

Zoning Board of Appeals
January 28, 2026, Regular Meeting

STAFF REPORT

Subject: ZBA25-0036; 405 South Main Street

Summary:

Danielle Perkins, representing The Stubborn Brothers Pizza restaurant, is requesting a variance from Section 5.24.5.A.2, Table 5.24-2 – D1, D2, and C1A/R District Permanent Signs of the Unified Development Code (UDC). A variance request of 100 square feet for permanent signs is being requested for a new restaurant located inside the existing Standard multiple-family dwelling building. The building has 102 square feet of existing signs, and the applicants are proposing to install a 198-square-foot sign package. The subject property is permitted to have 200 square feet of permanent signs. If granted, the variance would allow the building 300 square feet of signage. The property is zoned D2, Downtown Interface District.

Background:

The subject property is located at the southeast corner of South Main Street and East William Street. The new restaurant business will be on the first floor of the Standard Building. The Standard building is a 10-story apartment building with approximately 238 units. The project was completed in October of 2022.

Description:

Section 5.24.5.A.1 states: “Each *building* in Mixed-Use Zoning Districts other than D1, D2, and C1A/R and Nonresidential and Special Purpose Zoning Districts is permitted two square feet of *sign area* per linear foot of *building frontage* up to a maximum of 200 square feet of *sign area* for *permanent signs*.”

The applicants are requesting the following signs:

1. Two double-sided projecting “Tomato” signs that are 19.25 square feet each for a total of 38.5 square feet in area for both signs.
2. A “Pizza by the Slice” sign that is 18 square feet in area.
3. A “The Stubborn Brother Pizza Bar” sign that is 30 square feet in area.
4. The main “The Stubborn Brother Pizza Bar” sign that is 111 square feet in area.

Standards for Approval- Variance

The Zoning Board of Appeals has all the power granted by State law and by Section 5.29.12, Application of the Variance Power from the Unified Development Code (UDC).

The following criteria shall apply:

- (a). ***That the practical difficulties are exceptional and peculiar to the property of the person requesting the variance and result from conditions which do not exist generally throughout the City.***

Applicant response: “*This property is a large high-rise building. The building owner occupies 102 square feet of the total allowable signage, leaving 98 square feet to be shared across three retail spaces. This amount of signage is not sufficient to clearly identify our business boundaries or to distinguish two separate entrances that serve two distinct purposes.*”

- (b). *That the practical difficulties will result from a failure to grant the variance, include substantially more than mere inconvenience, inability to attain a higher financial return, or both.***

Applicant response: “*The practical difficulties that will result from denial of this variance extend beyond mere inconvenience. The property is a large high-rise structure with multiple tenants and businesses. Our business occupies a corner location with two distinct street frontages and two separate public entrances, each serving a different operational function, carryout service and full-service dine-in.*

Without additional signage area, the business will be unable to clearly identify its full tenant boundaries or distinguish between the two entrances. This creates ongoing challenges for customers, contributes to guest confusion, and increases congestion at entrances, particularly during peak hours. These conditions negatively affect pedestrian flow and public safety and cannot be reasonably mitigated through alternative signage placement due to the building’s existing signage allocations and physical constraints.

The requested variance is necessary to allow clear identification and, functional access to both entrances and to ensure the site operates as intended, consistent with the building’s design and the surrounding pedestrian-oriented environment.”

- (c). *That allowing the variance will result in substantial justice being done, considering the public benefits intended to be secured by this Chapter, the individual hardships that will be suffered by a failure of the Board to grant a variance, and the rights of others whose property would be affected by the allowance of the variance.***

Applicant response: “*Granting the requested variance will result in substantial justice by balancing the intent of the sign ordinance with the practical realities of the property. The additional signage will improve wayfinding and safe access for the public while maintaining an orderly and cohesive appearance consistent with the building and surrounding streetscape.*

Denial of the variance would create ongoing practical difficulties related to the building’s multi-tenant, multi-frontage configuration, making it difficult for guests to identify appropriate entrances and navigate the site safely. These difficulties arise from the physical characteristics of the property rather than from any desire for increased visibility or financial gain.

Allowing the variance will not adversely affect neighboring properties or the rights of others. The signage will be professionally designed, proportional to the building,

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and limited to only what is necessary for clear identification, ensuring no increase in visual clutter or negative impact on adjacent businesses or the public realm.”

- (d). *That the conditions and circumstances on which the variance request is based shall not be a self-imposed hardship or practical difficulty.***

Applicant response: “*The conditions and circumstances forming the basis of this variance request are not self-imposed. The practical difficulty arises from the existing physical characteristics of the property, including the building’s high-rise, multi-tenant configuration, multiple street frontages, and the limited allocation of shared signage area established by the property owner. These conditions are outside of our control. The requested variance is necessary to reasonably identify the business and its separate public entrances within the constraints of the existing site.*”

- (e). *A variance approved shall be the minimum variance that will make possible a reasonable use of the land or structure.***

Applicant response: “*The requested variance represents the minimum relief necessary to allow reasonable use of the property. The amount of additional signage requested is limited to what is required to clearly identify the business boundaries and distinguish between two separate public entrances serving different operational functions. Alternative signage layouts and reduced sign area were considered but would not be adequate. No additional signage beyond what is necessary is being requested.*”

Respectfully submitted,



**Jon Barrett- Zoning Coordinator
City of Ann Arbor**