

### GENERAL INFORMATION

Applicant: Kraus-Anderson Inc. (owner)

Location: 7803 Penn Avenue South

Request: 1) Variance to increase freestanding sign area from 200 square feet to 245 square feet; and  
2) Variance to reduce the setback from 20 feet to 10 feet for a freestanding pylon sign

Existing Land Use and Zoning: Southtown Shopping Center; zoned C-3(PD) and C-5(PD)

Surrounding Land Use and Zoning: North – Interstate 494  
East – Hospitality and a vacant auto dealership; zoned C-4  
South – Mixed-Use and restaurant; zoned C-5 and C-5(PD)  
West – Retail, restaurants, financial services; zoned CR-1(PD)

Comprehensive Plan Designation: Regional Commercial

### CHRONOLOGY

Planning Commission 05/07/2026 Public hearing scheduled

### DEADLINE FOR AGENCY ACTION

Application Date: 04/01/2026  
60 Days: 05/31/2026  
Extension Letter Mailed: No  
120 Days: 07/30/2026  
**Applicable Deadline: 05/31/2026**

### STAFF CONTACT

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## PROPOSAL

Kraus-Anderson Inc. is requesting variances to reduce the setback from 20 feet to 10 feet and to increase the sign area from 200 square feet to 245 square feet for a freestanding sign at Southtown Shopping Center. There is an existing freestanding sign along Interstate 494 that is considered legally non-conforming for size/area under current City Code standards. As part of ongoing redevelopment at Southtown Shopping Center, the existing sign must be removed and reconstructed. Due to site constraints associated with future development and infrastructure changes with the Interstate 494 project, the applicant is requesting variances for setback and sign area to maintain visibility and wayfinding for customers.

## ANALYSIS

The subject property is located within the C-3 Freeway Commercial Center zoning district and lies within the Class III Sign District. The site contains a long-standing freestanding pylon sign that has historically functioned as a primary identification and wayfinding feature for the Southtown Shopping Center, particularly for visibility from Interstate 494.

### Freestanding sign setback

The applicant is proposing to install the sign at a 10-foot setback located at the northeast corner of the Dick's House of Sport tenant location. The new sign would maintain the same height as the current sign, approximately 45 feet tall. The height meets City Code requirements. The existing sign is located at a 60 feet setback from the north property line.

The City Code requires a 20-foot setback along public streets for a pylon sign taller than 8 feet. The Interstate 494 project has required installation of large walls for the eastbound on-ramp from Penn Avenue South that reach 20 feet tall. This has impacted visibility of the existing sign. Redevelopment plans necessitate a new sign to be constructed. Placing the sign at a compliant 20-foot setback would interfere with site circulation and delivery/loading operations for the future Dick's House of Sport. The applicant has provided a truck turning diagram that shows the loading access area on the north side of Dick's House of Sport. Complying with the 20-foot setback would require redesigning the access lane to the loading area to accommodate truck turnaround and potential impact to the future phase of development on the east side, where more intense development is currently in the preliminary planning and design phase.

Placing the sign further west is not viable due to the existing Kohl's building blocking the view for eastbound traffic. Similarly, placing the sign further east would interfere with future phases of development at Southtown. Therefore, the proposed location is the only viable location on-site while maintaining optimum space for truck movements. The sign location as proposed would not encroach into the existing 10-foot drainage and utility easement along Southtown's northern boundary.

Freestanding sign area

The sign area of the existing freestanding sign at Southtown is 247 square feet. The applicant is seeking a variance to match this same size for the new freestanding sign. The City Code allows a maximum of 200 square feet. The applicant indicates that reducing the sign to the currently permitted 200 square feet would limit legibility and visibility for motorists traveling at freeway speeds. The reconstructed roadway for I-494 will also be over 90 feet from the northern property boundary of Southtown. The typical separation between a compliant freestanding sign to the adjacent roadway is 30 or 40 feet at most. Given the property’s location along prominent highway corridors and the number of businesses/tenants within Southtown (29 according to Assessing records), maintaining effective site identification and wayfinding is necessary for the viability and economic health of the shopping center. The variance to sign area would allow for orderly commercial speech/communication in an amount that staff’s believes is reasonable for a regional commercial center with an existing sign of similar size today.

**OUTREACH**

Outreach/Notification

- Mailed Notice (10-day notice – 500 foot buffer)
- Newspaper Notice (10-day notice – 04/23/2026 Sun Current)
- Public Hearing Notice Online
- E-Subscribe Group Notification

**FINDINGS**

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

Sign 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 proposed sign variances allow reconstruction of an existing pylon sign that has historically served Southtown Shopping Center. The existing sign is 247 square feet in area – the City revised its sign regulations in 2024 and reduced the maximum to 200 square feet, necessitating the sign variance related to sign area. The proposed sign variances maintain effective site identification and wayfinding while remaining compatible with the surrounding commercial area and without increasing overall sign intensity.

<b>Required Finding</b>	<b>Finding Outcome/Discussion</b>
(2) The variance is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.	<b>Finding Made</b> – The subject property is guided Regional Commercial. The proposed sign variances support reinvestment within an established commercial center while maintaining functionality for a regional shopping destination poised for additional future redevelopment. The proposed sign variances are consistent with Comprehensive Plan.
(3) The applicant for the variance 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.	<b>Finding Made -</b> Practical difficulties exist due to maximizing future site redevelopment, freeway visibility needs, and infrastructure constraints affecting sign placement and visibility. Strict compliance with current standards would reduce the sign’s effectiveness and limit reasonable use of a long-standing site identification feature that promotes Southtown Shopping Center’s many businesses.
(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.	<b>Finding Made -</b> A larger freestanding pylon sign at a reduced setback is a reasonable use for a regional shopping center adjacent to an interstate highway that has undergone significant reconstruction. The request preserves an existing identification function rather than introducing new signage, and the sign does not encroach into the existing drainage and utility easements.
(5) The plight of the landowner is due to circumstances unique to the property not created by the landowner.	<b>Finding Made -</b> The Property has a freeway-oriented location. Visibility limitations for the sign were created by ongoing public road construction projects near the Property. The impacts of the I-494 reconstruction project on sign visibility and sign setbacks are circumstances not created by the landowner.
(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.	<b>Finding Made -</b> The proposal maintains a sign similar in scale and function to the existing pylon sign and remains compatible with surrounding commercial development. The sign is not expected to negatively impact on traffic safety or alter the character of the area.

**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 May 12<sup>th</sup>.**

Staff recommends approval through the following motion:

Having been able to make the required findings, I move to adopt a resolution approving variances to reduce the setback from 20 feet to 10 feet and to increase the sign area from 200 square feet to 245 square feet for a freestanding sign located along Interstate 494 within the Southtown Shopping Center, subject to the conditions and Code requirements listed in the resolution.