



# WILDWOOD

## **Determination of Issues and Findings of Facts**

### **Board of Adjustment Case B.A. #19-23**

City of Wildwood's Board of Adjustment

Public Hearing of September 21, 2023

City Hall Council Chambers - 16860 Main Street

### *Nature of the Request:*

**B.A. 19-23 Robert Kelly, 2531 Eatherton Road, Wildwood, Missouri 63040** – requests an exception to the Business Signs – Attached to Wall, for the purpose of maintaining a new business sign attached to the wall of the building located upon the property at 16929 Manchester Road (Locator Number 24V540020, Niere Acres – Lot 2, Wildwood Town Center), which would thereby authorize it to be retained without individually pinned-on lettering, as required by the Wildwood Zoning Ordinance. The size and height associated with this sign is identical to the previous sign at this location. These sign requirements are stipulated by Chapter 415.420 Sign Regulations for all "C" and "M" Districts of the City of Wildwood's Zoning Ordinance, Chapter 415.190 C-8 Planned Commercial District Regulations of the City of Wildwood's Zoning Ordinance, and C-8 Planned Commercial District Ordinance #11,577, approved in 1984 by St. Louis County. *This request is also to be reviewed by the Architectural Review Board at its September 14, 2023, meeting, as required by Chapter 415.400 Sign Regulations - General.* (Ward Eight)

### *Determination of Issues:*

Principal to this request is the identification of its issues. This identification process is intended to determine whether the variance is reasonable and appropriate under the criteria that the property's site-specific characteristics create a unique hardship or practical difficulty with the application of individual ordinance requirements and, if granted, its impacts are contained to the tract of land under consideration or negligible enough upon adjoining properties to be considered acceptable. In the instance of **B.A. #19-23**, the issues relating to the variance's reasonableness and appropriateness are as follows:

### *Area and Site Characteristics*

1. The site of this request is located within Wildwood Town Center, in the Niere Acres Subdivision, along the portion of Manchester Road/Historic Route 66 that traverses through the Historic Grover Community.
2. The business that occupies the subject lot is Ballwin Sinclair Automotive. Just west of it is Three French Hens, a home furnishings boutique, and to the east is a small office center. Across the

street is a vacant lot. The surrounding area is a mix of commercial uses, almost all utilizing older residential structures for business purposes now. This area of Wildwood has a long history of commercial use and has been a hub of it for over one hundred (150) years. However, second and third tier properties on either side of Manchester Road are generally residential in nature.

3. This area of Town Center has an “old town charm” feel to it, given its many historic building facades still in existence today, particularly at the intersection of Manchester Road and Eatherton Road. Just across the street, and to the east, is the site of the future Route 66 Roadside Park.
4. The subject lot is 1.15 acres in overall size. Upon it is the vehicle service center utilized by the automotive business, constructed in 1959. To the rear of the building is a secured parking area for the storage of vehicles.
5. The subject building of this request was recently given a makeover (fresh coat of paint and new signage) after the business was sold to a new owner. The old sign, on the southern elevation (front) of the building, was replaced with a new sign of the same type and size.
6. This subject lot is zoned via Amended C-8 Planned Commercial District #11,577, approved by St. Louis County in 1984. This zoning district designation allows a vehicle service center and a storage facility for all types of vehicles, trailers, recreation vehicles, and others, and contains a number of conditions and requirements relating to architecture, design, and development standards, including signage.
7. There is a mix of signage types in this area of Town Center and along this particular corridor, the pattern of which is associated with approvals over by two (2) different jurisdictions (St. Louis County prior to 1995, and then City of Wildwood from 1995 and thereafter) under the different regulations associated with each.

### ***Current Request***

8. This variance request is for the purpose of maintaining the replacement sign, which does not consist of individually pinned-on lettering, as required by the Wildwood Zoning Ordinance.
9. The City’s Chapter 415.400 Sign Regulations (General) requires that signs seeking review and action from the Board of Adjustment must first be submitted to the Architectural Review Board (ARB) for comments, suggestions, or recommendations in this regard. Hence, these requests were reviewed by the ARB on September 14, 2023. This discussion of the Architectural Review Board is summarized in the attached memorandum. The ARB voted unanimously to recommend approval for this signage, with most members noting a preference for its historic look and feel relative to the building’s location on Historic Route 66. Additionally, Board Members requested the Department work with the appropriate Boards and Commissions to consider more permanent mechanisms for approving such signage in historic areas of Wildwood.

10. The petitioner's rationale for the sign type is to keep it consistent with the previous type, which was for the same business.
11. There is no lighting associated with this request.

### *Correspondences and Previous Actions*

12. The site was duly posted in accordance with City code requirements, including the placement of a sign on the property, advertisement in a newspaper, and posting at City Hall. Along with these notifications, direct mailings were sent to surrounding properties advertising the request.
13. The Department of Planning has received no public comments regarding this request at the time this report was completed.
14. The Department of Planning's review of records indicate no variances have been granted to this property in the past by the City of Wildwood or by St. Louis County. However, one (1) related variance was approved by the City of Wildwood in 2013, permitting a sign type for "The Porch" that differed from the individual pinned-on lettering type. The two (2) primary justifications offered for this approval was 1) the historic nature of the building, and 2) the mix of signage types already present, given the two (2) different jurisdictions associated with their approval over time: City of Wildwood and St. Louis County.

### *Findings of Fact:*

The Department of Planning has reviewed this request with regard to the criteria established for its approval or denial, i.e. site characteristics, which render a unique hardship or a practical difficulty and impacts on adjoining properties, and believes these requests **do meet** the requirements set forth to be considered reasonable and appropriate. This position is premised upon the following site-specific findings:

1. The building associated with this property was built in 1959 and contains within it a vehicle service center. Both the age of the building and its use has led to it maintaining the historic look and feel of Wildwood's Route 66 Corridor. The replacement signage for this location is intended to maintain the same look and feel of the previous signage, while giving it a cleaner look. While regulations are not presently in place supporting this intent, it has been the policy of the City of Wildwood, through the following actions, to invest in the look and feel of its Historic Route 66 Corridor:
  - a. Completed in 2020, the City improved the Manchester Road Streetscape through attractive street-lighting, sidewalks, and bicycle lanes;
  - b. In 2016, the City adopted an Economic Development Guide, which noted the importance of maintaining the historic character in the Historic Manchester Road District (where this building is located) for economic development purposes;
  - c. During 2022-2023, a process was implemented for the planning and design of a future Route 66 Roadside Park;

- d. The City has applied and is presently seeking grants supporting efforts to revitalize and promote the Historic Route 66 Corridor;
  - e. The City has installed Historic Community Markers at four (4) locations along the Historic Corridor;
  - f. The City has actively engaged the whole community around a Route 66 Revitalization effort; and
  - g. Nine (9) local and/or national register buildings or landmarks have been designated as such, which provides for another level of review in any proposed alterations to them, intended for the purpose of maintaining their historic look and feel.
2. The new signage does not impact surrounding properties, given it is of the same type, size, and dimensions as the previous signage in that same location. The updated signage has a cleaner look and arguably improves the streetscape with its new appearance. It is not lit and, therefore, has no impacts associated with such a feature.
  3. The Architectural Review Board unanimously voted to recommend approval for the requested sign variance to the Board of Adjustment at its meeting on September 14, 2023. The primary reason cited by members was to maintain the historic look and feel of the building along the Route 66 Corridor. Furthermore, the Board recommended that signage be reviewed at the macro-level by the appropriate entities to determine a more permanent mechanism for preserving the character of buildings and the corridor in the future.
  4. There is a mix of signage types in this area of Town Center, the pattern of which is associated with approvals over time by two (2) different jurisdictions (St. Louis County prior to 1995, and then City of Wildwood from 1995 and thereafter) under the different regulations associated with each. This new signage for the subject property is not out of character with the signage installed on other locations along this same corridor.

***Recommendation:***

Based upon the above-listed Findings of Fact, the Department recommends the Board of Adjustment approve the sign variance, as submitted.

Respectfully submitted,  
**CITY OF WILDWOOD**  
Department of Planning