



West 7th/Fort Road Federation
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Sent via email: Contact-Council@ci.stpaul.mn.us

February 19, 2026

City Council
15 Kellogg Blvd. W.
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Re: City Council Public Comment: Dynamic Sign Variance Bennett's 1305 W 7th Street – Appeal #DSIAPP-000317-2026

Dear Council President and Councilmembers,

On behalf of the West 7th/Fort Road Federation (District 9), we submit this letter in support of the appeal of the Board of Zoning Appeals' denial of the requested dynamic sign variance at 1305 7th Street West. We believe the record demonstrates that the required findings were met and that the denial reflects an error in finding.

Practical Difficulties & Reasonable Use

***Condition:** The applicant has established that there are practical difficulties in complying with the provision, and 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 record establishes practical difficulties arising from the unique physical characteristics of this specific property, not from economic motivations.

The parcel is a small corner lot in a B2 commercial district immediately surrounded by residential zoning districts on multiple sides. This configuration significantly constrains compliant placement of a dynamic display sign under the required setbacks. The building placement and lot orientation are fixed conditions not created by the landowner and limit feasible sign locations.

The Fort Road Federation coordinates participation in advocacy and planning and builds community connections for the residents, businesses, and nonprofit organizations of the West 7th neighborhood so that it is a place where people want to live, work, and play.

These constraints are inherent to the site and constitute a classic example of practical difficulties under the zoning code: the property cannot reasonably accommodate updated signage that meets setback requirements due to its unique physical circumstances.

The requested variance therefore allows a reasonable and customary use. This improvement modernizes an existing freestanding business sign in its current location—rather than introducing a new use or intensifying impacts. The hardship arises from site geometry, surrounding zoning context, and existing structural placement, all of which restrict compliant sign placement regardless of financial considerations.

Because the practical difficulty stems from physical and locational constraints unique to this parcel, the applicant satisfies this condition.

Essential Character of the Surrounding Area

Condition: *The variance will not alter the essential character of the surrounding area.*

The record demonstrates that the proposal will not alter the essential character of the area because it replaces an existing illuminated freestanding sign in the same location with a smaller, updated, modernized sign. The surrounding area is a mixed-use commercial corridor that already includes a variety of business signage serving neighborhood-scale businesses.

Operational safeguards significantly limit potential impacts, including monochromatic display, limited message changes, automatic dimming based on ambient light, reduced nighttime brightness, and daily shutoff during overnight hours.

These conditions ensure that the sign will function in a subdued and context-sensitive manner compatible with adjacent residential uses. As such, the proposal maintains the corridor's established pattern of neighborhood-serving commercial activity.

From the district council perspective, reinvestment in existing small businesses through well-regulated modernization supports corridor vitality without introducing new land use impacts. The essential character of West 7th is that of a historic mixed-use neighborhood corridor where commercial uses and nearby residences coexist. The proposed variance is consistent with that long standing pattern.

Conclusion

Based on the unique site constraints, the reasonable nature of the proposed sign replacement, and the limited and well-mitigated impacts on surrounding residential properties, the applicant has met the required conditions.

For these reasons, the West 7th/Fort Road Federation respectfully requests that the City Council find that the Board of Zoning Appeals erred in its findings and grant the appeal.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julia McColley', written in a cursive style.

Julia McColley

Executive Director

CC: Councilmember Noecker

Joe Bennett, Bennett's Chophouse & Rail Owner