaller than the existing sign and will significantly improve the appearance of the site. Bennett's has communicated directly with the neighborhood association and has committed to design and operational measures to minimize light spill and potential impacts to nearby properties. Digital signage is an important tool for helping local businesses remain competitive and grow, and a successful, vibrant restaurant contributes positively to the vitality and character of the surrounding community.

Bennett's Chop and Railhouse City Council Sign Permit Variance Appeal Narrative.

Joe Bennett, owner of Bennett's Chop & Railhouse, is requesting approval to install a new digital sign to replace the existing aging sign on the property. The current sign is outdated, in need of repair, and relies on manual changeable letters, which significantly limits its effectiveness and creates ongoing maintenance challenges.

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A practical hardship exists in that there is no location on Bennett's property that would allow the sign to meet the required setback from nearby residential property. Due to the physical constraints of the site, full compliance with the setback requirement is not feasible.

Without the ability to modernize signage, properties are often left with aging and deteriorating signs that negatively impact the visual character of the corridor. The proposed sign is smaller than the existing sign and represents a substantial aesthetic improvement for the site. It will modernize the property, improve visibility in a tasteful manner, and significantly enhance the overall appearance of the location.

The new sign will support the restaurant's ongoing marketing efforts and help the business remain competitive in an increasingly challenging marketplace. Digital signage is an important tool for helping local businesses retain existing customers, attract new customers, and continue to grow. A successful and vibrant restaurant contributes positively to the vitality and character of the surrounding community.

The applicant recognizes that potential light impacts are an important consideration for the City and for nearby residential properties. Bennett's has communicated directly with the neighborhood association and has committed to design and operational measures to minimize light spill and potential impacts to nearby properties.

The proposed sign and its operation will comply with all applicable City sign code requirements and will incorporate the following safeguards:

- The sign will not scroll or change messages more frequently than once every twenty minutes.
- The sign will be monochromatic, using dark backgrounds with lighter text to minimize overall light output.
- The sign will be turned off daily between 11:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m.
- The sign will be equipped with a photocell that automatically adjusts brightness based on ambient lighting conditions, including overcast and low-light conditions.
- The sign will operate at approximately ten percent of its daytime brightness after sunset.
- The sign software can be configured to further reduce nighttime brightness if needed to address any unforeseen impacts.

With the replacement of the existing larger cabinet sign and the installation of a smaller Bennett's identification sign together with a monochromatic digital display, the overall light impact of the proposed signage is expected to be equal to or less than that of the existing sign.

Joe Bennett has committed to work cooperatively with the City and nearby residents to promptly address any concerns should the sign be found to create light levels that are a nuisance.

Think Digital Signs has installed digital signs at more than eighty churches, many of which are located in close proximity to residential neighborhoods. In the limited number of instances where brightness concerns were initially identified, adjustments to nighttime brightness levels resolved those concerns without further issues.



Bennett's Chop & Railhouse

1305 West 7th Street
Saint Paul, MN 55102

City Council Appeal

February – 2026

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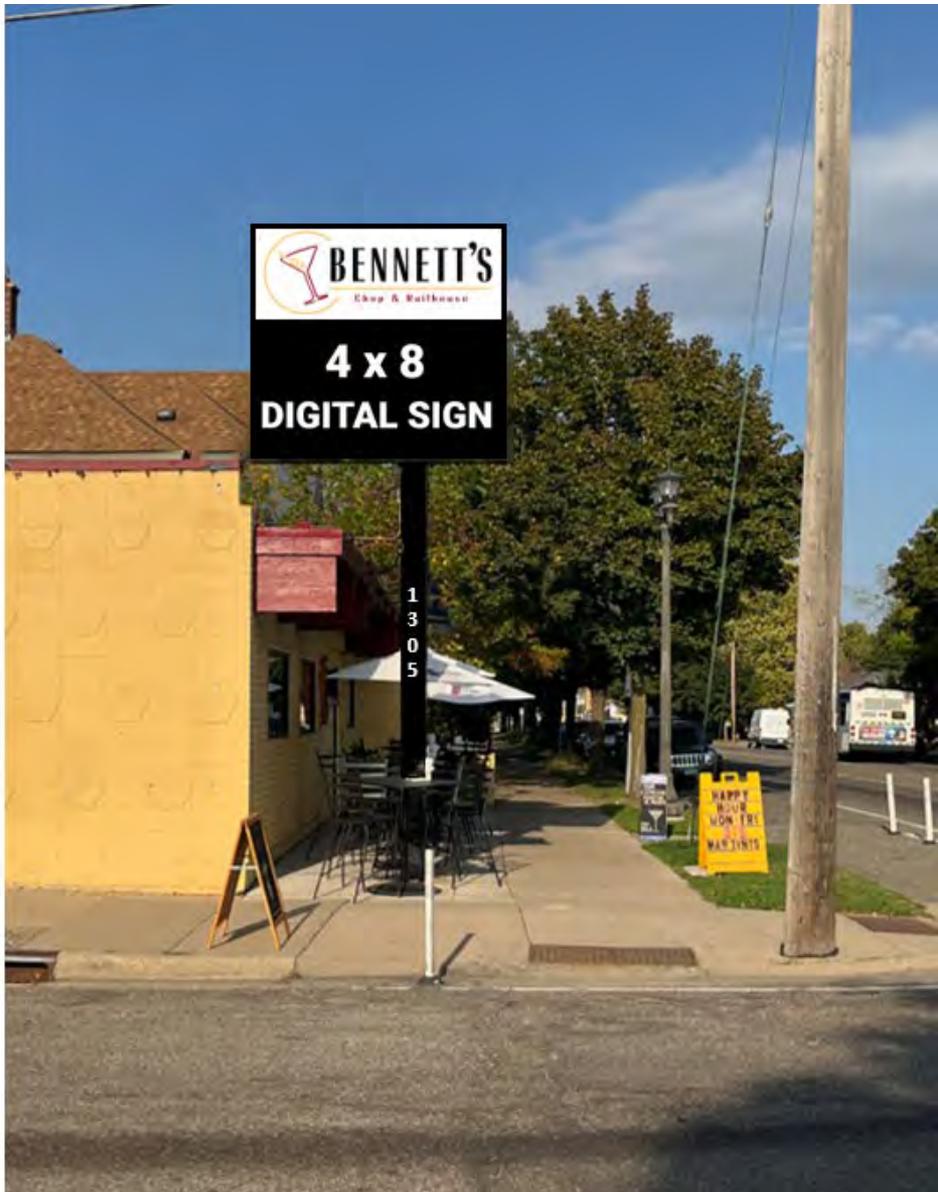
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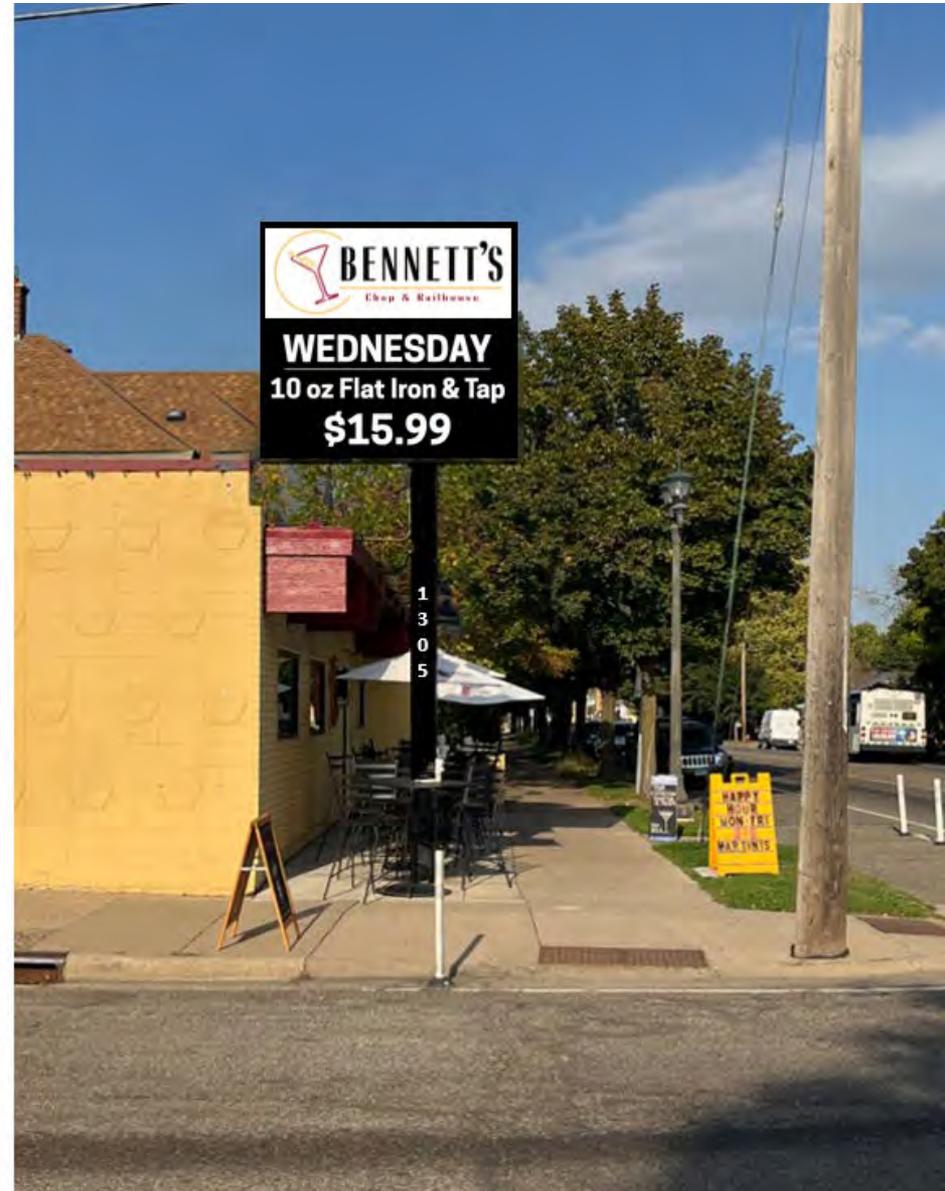
Existing Sign



Proposed Signage: 4x8 Digital Sign



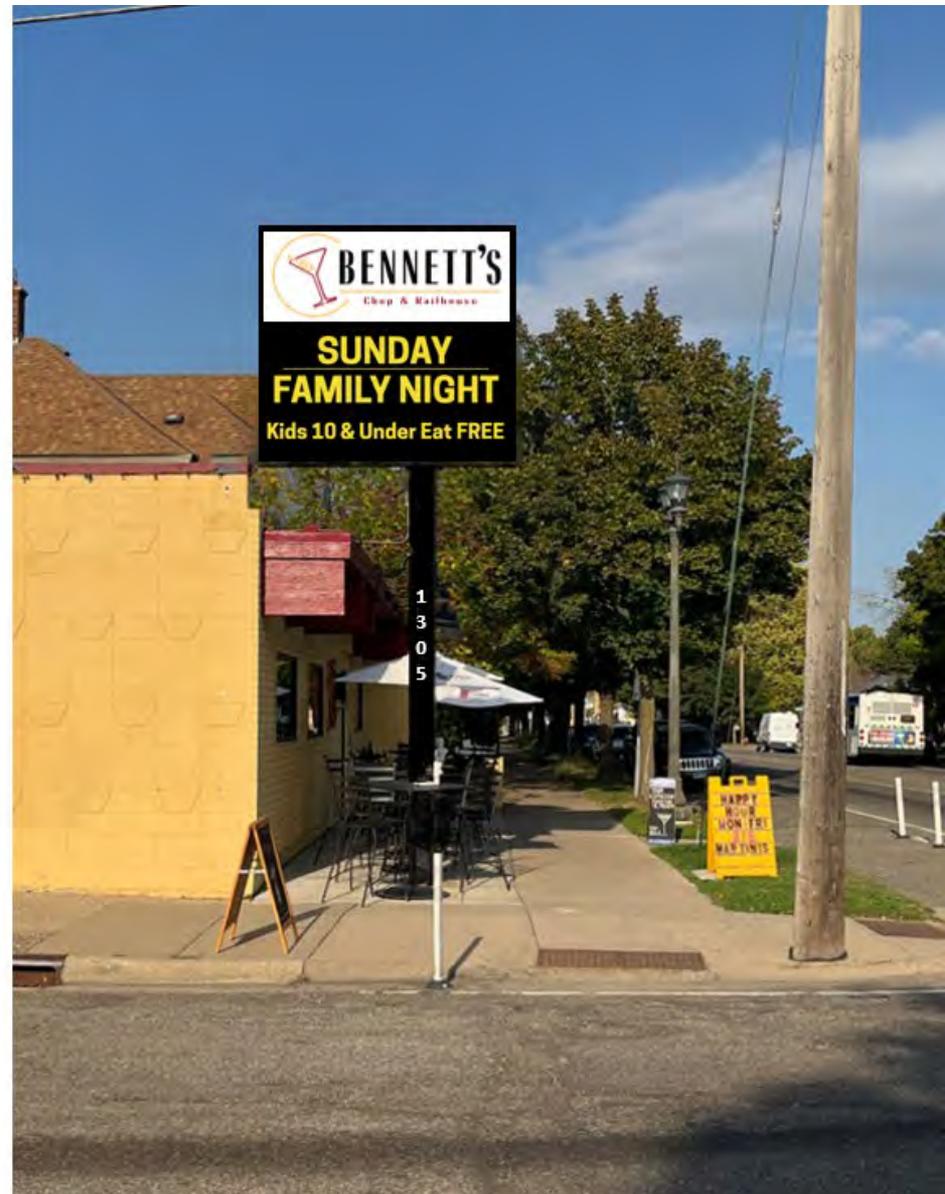
Example Messages

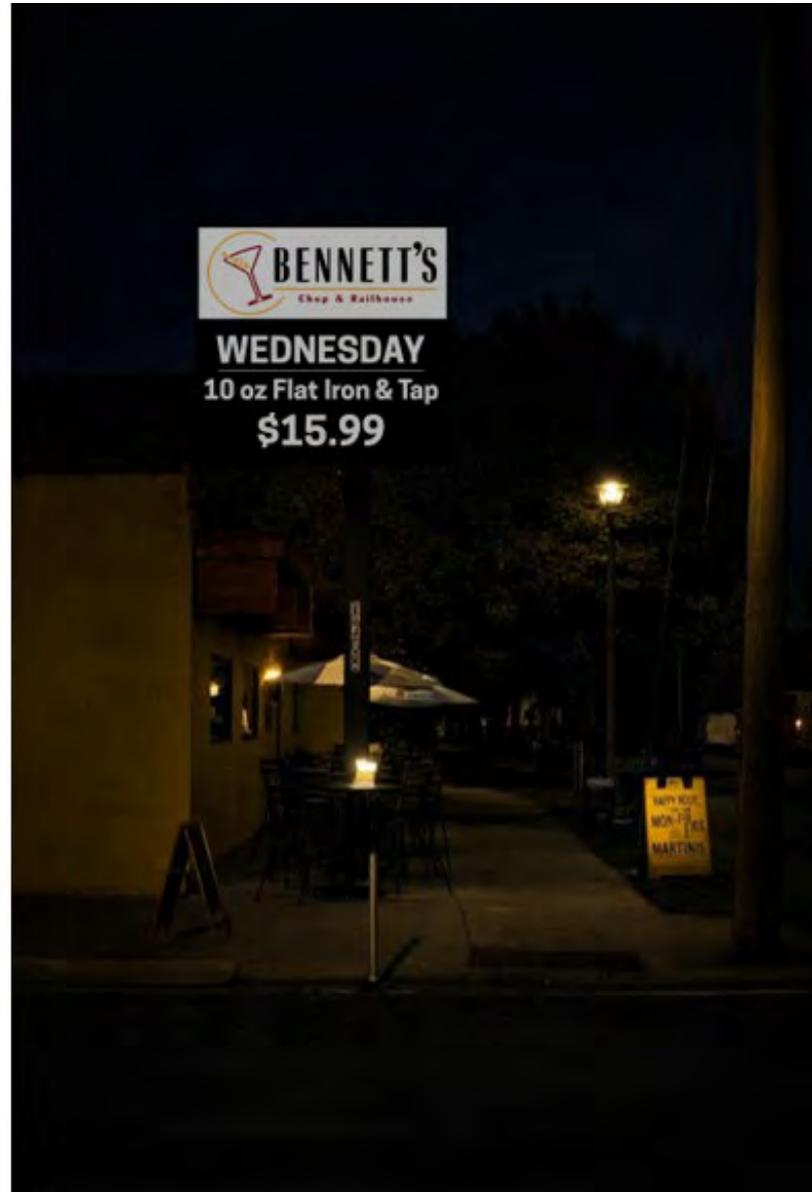
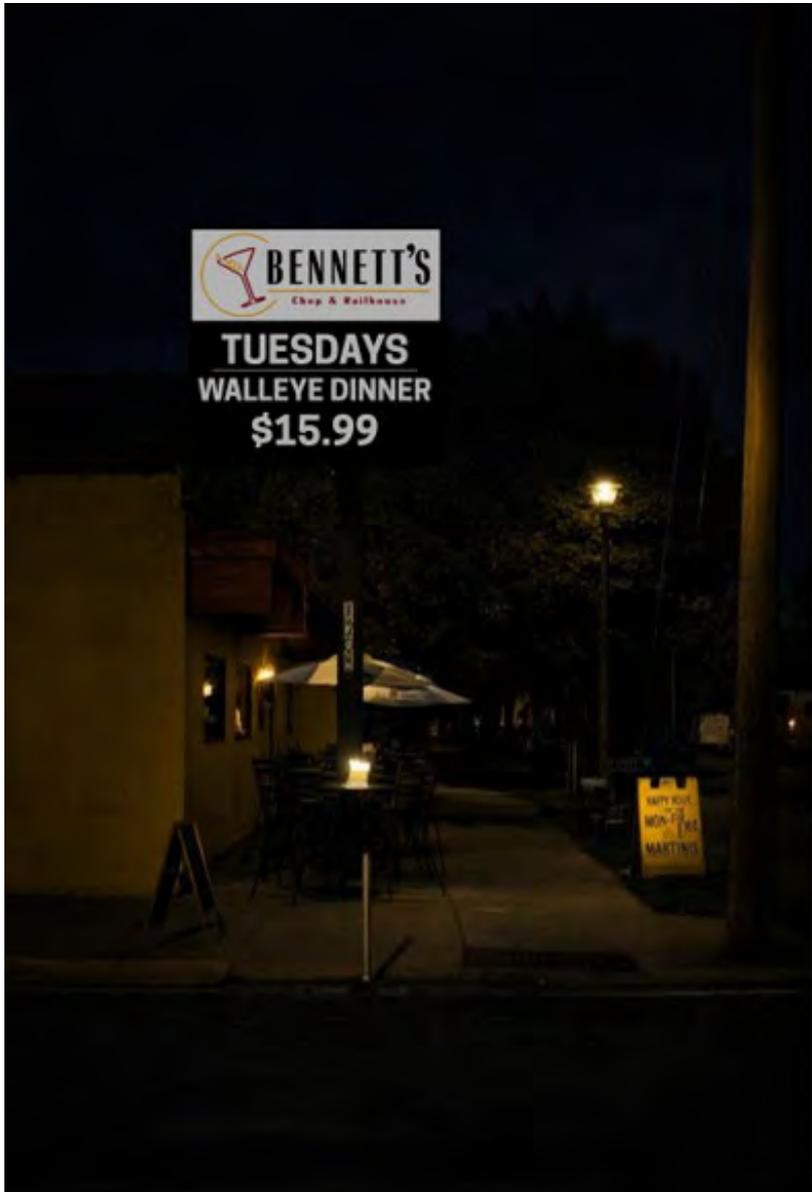


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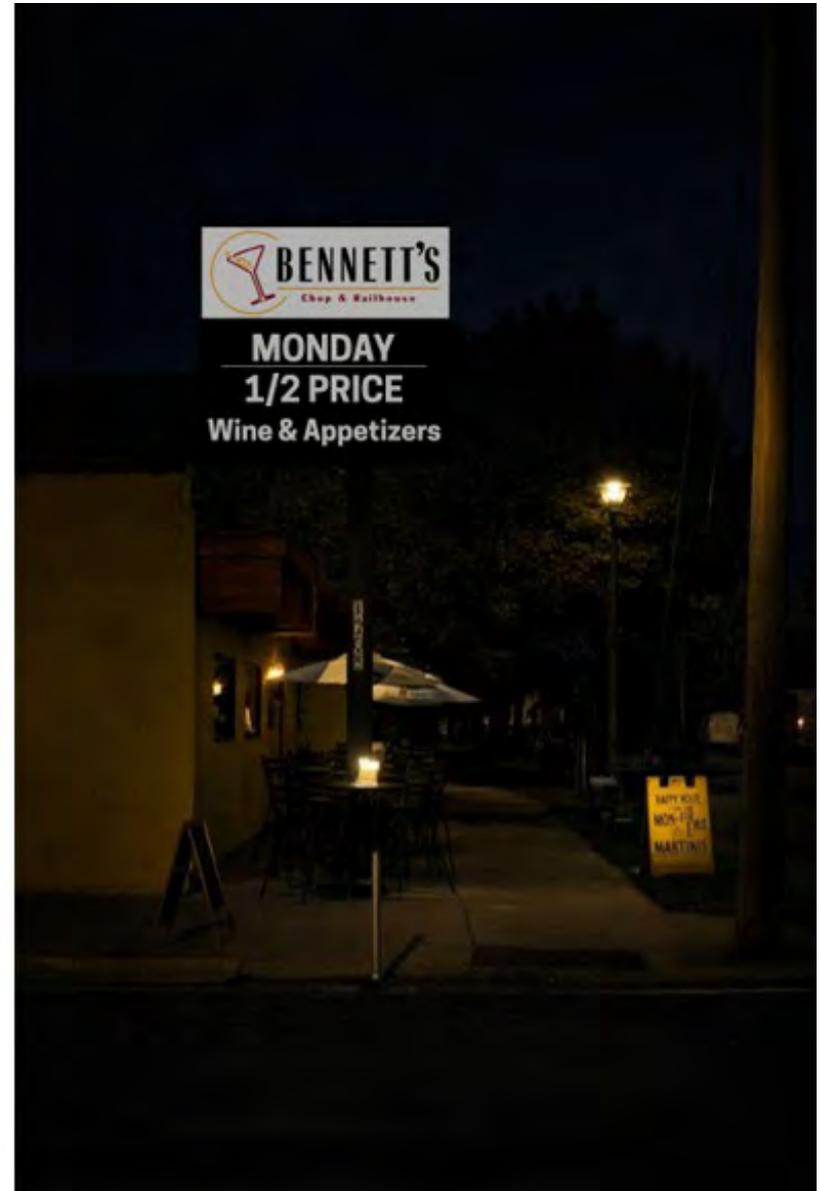
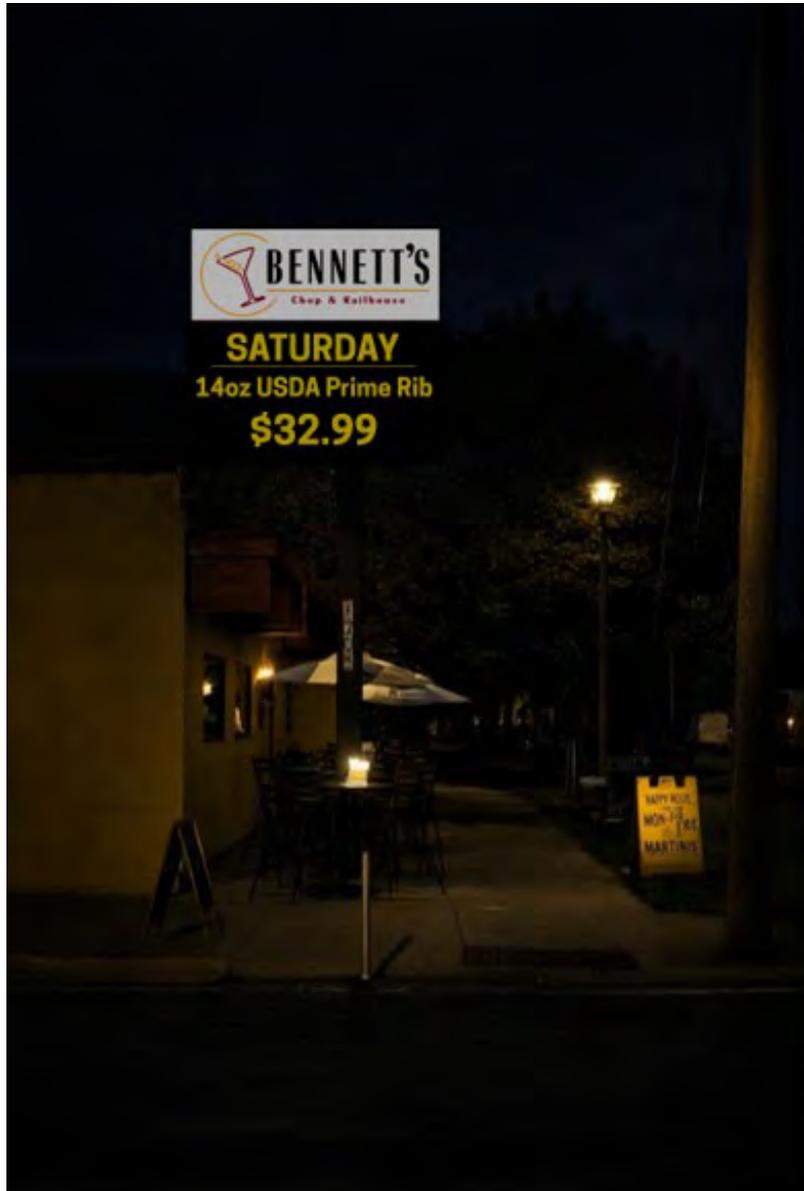


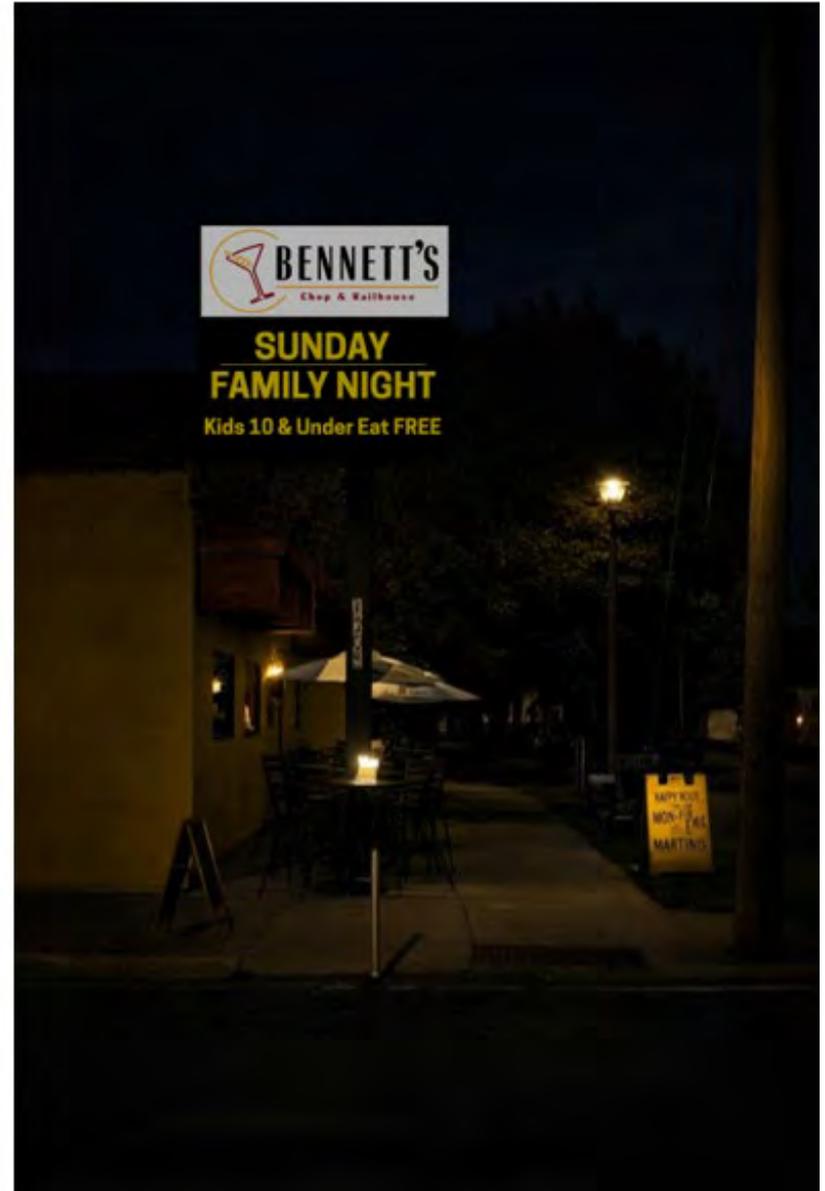
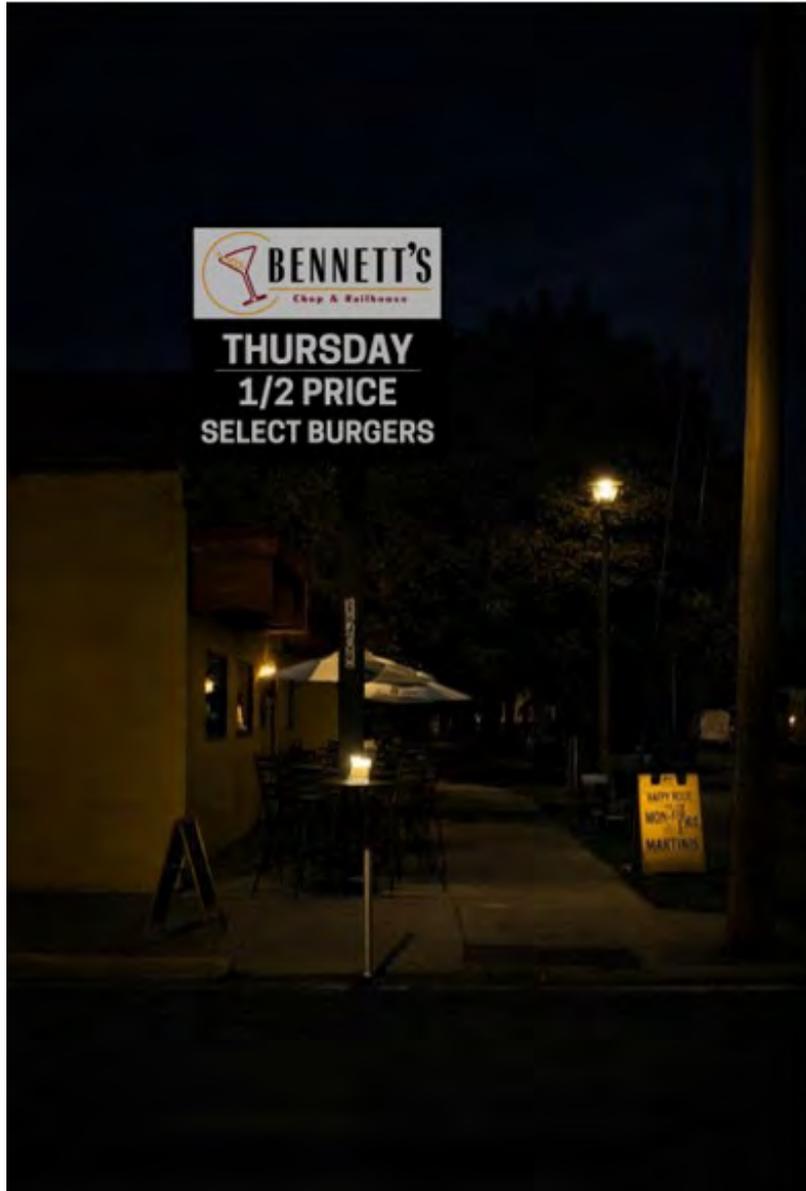
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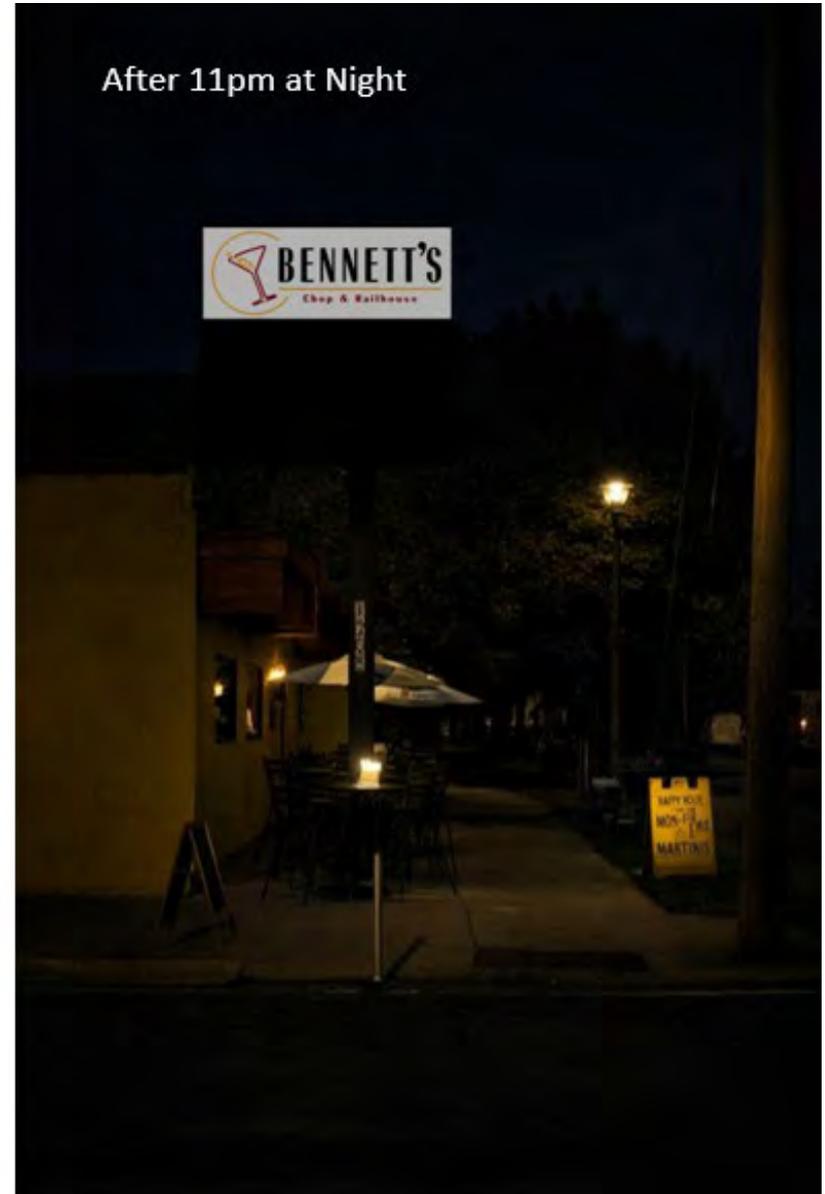




Nighttime Views







New Sign vs. Old Sign





CITY OF SAINT PAUL

DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY AND INSPECTIONS
375 JACKSON STREET, SUITE 220
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA 55101-1806
Phone: 651-266-8989 Fax: 651-266-9124
Visit our Web Site at www.stpaul.gov/dsi

Board of Zoning Appeals

Staff Report

TYPE OF APPLICATION: Major Variance **FILE #: DSIBZA-000232-2025**

APPLICANT: Joe Bennett

HEARING DATE: February 2, 2026

LOCATION: 1305 7th Street West

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: CLARKE'S ADDITION EX VICTORIA AND 7TH STS
LOTS 16 AND LOT 17 BLK 8

PLANNING DISTRICT: 9

PRESENT ZONING: B2

ZONING CODE REFERENCE: § 64.405

DATE RECEIVED: December 21, 2025

REPORT DATE: January 29, 2026

DEADLINE FOR ACTION: March 16, 2026 **BY: Kaozouapang Yang**

A. **PURPOSE:** The applicant proposes to convert an existing lit, freestanding sign to a dynamic display sign, keeping it in its current location. The zoning code requires dynamic display signs to be 75 feet measured along the road from residential districts and 50 ft from residential districts measured radially; 50 and 47 feet are proposed, for variances of 25 and 3 feet, respectively.

B. **SITE AND AREA CONDITIONS:** This is a 0.1363 sq ft parcel on the corner of 7th Street West and Victoria Street South.

The surrounding land uses and zoning include:

- Medium-Density Multiple-Family Residential (RM2)
- Residential (H2)
- Traditional Neighborhood (T2)

C. **ZONING CODE CITATION:**
Sec. 64.405(a) - Location and orientation. Business signs with dynamic display shall be at least seventy-five (75) feet, as measured along the road, from a residential district, and shall be at least fifty (50) feet from a residential district, measured radially. Signs with dynamic display intended to be read from a freeway shall be at least six hundred sixty (660) feet as measured along the

freeway from any other sign with dynamic display designed to be read by drivers heading in the same direction. Signs with dynamic display shall not interfere with traffic and road safety due to placement and orientation as determined by the city traffic engineer.

Sec. 64.207. - Variances.

Applications for variance from the strict enforcement of the provisions of this chapter shall be filed and reviewed according to the provisions in chapter 61, administration and enforcement. In addition to the requirements for variances in section 61.601, the applicant shall demonstrate that such variance is needed due to unusual conditions pertaining to sign needs for a specific building or lot, and that the sign would not create a hazard, would not be objectionable to adjacent property owners, would not adversely affect residential property through excessive glare and lighting, and would be in keeping with the general character of the surrounding area.

D. FINDINGS:

1. The variance is in harmony with the general purposes and intent of the zoning code.

The applicant proposes to convert an existing lit, freestanding sign to a dynamic display sign, keeping it in its current location. The zoning code requires dynamic display signs to be 75 feet measured along the road from residential districts and 50 ft from residential districts measured radially; 50 and 47 feet are proposed, for variances of 25 and 3 feet, respectively.

This applicant’s request conforms to the provisions of Section 64.207, the findings necessary for sign variances, as follows:

a. The variance is due to unusual conditions pertaining to sign needs for a specific building or lot.

The corner-lot configuration and existing building placement limit standard sign placement. The proposal replaces existing signage to provide necessary business identification consistent with the area. **This finding is met.**

b. The sign would not create a hazard.

The sign will be installed by a licensed contractor and poses no safety hazard to the immediate area or the public. **This finding is met.**

c. The sign would not be objectionable to adjacent property owners.

No objections to this request have been raised by adjacent property owners. **This finding is met.**

d. The sign would not adversely affect residential property though excessive glare and lighting.

The sign will be monochromatic, static (changing no more than every 20 minutes), and turned off between 11:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. This minimizes potential glare and lighting

impacts on nearby residential properties. **This finding is met.**

e. The sign is in keeping with the general character of the surrounding area.

The proposed sign is consistent in scale, placement, and appearance with other business signage in the surrounding area. **This finding is met.**

2. The variance is consistent with the comprehensive plan.

The request aligns with Policy LU-6 of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan and the District 9 Area Plan Summary, which support businesses that enhance neighborhood services. The proposed sign will increase visibility, attract patrons, and stimulate local economic activity. **Therefore, this finding is met.**

3. The applicant has established that there are practical difficulties in complying with the provision, that the property owner proposes to use the property in a reasonable manner not permitted by the provision. Economic considerations alone do not constitute practical difficulties.

The applicant has demonstrated practical difficulties in complying with the current signage provision. The property is uniquely located in a B2 (commercial) district that is surrounded by residential districts. This condition limits the options for updating the signage in a manner consistent with other commercial properties, which are typically located in fully commercial corridors.

The proposed use of the property is reasonable. The request is justified by these specific, site-related constraints and not by economic considerations alone, which do not constitute a valid practical difficulty. **Therefore, this finding is met.**

4. The plight of the landowner is due to circumstances unique to the property not created by the landowner.

The landowner's plight originates from the property's unique circumstance, a B2-zoned lot surrounded by residential districts. As this situation is not attributable to the owner, **the finding is met.**

5. The variance will not permit any use that is not allowed in the zoning district where the affected land is located.

The zoning code allows signage in all districts. **This finding is met.**

6. The variance will not alter the essential character of the surrounding area.

The proposed sign is consistent with the other signs in the area and will not change the commercial character of the area. **This finding is met.**

E. DISTRICT COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION: As of the date of this report, staff have not

received a comment from District 9.

- F. **CORRESPONDENCE:** Staff have not received any correspondence regarding this request.
- G. **STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Based on findings 1 through 6, staff recommend approval of the requested variance.