

Nonconforming use-off-the- premises signs consolidation and relocation

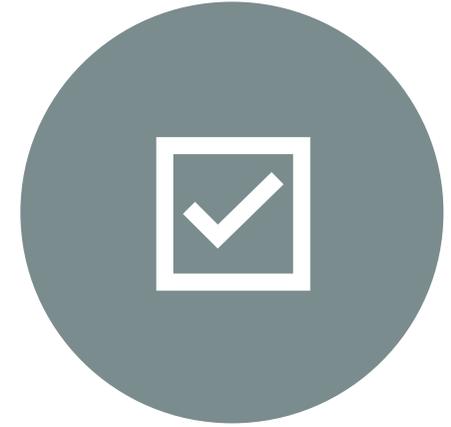
CARROLL COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
FEBRUARY 5, 2026



PROPOSAL AND
BACKGROUND



PROPOSED TEXT



ACTION

Nonconforming use-off-the-premises signs consolidation
and relocation

Proposal and background

- Aug. 28, 2025: Citizen request prompted Board direction to explore billboard consolidation with no net increase in sign area; Planning & Zoning Commission reviewed the concept on Oct. 1 and Dec. 16, 2025, and Jan. 20, 2026.
- Three letters of opposition to the proposal have been received so far.



Proposal and background

- **Intent: To reduce the number of billboards while allowing billboard owners to modernize signage to align with industry standards.**
- **The proposed text allows consolidating and removing multiple nonconforming signs to install a larger, possibly digital sign at the same location.**

Proposal and background

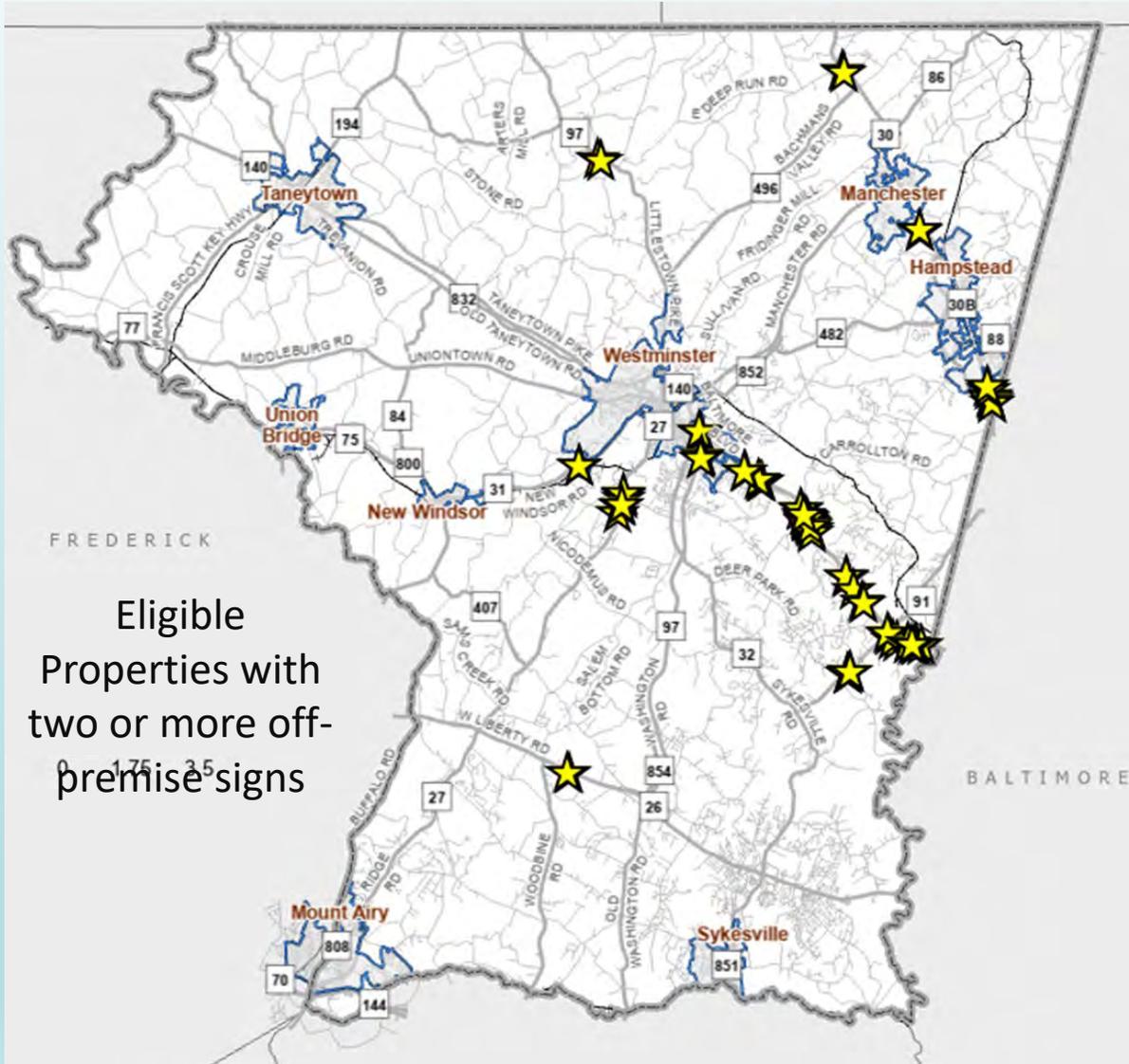
- Since 2003, County regulations limit off-premise signs to 10 ft high* and 32 sq ft, but many older billboards exceed these limits and are nonconforming.
- The county has 121 registered nonconforming off-premise signs, averaging 28.5 ft in height* and 308 sq. ft in size.

*from grade of roadway



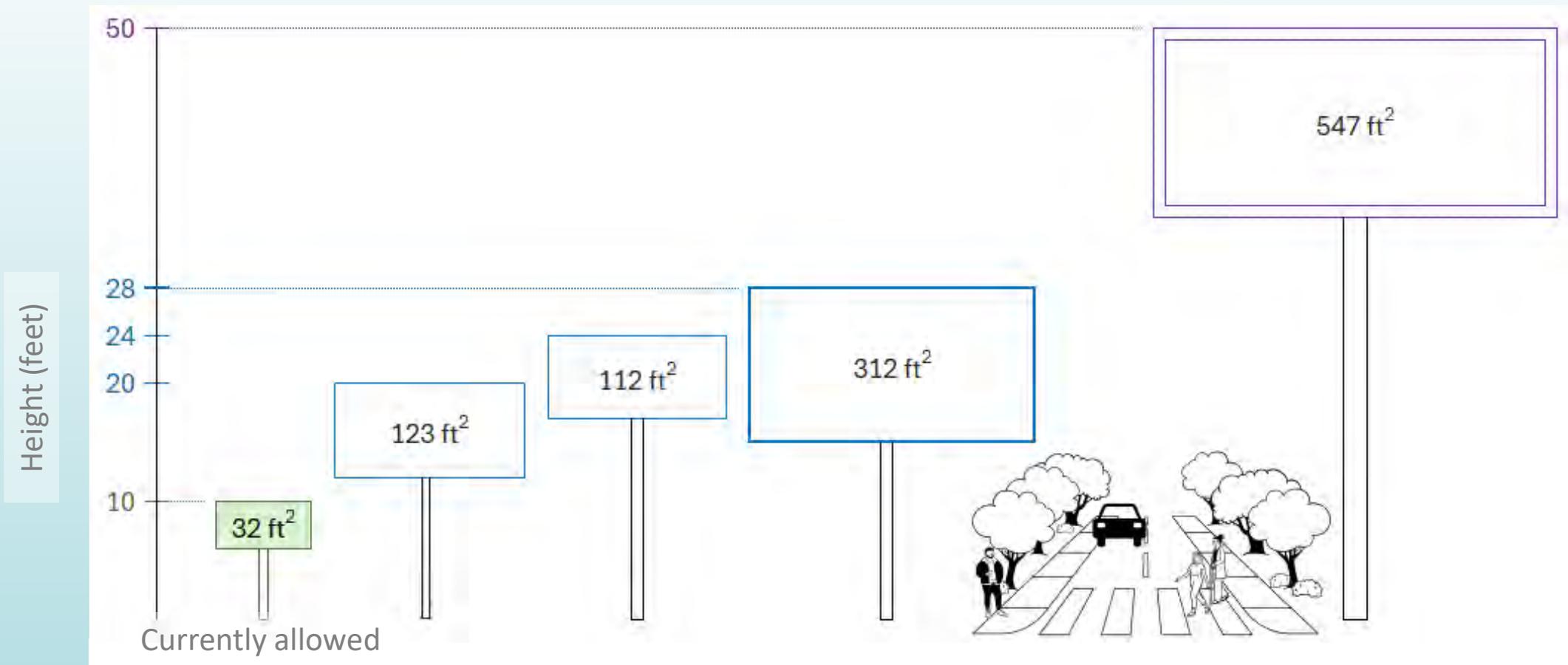
Example of average billboard size

Proposal and background



Planning Commission Recommended Text Amendments

- Allows multiple existing nonconforming billboards on the same or adjacent parcels to be consolidated into one new sign.
- Maximum square footage: 672 sq. ft. per side (14 x 48 ft.) or the total area of consolidated signs, whichever is less.
- Maximum height: 50 feet (from grade of roadway)
- New sign must be located within 25 feet of an existing sign.



Proposal and background

ILLUSTRATION OF CONSOLIDATION

123 + 112 + 312 = 547 SQUARE FEET

* OR TWO 264 SQ FT SIDES



- Multiple Nonconforming Signs
- Several separate signs on the same or adjacent parcels
- Could be converted to single-sided digital sign(s) with same area and footprint

Proposal and background

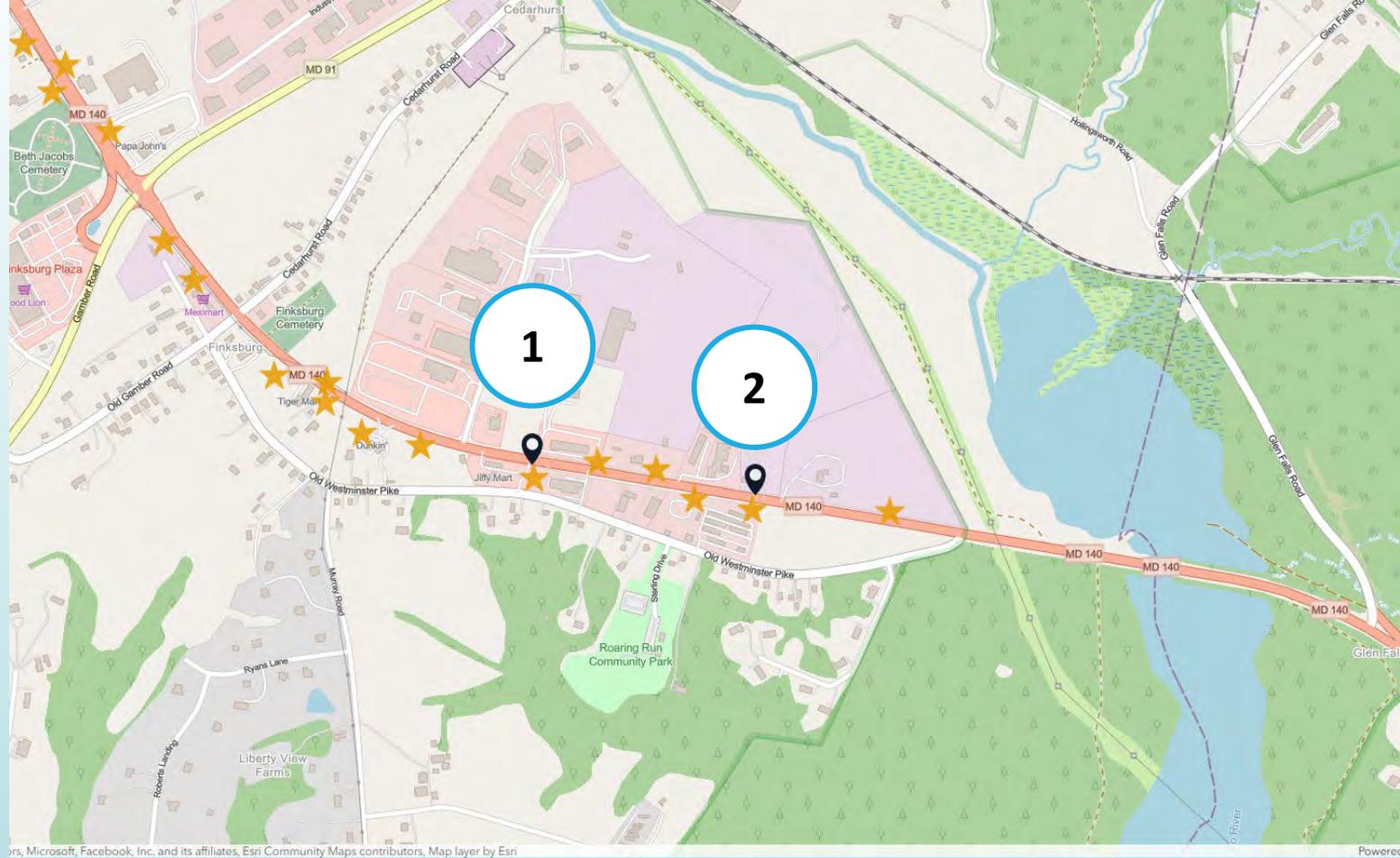
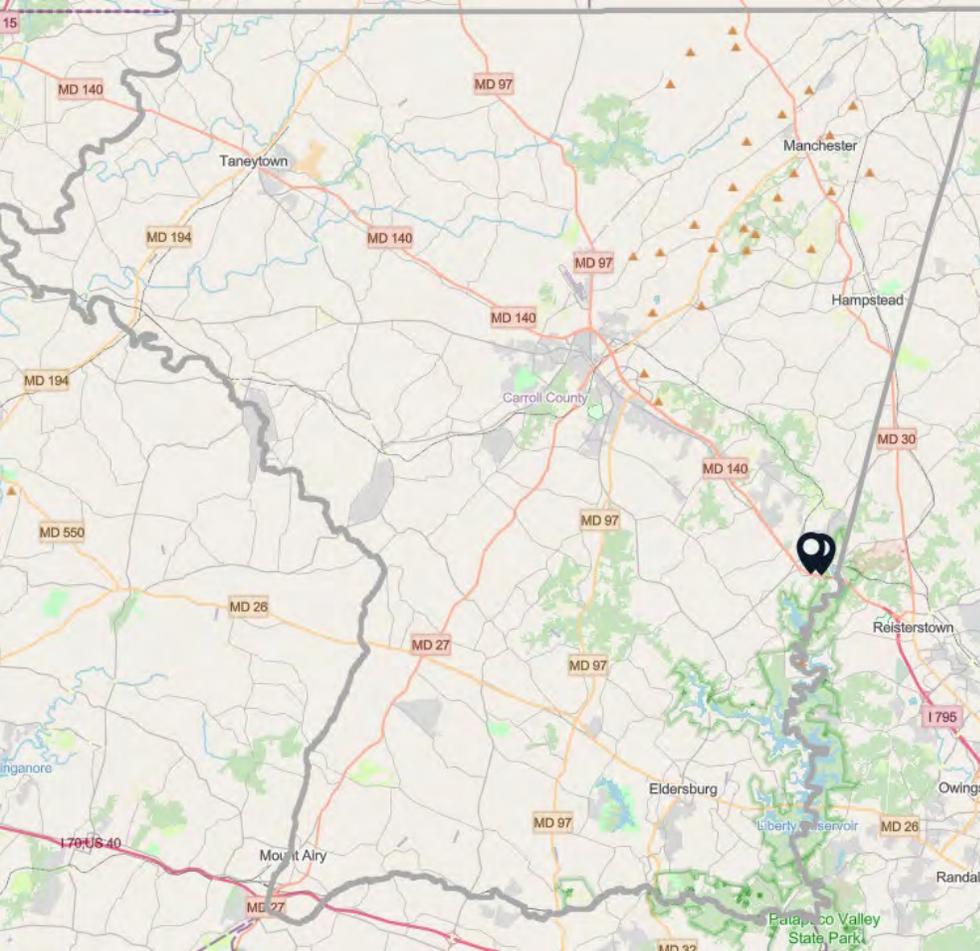
EXAMPLE: CURRENT CONDITIONS



- Multiple signs combined into a single new sign
- Maximum area of new sign: 672 ft² per panel
- Maximum height: 50 feet
- Could be converted to double-sided and/or digital sign
- Removed signs permanently eliminated
- Signs not owned by the same owner remain

Proposal and background

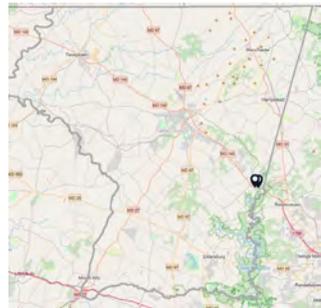
EXAMPLE: PROPOSAL



Proposal and background

Existing Examples

Proposal and background



Existing Examples

45 feet high
672 total sq. ft.



1



2



Proposal and background

State Code and Policy on use-off-the-premises signs along state highways

- Nonconforming Signs: may remain, no relocation/rebuild/enhancement
- Zoning Districts: only in commercial/industrial
- Height: 25 ft max
- Area: 800 sq. ft per panel, 1,600 sq. ft total
- Setbacks: not allowed within/over state right-of-way

Proposed Text



§ 158.115 USE-OFF-THE-PREMISES SIGNS.

Consolidation, or Consolidation and Relocation



§ 158.113 GENERAL REGULATIONS.

Sign removal/relocation/modification when obstructing traffic visibility



§ 158.115 USE-OFF-THE-PREMISES SIGNS.

Administrative adjustments

Proposed Text – Consolidation & Relocation

§ 158.115 USE-OFF-THE-PREMISES SIGNS.

- Consolidation, or Consolidation and Relocation

Proposed Text – Consolidation & Relocation

(C) Unless lawfully removed by county or state action, legal nonconforming signs may continue to be used, the copy may be changed, and such signs may be rebuilt or replaced; provided, however, that notwithstanding the provisions of § 158.033, such nonconforming signs may not be enlarged in height or area beyond that which existed on August 18, 2003, unless otherwise approved through the process set forth in §158.115(F). All nonconforming signs shall be registered with the Zoning Administrator by completing a registration application, including but not limited to: the location of the sign including distances from all property boundaries and roadways; the height, size and dimensions of the sign; the building materials that the sign is constructed of; an affidavit of the property owner; and an affidavit of the lessee of the property and/or developer of the sign.

Proposed Text – Consolidation & Relocation

(F) Consolidation, or consolidation and relocation of existing nonconforming outdoor advertising signs pertaining to use off the premises.

(1) Signs located on one parcel or on two or more adjacent parcels in the C-1, C-2, C-3, I-1, and I-2 Zoning Districts as of {date of Ordinance adoption} may be consolidated, or consolidated and relocated, into either a new printed outdoor advertising sign or a new electronic message sign; and signs located on one parcel or on two or more adjacent parcels in any other Zoning District as of {date of Ordinance adoption} may be consolidated, or consolidated and relocated into a new printed outdoor advertising sign, provided that any such sign consolidated and relocated under this Section shall meet the following standards:

Proposed Text – Consolidation & Relocation

(F) (1) (a) The relocation must take place:

1. on the same parcel where one of the signs subject to the application pursuant to §158.115(F) was originally located; or
2. on an adjacent parcel that is owned by the same landowner and located in the C-1, C-2, C-3, I-1 or I-2 Zoning Districts.

Proposed Text – Consolidation & Relocation

(F) (1) (b) The consolidation cannot result in an increase in the total square footage from that which currently exists. The Zoning Administrator shall confirm that the total square footage of printed sign faces to be removed is equal to or greater than the total square footage of the new printed outdoor advertising sign or electronic message sign faces to be installed. The maximum square footage of any new printed outdoor advertising sign or electronic message sign that is constructed as part of a consolidation and relocation project described under this Subsection shall be double-sided panels of 672 square feet per panel; and

Proposed Text – Consolidation & Relocation

(F) (1) (c) Subject to Zoning Administrator approval, any new printed outdoor advertising sign or electronic message sign constructed as part of a consolidation or consolidation and relocation project under this Subsection shall comply with the following standards:

1. Shall not be relocated to be closer to the frontage of the property than the sign or signs being removed
2. Shall not exceed fifty (50) feet in height,
3. Shall be located no more than twenty-five (25) feet from one of the existing signs, and
4. Shall not obstruct traffic visibility as determined by the Zoning Administrator, and shall comply with applicable state and local sight-distance standards; and

Proposed Text – Consolidation & Relocation

(F) (1) (d) An applicant may request consolidation and relocation under this Subsection, according to § 158.130(G). An application shall be on forms approved by the Zoning Administrator and shall identify: (i) the existing printed outdoor advertising signs to be removed; (ii) the total square footage of the sign faces that will be removed; (iii) the location of the existing, consolidated and relocated printed outdoor advertising signs or electronic message sign; and (iv) the square footage of the new sign faces after the consolidation and relocation; (v) the height of the proposed sign; and

Proposed Text – Consolidation & Relocation

(F) (1) (e) Any new printed outdoor advertising sign or electronic message sign that is constructed as part of a consolidation and relocation project described under this Subsection shall comply with all operational and procedural requirements set forth in § 158.115(D).

(f) There shall be no new additional use-off-the-premises signage as otherwise allowed in §158.115(B) on any property where a new printed outdoor advertising sign or electronic message sign is constructed as part of a consolidation and relocation project described under this Subsection. All use-off-the premises signs owned by the same person or entity on the property subject to the application for consolidation and/or consolidation and relocation shall be subject to the application for consolidation as described in §158.115(F).

Proposed Text – Consolidation & Relocation

(F) (1) (g) Any new printed outdoor advertising sign or electronic message sign that is constructed as part of a consolidation and/or relocation project described under this Subsection shall receive all necessary permits through Carroll County and the State of Maryland, when applicable.

(h) Within thirty (30) days of the issuance of a use and occupancy permit for the consolidated structure, the previously existing signs subject to the consolidation shall be removed by the applicant and the applicant shall provide an affidavit to the Zoning Administrator confirming the removal has been completed. Removal of signs subject to the affidavit required herein permanently extinguishes nonconforming sign rights including any right to replace, reconstruct, or relocate such signs.

Proposed Text – Obstruction to Traffic Visibility

§ 158.113 GENERAL REGULATIONS.

- Sign removal/relocation/modification when obstructing traffic visibility

Proposed Text – Obstruction to Traffic Visibility

(F) Any sign that obstructs traffic visibility shall be subject to an order issued by the Zoning Administrator requiring the sign to be relocated, removed, or modified. Compliance with an order requiring removal shall occur within thirty (30) days of receipt of the order. In cases involving relocation or modification, an application for any required permit shall be submitted within ninety (90) days of receipt of the order. The provisions of this subsection shall supersede §§ 158.033 and 158.115.

~~(F)~~(G) No sign shall be located on the right-of-way for any road.

Proposed Text – Administrative Adjustments

§ 158.115 USE-OFF-THE-PREMISES SIGNS.

- Administrative adjustments

Proposed Text – Administrative Adjustments

- (B) (4) A minimum of 300 feet between outdoor advertising signs located in a Business-Commercial District and 800 feet between outdoor advertising signs located in an Industrial District. ...
- (5) ...
- (6) Prior to issuance of a zoning certificate for an outdoor advertising sign, the Zoning Administrator ~~or the Administrator's designee~~ shall conduct an ~~conference~~ administrative hearing on the zoning certificate application to allow for public notice and comment in accordance with § 158.130(G) and within 15 days of the hearing, the Zoning Administrator shall decide whether to issue the zoning certificate or issue a written denial. The Zoning Administrator ~~or the Administrator's designee~~ shall allow all persons who are present at the ~~conference~~ hearing an opportunity to be heard concerning the application.

Proposed Text – Administrative Adjustments

- (B) (6) ~~(a) Prior to the informal conference, the Zoning Administrator shall cause the property to be posted with notice of the pendency of the application and cause the adjoining property owners to be notified of the application by first class mail. The notice shall contain the date, time, and place of the conference.~~
- ~~(b) Within 15 days of the conference, the Zoning Administrator shall decide whether to issue the zoning certificate or issue a written denial.~~
- ~~(c) The Zoning Administrator shall not issue the zoning certificate if to do so would violate the spirit and intent of this chapter, or cause or be likely to cause substantial injury to the public health, safety, and general welfare. The Zoning Administrator shall be guided in making this decision by the considerations set forth in § 158.133(G).~~

Proposed Text – Administrative Adjustments

(D) (2) Prior to issuance of a zoning certificate for an outdoor advertising sign to be converted to an electronic message outdoor advertising sign in the Commercial Districts, the Zoning Administrator shall conduct ~~a Zoning Administrator's~~ an administrative hearing in accordance with § 158.1030(G) and ~~(H)~~ within 15 days of the hearing, the Zoning Administrator shall decide whether to issue the zoning certificate or issue a written denial, on the zoning certificate application to allow for public notice and comment. The Zoning Administrator shall allow all persons who are present at the hearing an opportunity to be heard concerning the application.

Proposed Text – Administrative Adjustments

- (D) (2) ~~(a) Prior to the hearing, the Zoning Administrator shall cause the property to be posted with notice of the pendency of the application and cause the adjoining property owners to be notified of the application by first class mail. The notice shall contain the date, time, and place of the conference.~~
- ~~(b) Within 15 days of the hearing, the Zoning Administrator shall decide whether to issue the zoning certificate or issue a written denial.~~
- ~~(c) The Zoning Administrator shall not issue the zoning certificate if to do so would violate the spirit and intent of this chapter, or cause or be likely to cause substantial injury to the public health, safety, and general welfare. The Zoning Administrator shall be guided in making this decision by the considerations set forth in § 158.133(I).~~
- 3d The provisions of § 158.115(D)(1)(a) through (D)(1)(d) herein shall apply.
- (E) (2) All outdoor advertising signs erected under this provision shall conform to all front, rear and side yard setbacks and lot area requirements for the zoning district in which they are constructed. Variances to the 1,000-foot distance requirement in division (E)(1) above may not be obtained.



Possible Action

Options:

- Direct staff to schedule a work session with the Board to discuss proposed amendments to County Code Sections 158.115 Use-Off-the-Premises Signs and 158.113 General Regulations.
- Direct staff to schedule a public hearing for proposed amendments to County Code Sections 158.115 Use-Off-the-Premises Signs and 158.113 General Regulations.