

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

Applicant: Bloomington Lincoln Mercury

Location: 7801 Dupont Avenue S

Request: a variance to reduce the landscape yard front yard setback from 20 feet to 4 feet and a variance to reduce the front yard setback from 20 feet to 2 feet for a freestanding sign

Existing Land Use and Zoning: Auto Dealership, zoned C-1, Freeway Office and Service

Surrounding Land Use and Zoning: North – City of Edina and I-494  
East – REI and Bauer Hockey; zoned C-3  
South – Vehicle repair; zoned I-3  
West – Large item retail sales; zoned C-3

Comprehensive Plan Designation: Regional Commercial

**CHRONOLOGY**

Planning Commission 08/07/2025 Public hearing scheduled

**DEADLINE FOR AGENCY ACTION**

Application Date: 06/26/2025  
60 Days: 08/25/2025  
Extension Letter Mailed: No  
120 Days: 10/24/2025  
**Applicable Deadline: 08/25/2025**

**STAFF CONTACT**

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**PROPOSAL**

Bloomington Lincoln Mercury is proposing variances to reduce the landscape yard from 20 feet to 4 feet and to reduce the front yard setback from 20 feet to 2 feet for a freestanding sign. Bloomington Lincoln Mercury primarily uses Clover Drive as the main access to the property. However, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) recently condemned Clover Drive as part of the Interstate 494 Reconstruct Project. The only access to the property would be from Dupont Avenue. Variances are requested due to parking lot and drive aisle reconfiguration from the loss of Clover Drive.

Earlier in 2025, the City adopted a streamlining ordinance that removed the Hearing Examiner review process for variance applications. The ordinance requires a public hearing at Planning Commission. Variances are no longer required to go to City Council, unless an appeal is received.

## ANALYSIS

### Landscape Yard Setback

Previously, Clover Drive was the primary access to the site allowing for one-way traffic (heading westward) and angled parking in front of the building. With the loss of Clover Drive, the drive aisle would accommodate two-way traffic from the driveway on Dupont Avenue. With the orientation of the new curb cut on Dupont Avenue, the drive aisle and parking must be relocated closer to the north to allow vehicles to enter in a straight line. Also, Bloomington Lincoln Mercury intends to construct a landing strip in front of the building entrance for customers to wait for vehicles and dealership staff. This necessitates the reduced landscape yard setback to allow for this area, a compliant 24-foot drive aisle and 90-degree parking spaces.

The City Code requires a 20-foot landscape yard along a street. With the elimination of Clover Road, the street is considered Interstate 494. However, the interstate is approximately 100 feet away from the subject property line. Functionally, the property line is more of an interior lot line which requires a five-foot parking setback.

With the condemnation of Clover Drive, the required 20-foot landscape yard is impractical. The reduced setback to four feet will allow two-way traffic circulation on-site while also accommodating lighting and preserving existing landscaping within the four-foot yard area. MNDOT intends to install a stormwater pond and green space between Bloomington Lincoln Mercury's northern property boundary and Interstate 494. The nearest property to the north is over 500 feet away so the impact to adjacent properties is minimal. In addition, two-way circulation benefits emergency vehicles with improved access and circulation around the site. Also, keeping loading and unloading off public streets is a benefit.

If the variance is not granted, vehicles would be required to enter from the southernmost driveway off Dupont Avenue and travel around the building to the service bay doors on the north side of the building. Reorienting and reconstructing the interior of the building to locate the service area on the west side of the building would be costly and impractical.

Freestanding sign setback

The City Code requires a 20-foot setback for a freestanding sign along a street. The current sign is located on the western corner of the property. The sign must be removed to create a curb cut access to Dupont Avenue. To maintain visibility from the highway, the sign must be relocated along the northern yard area. With the reduced yard area to four feet, the sign is forced to have a reduced setback as well. There are no alternative Code complying locations for the sign that would also maintain freeway visibility. Therefore, a variance is necessary given the unique circumstances.

The submitted plans show a fire hydrant must be relocated. The relocated hydrant is located immediately adjacent to the relocated freestanding sign. The fire hydrant must be relocated so the freestanding sign is not located on top of the water main for the hydrant. A condition is included for clarity.

A minor revision to Final Site and Building Plans application must be submitted and approved by the Planning Manager for the site modifications and a sign permit application must be submitted for the freestanding sign.

Traffic Analysis

No significant impacts to the adjacent traffic patterns due to this building addition have been identified.

**OUTREACH**

Outreach/Notification

- Mailed Notice (10-day notice – 500 foot buffer)
- Newspaper Notice (10-day notice – 07/24/2025 Sun Current)
- Public Hearing Notice Online
- E-Subscribe Group Notification

**FINDINGS**

**Required Variance Findings - Section 21.501.10(g)(1)(A-F)**

Zoning variances may only be approved when:

Required Finding	Finding Outcome/Discussion
(A) ... The variance is in harmony with the general purposes and intent of the ordinance.	<b>Finding Made</b> – The C-1 Zoning District’s intent is to promote uses compatible with freeway access. The condemnation of Clover Drive and elimination of the subject property’s frontage makes meeting the 20-foot setback impractical. The proposed setback allows for green space, landscaping and lighting, which

	meets the general purposes and intent of the ordinance.
(B) ... The variance is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.	<b>Finding Made</b> - The Comprehensive Plan supports business vitality and accessibility along major freeway corridors. The Comprehensive Plan guides the area adjacent to I-494 for large scale commercial uses. Granting the variance will allow for continued use of the property, which promotes continued community investment and vitality. The requested variance is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.
(C) ... The applicant for the variance establishes that there are practical difficulties in complying with the zoning ordinance. Economic considerations alone do not constitute practical difficulties	<b>Finding Made</b> – The loss of access and condemnation of land associated with the Interstate 494 Reconstruct Project creates a practical difficulty for the applicant. If the variance is not granted, reconstruction of the interior would be required. The applicant demonstrates there are practical difficulties in complying with the zoning ordinance.
(D) ... The property owner proposes to use the property in a reasonable manner not permitted by the zoning ordinance.	<b>Finding Made</b> - Given the site constraints, a reduced landscape yard setback is necessary for improved site circulation. The interstate is almost 100 feet away from the property line and would not impact traveling vehicles on the interstate nor impact adjacent properties. The owner proposes using the sign in a reasonable manner not permitted by the sign code.
(E) ... The plight of the landowner is due to circumstances unique to the property not created by the landowner.	<b>Finding Made</b> – The need for the proposed variance is directly related to the I-494 Reconstruct Project, not to any modifications or actions made by the landowner.
(F) ... The variance if granted will not alter the essential character of the locality.	<b>Finding Made</b> - The proposed variance will not adversely alter the essential character of the locality. The surrounding area includes large scale commercial and industrial users, with no nearby residential uses. The reduced setback would not adversely alter the essential character of the locality.

**Required Sign Variance Findings - Section 21.304.24(h)(1-6)**

Zoning variances may only be approved when:

<b>Required Finding</b>	<b>Finding Outcome/Discussion</b>
(1) ... The variance is in harmony with the general purposes and intent of the sign code and other applicable sections of the city code.	<b>Finding Made</b> – The C-1 Zoning District’s intent is to promote uses compatible with freeway access. The condemnation of Clover Drive and elimination of the subject property’s frontage makes meeting the 20-foot setback impractical. The proposed freestanding sign setback meets the purpose and intent of the sign code by enabling functional and orderly signage visible from the freeway.
(2) ... The variance is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.	<b>Finding Made</b> - The Comprehensive Plan supports business vitality and accessibility along major freeway corridors. The Comprehensive Plan guides the area adjacent to I-494 for large scale commercial uses. Granting the variance will allow for continued use of the property, which promotes continued community investment and vitality. The requested variances are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.
(3) ... The applicant for the variance	<b>Finding Made</b> – Condemnation of Clover Drive and

<p>establishes that there are practical difficulties in complying with the sign code, and strict compliance with the sign code would deprive the applicant of a reasonable use of a sign, consistent with the purpose of the sign. Economic considerations alone do not constitute practical difficulties/</p>	<p>reconstruction of the access to a dead-end drive has made the previous sign location ineffective. The unique site constructs created by MNDOT makes a variance necessary to maintain sign visibility and identification along the freeway.</p>
<p>(4) ... The property owner proposes to use the sign in a reasonable manner not permitted by the sign code or other applicable sections of the city code.</p>	<p><b>Finding Made</b> - Given the site constraints, a reduced sign setback is necessary for wayfinding purposes. The interstate is almost 100 feet away from the proposed sign location and would not impact traveling vehicles on the interstate. The property owner proposes to use the sign in a reasonable manner not permitted by the sign code.</p>
<p>(5) ... The plight of the landowner is due to circumstances unique to the property not created by the landowner.</p>	<p><b>Finding Made</b> – The Clover Drive condemnation and subsequent reconfiguration eliminated the effectiveness of the previous sign location. The need for the proposed variance is directly related to the I-494 Reconstruct Project, not to any modifications or actions made by the landowner.</p>
<p>(6) . . . The variance, if granted, will not alter the essential character of the locality, or deter or negatively affect the traveling public on roads or highways adjacent to the sign.</p>	<p><b>Finding Made</b> - The reduced freestanding sign setback will maintain freeway visibility without altering safety of traveling vehicles. The reduced setback would not adversely alter the essential character of the locality.</p>

**RECOMMENDATION**

**Note the Planning Commission has final approval authority on this variance application unless an appeal to the City Council is received by 4:30 p.m. on August 12<sup>th</sup>.**

Staff recommends approval through the following motion:

Having been able to make the required findings, I move to approve a variance to reduce the landscape yard front yard setback from 20 feet to 4 feet and a variance to reduce the front yard setback from 20 feet to 2 feet for a freestanding sign, subject to the conditions and Code requirements attached to the staff report.