



Division of Zoning and Development Review

City of Pittsburgh, Department of City Planning

412 Boulevard of the Allies, Second Floor

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15219

ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT**Date of Hearing:** May 14, 2026**Date of Decision:** June 23, 2026**Zone Case:** 27 of 2026**Address:** 116 15th Street**Lot and Block:** 9-G-170**Zoning Districts:** SP-8**Ward:** 2**Neighborhood:** Strip District**Request:** Wall Sign**Application:** BDA-2025-12930

Variance	Section 919.03.M.7	40' max wall sign height; 69' requested
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Appearances:

Applicant: Alan Sable, Fred Hawk

Findings of Fact:

1. The Subject Property is located at 116 15th Street in the SP-8 (Special Planned, Riverfront Landing) District in the Strip District.

2. The Subject Property extends from Smallman Street to Riverfront Place and from 14th Street to 15th Street and is also proximate to the elevated roadway of the Veterans Bridge. The site is approximately one block away from the 16th Street Bridge.

3. An 8-story/117' high multi-tenant office building is located on the Subject Property. As design features of the building, a portion of the first two stories extend to the Waterfront Place property line with a 0' setback and another portion of the first five stories is set back approximately 3' from that property line and is framed in brick. The upper three stories are primarily glass and are set back approximately 8' from the Waterfront Place property line.

4. On March 25, 2025, the Planning Commission approved two high wall signs, with the text "New York Life," one on the west façade of the building, at the 14th Street/Smallman Street corner, at the height of 114'-3"; and one on the north façade of the building, at the 15th Street/Waterfront Place corner, at the height of 114'-9". The approved area of both of the New York Life signs is 420 sf.

5. The Applicant, Huntington Bank, occupies office space within the second and fifth floors of the building. Huntington Bank is a tenant of the building but did not offer any evidence that it is the principal entity occupying the building.

6. Currently, an 80 sf wall sign, with the text “Huntington Bank” is mounted at the top of the two-story portion of the building that extends to the Waterfront Place property line, at the height of approximately 20’ from grade.

7. The Applicant proposes to remove the existing sign and to install an 80 sf wall sign within its fifth floor tenant space, at the top of the brick-framed, 5-story portion of the building, at the height of 69’ from grade.

8. The Applicant offered testimony that the proposed height of the sign is necessary to provide visibility and wayfinding to the building.

9. The Applicant submitted evidence that a sign at the proposed height would be visible from the Veterans Bridge and the 16th Street Bridge and that the existing sign, which complies with the Code’s 40’ height limitation, is only visible from grade on Waterfront Place.

10. The Applicant presented evidence regarding the limited visibility of the sign in its current location but did not provide any evidence of any hardship that prevents compliance with the Code’s signage provisions for the SP-8 District.

11. The Applicant confirmed that, other than the approved New York Life signs, no additional wall signage would be mounted on the Waterfront Place façade or the other building façades.

12. No one appeared at the hearing to oppose the request.

Conclusions of Law:

1. Section 919.01.C includes these special definitions for Chapter 919 “Signs”:

- *Business sign* means a sign that directs attention to a business, organization, profession or industry located upon the premises where the sign is displayed; to the type of products sold, manufactured or assembled; and/or to the service or entertainment or other activity offered on such premises; except a sign pertaining to the preceding if such activity is only minor and incidental to the primary use of the premises.
- *Identification sign* means a sign used to identify the name of the principal entity occupying the premises; the profession of the principal occupant; the name of the building on which the sign is displayed; the name of a public destination facility, or portion thereof, including any sponsor or memorialized names assigned thereto; or the name of the major enterprise or principal product or service on the premises.

2. Pursuant to Section 909.01.O.8, the requirements for business and identification signs in Section 919.03.M.7 apply to the SP-8 District.

3. Section 919.03.M.7.a.ii provides that, for buildings with multiple commercial tenants on the first and second floors, additional tenant business or identification signs are permitted, with a total face area that is not to exceed 2 sf of sign face area for each lineal foot of the building wall width, to a maximum of 80 sf. Section 919.03.M.7.a.iii provides that tenant signs are to be within the façade area of the tenant and are to be mounted no higher than 40' above grade.

4. Section 919.03.M.7.c states that “[o]nly the name of the building or business shall be mounted higher than forty (40) feet.” The area permitted for high wall signs is not to exceed 2% of the exposed façade area. Where the Code permits high wall signs, the high wall sign serves as building identification for wayfinding purposes, for the entire building, regardless of the number of different tenants in different spaces on different floors within the building.

5. The other districts where wall signs mounted at a height above 40' are permitted, pursuant to Section 919.03.M.7, are the GT (Golden Triangle) District and the RIV-NS (Riverfront North Shore) District. The signage requirements adopted for SP-9 (Bakery Square), also allow for signs mounted at a height above 40'.

6. The Applicant requests variances from the sign height standard to allow the installation of an 80 sf wall sign, at a height of 69' above grade. The Applicant is a tenant of the building but is not “the principal entity occupying the premises.”

7. Signage for New York Life has already been approved for two façades of the building, at heights of 114'-3” and 114'-9”.

8. In seeking a variance, the applicant is required to provide evidence of some unique feature or condition of the property that prevents compliance with the Code's requirements. Any variance requested is to be the minimum that would afford relief and is not to have any significant impacts on the surrounding area. See Code Section 922.09.E. These provisions apply to both use and dimensional variances.

9. An asserted “unnecessary hardship” must be unique to the property and cannot be based on “circumstances or conditions generally created by the provisions of the zoning ordinance in the neighborhood or district in which the property is located.” Section 922.09.E.1. *Marshall v. City of Philadelphia and Zoning Bd. of Adj.*, 97 A.3d 323, 329 (Pa. 2014), citing *Valley View Civic Ass'n v. Zoning Bd. of Adj.*, 462 A.2d 637, 640 (Pa.1983) (Pennsylvania Supreme Court held that, to support a variance request, an asserted hardship cannot arise from the impact of the zoning regulations on the entire area).

10. The Applicant here proposes to remove a sign that complies with the height requirement and to replace it with a sign that would comply with the 80 sf area limitation but would be mounted at a height of 69', nearly 30' higher than permitted. As proposed, the sign would be on the same façade where one of the New York Life identification signs has already been approved.

11. The Applicant demonstrated that the existing sign, mounted at a height of approximately 20' from grade, is not visible from certain areas, but did not demonstrate an unnecessary hardship that is unique.

12. The provision that allows only the name of the building or the name of the principal entity occupying the building to be mounted higher than 40' is one that applies to all properties in the SP-8 District and to all properties in the other districts that are subject to the Section 919.03.M.7 signage requirements. Those provisions were designed to limit high wall signage, not to ensure that all signs for all tenants on all buildings in those districts are visible from all preferred locations.

13. The regulations for SP Districts are intended to provide a framework for alternative forms of development for large sites and to allow for a substantial amount of flexibility in site planning. Section 909.01. The provisions adopted for the SP-8 District include Section 909.01.O.8, which provides that business identification signs are subject to 919.03.M.7.

14. Because of the nature of SP Districts, generally, the signage requirements could be amended to address features of the SP-8 District that might affect signage or to address how signage considerations might have evolved since the SP-8 regulations were originally adopted. An amendment to the SP-8 District requirements would be limited to that district and would not affect the other districts that are subject to Section 919.03.M.7.

15. Based on the evidence presented and the applicable legal standards, the Board cannot grant a variance from the signage requirements for the SP-8 District, as adopted.

Decision: The Applicant's request for a variance from Section 919.03.M.7 to allow an 80 sf wall sign mounted at a height of 69' from grade is hereby DENIED.

s/Alice B. Mitinger
Alice B. Mitinger, Chair

s/Lashawn Burton-Faulk
LaShawn Burton-Faulk

s/ John J. Richardson
John J. Richardson

Note: Decision issued with electronic signatures, with the Board members' review and approval.