LOWER ALLEN
ZONING HEARING BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	5000 Simpson Ferry Road Zone: Multifamily Residential District (R-3) Applicant: STSG Digital/Shawn Chronister Owner: Mt. Olivet United Methodist Church Application No. 2026-07
REQUEST FOR:	**DIMENSIONAL VARIANCES FROM THE SIGNAGE REQUIREMENTS FOR A FREE-STANDING SIGN IN THE R-3 ZONING DISTRICT**
BEFORE:	Moran, Chair Migala, Member Massott, Member (recused) Hayes, Participating Alternate

DECISION

Applicant filed an application for multiple dimensional variances from the signage requirements in the R-3 Zoning District (Sections 220.250 Attachment 2 and 220.252.D) to install a 49.5 sq. ft. size, 9 ft. 8 in. high free-standing sign with electronically changeable messaging on the property located at 5000 Simpson Ferry Road, Mechanicsburg (property). The Lower Allen Township Zoning Hearing Board (Board) considered and decided Applicant's zoning requests at the October 15, 2026 hearing.

EXHIBITS

B-1 Certificate of Service of Public Notice and Written Notice of Hearing

B-2 Application for Variances with attached narrative, photos of the existing sign on the property, plans for the proposed sign, and township property card.

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. On or about September 8, 2026, STSG Digital/Mount Olivet United Methodist Church (Applicant) applied for multiple dimensional variances from signage requirements of the

Lower Allen Township Zoning Ordinance (Zoning Ordinance) to install a 49.5 sq. ft. size, 9 ft. 8 in. high free-standing sign with electronically changeable messages on the property located at 5000 Simpson Ferry Road, Mechanicsburg (property).

2. A hearing on the application took place on October 15, 2026.

3. Public notice of the hearing on the application was published in the Patriot News on September 29, 2026 and October 6, 2026. Notice of the hearing was posted at the Lower Allen Township Municipal Building and on the Township's website on October 2, 2026 and posted on the property on October 2, 2026.

4. Notice of the hearing was mailed to the Applicant and adjoining property owners on October 5, 2026.

5. No objections as to the method and timing of notice and advertising were raised.

6. No objections to any of the exhibits submitted into the record at the hearing were raised.

7. The property is located in the Multifamily Residential District (R-3).

8. The Applicant has standing to pursue the zoning relief requested as it is the owner of the property.

9. Testimony at the hearing was taken from Shawn Chronister from STSG Digital, and Jason Weirch, Pastor of the Mount Olivet United Methodist Church on behalf of applicant, and Marcus Brandt, Lower Allen Township Zoning and Codes Administrator.

10. The property features a church that was constructed over 50 yrs ago, with a parking area.

11. There is a sixty-one (61) sq. ft. sign near the entrance driveway to the property that identifies the church with a white manually changeable message board.

12. Applicant proposes to replace the existing sign with signage that is larger (49.5 sq. ft.) and taller (9 ft. 8 in.) than the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance (40 sq. ft size, and 4 ft. height). (**Section 220-250 Attachment 2**)

13. The proposed sign will be two-sided and feature an electronically changeable message board which is not permitted by the Zoning Ordinance. (**Section 220.252.D**)

14. The proposed sign will be setback approximately 20 ft. from the roadway to avoid being struck and damaged by vehicles, which have been known to run off the road near the entrance to the property, and to avoid damage from snowplows. (October 15, 2026 hearing transcript, Shawn Chronister, Notes of Testimony p. 13)

15. The proposed sign will be a short distance closer to Simpson Ferry Road than the existing sign.

16. Simpson Ferry Road is a very busy street which requires that the signage be larger than permitted in the R-3 Zoning District.

17. Near the entrance to the property, there are four (4) ft. tall pillars on both sides of the driveway that may obstruct the view of a sign that complies with the six (6) ft. height requirement of the Zoning Ordinance.

18. The brightness of the sign will be reduced at night to 10-15% of its maximum illumination and will not provide light spillage beyond ten (10) ft. of the sign location.

19. The electronically changeable messaging board is available for Township usage for emergency alerts.

20. No one appeared at the October 15, 2026 hearing to voice opposition to the application.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. The Lower Allen Township Zoning Hearing Board has jurisdiction to hear the above-captioned application pursuant to 53 P.S. Section 10909.1(a)(5). (The Municipalities Planning Code).

2. Proper notice of the hearing was given to the public and to all interested parties.

3. Exhibits B-1 and B-2 were properly admitted into evidence.

4. Applicant sustained its burden of proof for the Dimensional Variances requested for zoning relief from the signage requirements in the R-3 Zoning District in accordance with the attached discussion and decision.

DISCUSSION

The property is located in the Multifamily Residential (R-3) Zoning District which is regulated by Article 7 of Chapter 220 – Lower Allen Township Zoning Ordinance (Ordinance). Applicant seeks multiple Dimensional Variances for zoning relief from the signage requirements (**Sections 220-250 Attachment 2 and 220-252.D**) to install a 49.5 sq. ft. size, 9 ft. 8 in. tall, free-standing sign with electronic changeable messaging on the property at 5000 Simpson Ferry Road.

VARIANCE

In reviewing the variance application, the Zoning Hearing Board must take into account the criteria as set forth in Section 220-269 of the Township Zoning Ordinance which states the following;

> **C. Variances**. The Zoning Hearing Board shall hear requests for variances where it is alleged that the provisions of this chapter inflict unnecessary hardship upon the applicant. The Zoning Hearing Board may, by rule, prescribe the form of application and may require application to the Zoning Officer. The Zoning Hearing Board may grant a variance, provided that the following findings are made where relevant in a given case:

(1) That there are unique physical circumstances or conditions, including irregularity, narrowness or shallowness of lot size or shape or exceptional topographical or other physical conditions peculiar to the particular property, and that the unnecessary hardship is due to such conditions and not the circumstances or conditions generally created by the provisions of this chapter in the district in which the property is located.

(2) That because of such physical circumstances or conditions, there is no possibility that the property can be developed in strict conformity with the provisions of this chapter and that the authorization of a variance is therefore necessary to enable the reasonable use of the property.

(3) That such unnecessary hardship has not been created by the appellant.

(4) That the variance, if authorized, will not alter the essential character of the district in which the property is located nor substantially or permanently impair the appropriate use or development of adjacent property nor be detrimental to the public welfare.

(5) That the variance, if authorized, will represent the minimum variance that will afford relief and represent the least modification possible of the regulation in issue. In granting any variance, the Zoning Hearing Board may attach such reasonable conditions and safeguards as it may deem necessary to implement the purposes of this chapter.

Lower Allen Township Zoning Ordinance, Section 220-269.

Common law distinguishes between a dimensional variance and a use variance. A use variance applicant requests to use the property in a manner prohibited by the zoning regulation. *Hertzberg v. Zoning Bd. of Adjustment*, 721 A.2d at 47. A dimensional variance allows for the reasonable adjustment of the zoning regulation in order to utilize the property as desired. *Dunn v. Middletown Twp. Zoning Hearing Bd.*, 143 A.3d 494, 501 (Pa. Commw. 2016).

The church/place of worship use is a permitted use in the R-3 Zoning District. Applicant's variance requests for zoning relief from the signage requirements is categorized as a dimensional

variance. When considering a dimensional variance for purposes of determining unnecessary hardship, a Zoning Hearing Board is able to consider multiple factors not applicable to the use variance test, such as the financial hardship created by any work necessary to bring the property into strict compliance with the ordinance and the characteristics of the surrounding neighborhood. *Soc'y Created to Reduce Urban Blight v. Zoning Bd. of Adjustment*, 771 A.2d 874, 877 (Pa. Commw. 2001). A dimensional variance therefore compels a slightly lowered standard from a use variance, but must still address the aforementioned factors, including the showing of an unnecessary hardship. *Tri-Cnty. Landfill, Inc. v. Pine Twp. Zoning Hearing Bd.*, 83 A.3d 488, 520 (Pa. Commw. 2014).

An applicant that is replacing a non-conforming sign that was not damaged by fire, explosion, windstorm, or other sudden natural or criminal act, must install a sign that conforms with the Zoning Ordinance. **Section 220-249(B)**

A sign on the property is necessary to identify the church, times for services, and other activities. The structure is setback a considerable distance from Simpson Ferry Road. Also, any proposed sign is at significant risk of getting struck and damaged by vehicles if too close to the roadway. Applicant intends to install the signage closer to the roadway than the existing 61 sq. ft. sign that is being replaced; but it will still be approximately twenty (20) ft. setback from the street. This distance necessitates the variance request of approximately 9.5 ft in excess of the forty (40) ft. maximum size for a free-standing sign in the R-3 Zoning District. **Section 220-250 Attachment 2** Simpson Ferry Road is a busy street with fast moving traffic. The variance for a larger sign is necessary to allow motorists the ability to observe and identify the church with sufficient time to turn into the entrance of the property.

There are four (4) ft. pillars on both sides of the driveway leading to the church. In order to avoid blocking the view of a portion of the sign from the roadway, applicant requested a variance of 3 ft. 8 in. in excess of the six (6) ft. maximum height for a free-standing sign in the R-3 Zoning District. **Section 220-250 Attachment 2** This increase in height would allow applicant to maintain the location of the sign near the existing sign that will be replaced.

Applicant proposed signage that will have electronically changeable messaging, which is not permitted in the R-3 Zoning District. **Section 220-252.D** This is necessary to avoid manually changing messages when it would be impractical due to an emergency, including weather conditions. Furthermore, this feature allows the Township the ability to use the signage to relay emergency information to its residents.

Applicant is unable to install signage in compliance with all Township Zoning Regulations that will provide sufficient notice of the church location, times of services, and activities to its congregants and the traveling public. The proposed variance is the minimum necessary to afford relief and allow the continued reasonable use of the property as a church. The signage is smaller (49.5 sq. ft.) than the one it is replacing (61 sq. ft.), and it is moved closer to the roadway. Also, the proposed height of 9 ft. 8 in. is necessary to avoid the view of the sign from obstruction by a four (4) ft. pillar near the entrance to the property. Finally, applicant explained that the brightness of the signage from dusk to dawn will be reduced to approximately 10-15% of its maximum illumination and will not provide light spillage beyond ten (10) ft. of the sign location.

Applicant has met its burden of proof for dimensional variances from the size, height, and messaging requirements for a free-standing sign in the R-3 Zoning District in accordance with the above discussion.

ORDER

In accordance with the above discussion, and the plans submitted with the application (See Ex. B-2), applicant's request for Dimensional Variances from **Sections 220-250 Attachment 2 and 220.252.D** of the Zoning Ordinance for relief from the signage requirements to install a 49.5 sq, ft. size, 9 ft. 8 in. tall, free-standing sign with electronically changeable messaging is granted subject to the following conditions:

1. Applicant agrees to work with the Township for any concerns relevant to the brightness from dusk until dawn; and

2. The Township is able to request emergency notifications be placed on the signage at no cost to the Township in perpetuity as long as the sign is present on the property.

This decision and order pertain to the property located at 5000 Simpson Ferry Road, Mechanicsburg in the R-3 Zoning District.

LOWER ALLEN TOWNSHIP ZONING HEARING BOARD

Date: 11/19/26 By: Ann Moran
Ann Moran, Chair

Any parties that are aggrieved by this Decision may appeal same within thirty (30) days to the Court of Common Pleas of Cumberland County, PA