

Staff Report



To	General Committee
Subject	Sign Variance Application - 555 Essa Road
Date	April 22, 2026
Ward	7
From	W. Cooke, City Clerk/Director of Legislative and Court Services
Executive Member Approval	J. Schmidt, General Manager of Community and Corporate Services
CAO Approval	M. Prowse, Chief Administrative Officer
Staff Report #	CCS-013-2026

Recommendation(s):

1. That the requested height variance to City of Barrie By-law 2018-029 (Sign By-law) by Calloway REIT (Barrie II) Inc. (Smart Centres) for signage at 555 Essa Road, be denied based on the following:
 - 1.1. The permitted maximum ground sign height is 7.5m / 24ft - 6in in the by-law. The proposed ground sign is requested at a height of 9.75m / 32ft, a difference of 2.25m / 7ft - 6in which is a 30% increase in height;
 - 1.2. The additional height does not appear required for sightline obstructions or visibility due to contours or elevation of the land or tall foliage;
 - 1.3. The location for the proposed ground sign is in close proximity of a major signalized intersection and the increased height may cause the placement of the proposed digital display to cause a distraction to the view of the traffic control signals for southbound motorists on Essa Road.

Executive Summary:

This report provides a recommendation from staff based on information collected during the review of a request for a minor variance to erect a new ground sign at 555 Essa Road, Barrie. The request for a minor variance was determined to not be minor in nature as the proposed ground sign would be 30% taller than the current maximum height permitted in the by-law. Therefore, this report has been put forth as an exemption request

on behalf of the requestor.

Key Findings:

The Sign By-law sets a maximum height allowance for all ground signs of 7.5 meters or 24.6 feet, measured from the finished level at the base of the supporting structure at grade. The maximum height of a ground sign is capped at 7.5 metres as this is a provincial standard for commercial ground signs. Signs that exceed this height have additional requirements under the Ontario Building Code including being designed, signed, and sealed by a Professional Engineer or Architect registered in Ontario. The applicant has not fulfilled these requirements.

The Sign By-law prescribes minimum setback requirements for the placement of all ground signs. These setbacks include set distances from all property lines, driveways, sidewalks, parking spaces, other signs located on the same property, as well as from city infrastructure and other utilities.

In addition to setback requirements, the Sign By-law specifies the location of the ground sign must be within a landscaped area. The location shall include soft landscape treatment at the base of the sign or supporting structure. The boundaries of such sign shall be defined by a line measuring a minimum of 1.0m from all outermost sides of the sign or supporting structure.

A general provision prescribed to all signs and advertising devices requires that the device not create a distraction, stating signs which, by reason of size, location, or illumination, obstruct the vision of drivers or pedestrians, or obstruct or detract from the visibility or effectiveness of any traffic sign or control device on public streets and roads not be permitted.

A review of the landscape in the general area of the proposed ground sign show the contour of the land to be relatively flat with minimal or no visual obstructions. Staff reviewed several different views approaching the proposed sign location both on GIS mapping, online street views and in person. Staff observed that the contours of the landscape in the area of 555 Essa Road to be essentially flat on all approaches to the proposed sign location, with minimal or no vegetation, trees or other visual obstructions that may cause the sign to be not visible. This can also be seen on the artist-rendered street view photographs included in the applicant's package.

Staff noted the proposed digital display is 25% of the overall sign area within the proposed ground sign. If unchanged when contained in a sign at the by-law's maximum height, would be 33% of the overall sign area, still within the 50% maximum stated in the by-law and not detracting from the advertising potential.

Financial Implications:

There are no financial implications for The Corporation resulting from the proposed

recommendation.

Alternatives:

The following alternatives are available for consideration by General Committee:

Alternative #1 General Committee could grant the exemption for the variance to the proposed ground sign as requested, allowing the sign to a maximum height of 9.75m / 32 ft.

This alternative is available but not recommended as it would erode the integrity and intent of the by-law, may cause motorist distractions, and would not be in-line with the standards that were required for other granted height exemptions that were essential for visual purposes such as extreme changes in land contours or elevation.

Alternative #2 General Committee could alter the proposed recommendation by approving the proposed ground sign at a maximum height of 9.75m / 32 ft. but require the placement of the sign to be further south of the major signalized intersection to avoid the possible distraction to motorists.

Although this alternative is available, it is not recommended as it does not uphold the integrity or intent of the by-law and remains out-of-line with previous standards required for increased sign height applications.

Alternative #3 General Committee could alter the proposed recommendation by modifying the proposed overall height of the sign to a lesser height closer to the current maximum height.

Although this alternative may be available, it is not recommended as it does not uphold the integrity or intent of the by-law and remains out-of-line with previous standards for increased sign height applications.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

Affordable Place to Live		
Community Safety	X	The unnecessary increase in height for this proposed ground sign at this major intersection may place the digital display contained in the sign in a location that may become a visual distraction for the traffic control device for southbound motorists, as noted by the City Traffic Department.
Thriving Community		
Infrastructure Investments		

Additional Background Information and Analysis:

In February 1999, following a fulsome review of the sign regulations by an independent consultant, the Municipal Code By-law 88-260 was amended to enact more comprehensive regulations to provide a more effective means of control regarding the placement, maintenance, and content of signs. **These amendments included the height and setback requirements for all ground signs that are still in effect today.**

In April 2005, the City enacted By-law 2005-093, a stand-alone by-law to regulate advertising devices including signs, repealing it from the Municipal Code By-law 88-260 to simplify management of the by-law in the future.

In 2018, a fulsome review of the Sign By-law was undertaken resulting from Council Motion 17-G-024 “That staff in the Legislative and Court Services Department review opportunities to enhance enforcement and increase cost recovery associated with illegal signs and property standards violations including but not limited to the implementation of a sign permit fee system and report back to General Committee.” The Sign By-law 2018-029 was amended to add or clarify definitions, enhance wording for clarification or to align with other by-laws, and to enhance provisions on permissible sign types to address technological advancements in advertising and industry standards.

Advertising is important to local businesses and the local economy, providing business identification, communication and wayfinding. Enforcement of the Sign By-law is essential to manage the City’s objectives of dealing with visual clutter/litter, ensure public safety and preserve Barrie’s exceptional character. When advertising is not controlled and kept to a minimum standard, the community suffers. The Sign By-law 2018-029 prescribes standards and restrictions for the placement and maintenance of signs on public and private property within the City of Barrie, as well as the permitted numbers of signs on a property, height, setbacks, and subject of the advertising.

Consultation and Engagement:

There was no public consultation undertaken or required in relation to this report.

Environmental and Climate Change Impact Matters:

There are no environmental and/or climate change impact matters related to the recommendation.

Appendix:

- Appendix A – Minor Variance Submission from Smart Centres
- Appendix B - Additional information from Staff

Report Author:

J. Forgrave, Supervisor of Enforcement Services

File #:

Pending #:

Not Applicable.