



Report to: Development Services Committee

Meeting Date: May 2, 2023

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**SUBJECT:** Ground Sign Variance – Ebenezer United Church  
5000 Steeles Avenue East Application No. SP 22 257706  
(Ward 7)

**PREPARED BY:** Peter Wokral, Senior Heritage Planner, ext. 7955

**REVIEWED BY:** Regan Hutcheson, Manager of Heritage Planning, ext. 2080  
Stephen Lue, Senior Development Manager, ext. 2520

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

- 1) THAT the ground sign variance application by Ebenezer United Church at 5000 Steeles Avenue East, Application No. SP 22 257706 (Ward 7), be approved, subject to it being used to display the dates and times of services and programs only;
- 2) AND THAT Staff be authorized to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

**PURPOSE:**

This report recommends approval of a variance from the City’s Sign By-law 2002-94, as amended (the “Sign By-law”) for a ground sign at Ebenezer United Church.

**BACKGROUND:**

**The site is the location of Ebenezer United Church, which was founded in the year 1852**

The subject property is located 5000 Steeles Avenue East, on the north west corner of Brimley Road and Steeles Avenue East, as shown in Figure 2, and is zoned O2 Institutional and Open Space Zone, under By-law 90-81, as amended. The subject property is designated under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

**The applicant seeks permission to permit the construction of a new ground sign with an electronic message board**

The proposed new sign is in the same location as an existing ground sign with a backlit readograph sign, which does not comply with Section 10.0 of the Sign By-law, as amended, in the following way:

Permissions	Proposal	Required Variance
<b>Section 10.3 Table E-Signs Permitted in Special Sign Districts</b> Ground signs must be externally illuminated. <b>Sections 10.4.2 and Section 10.4.3 (in part)</b> Prohibits readograph signs, but permits a permanent non-electronic readograph sign for a religious institution to identify the times of services and programs	A new ground sign with an electronic message board and internal illumination (see Figure 5)	To permit a ground sign with a permanent electronic message board and internal illumination

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**OPTIONS/ DISCUSSION:****Sign variances can be supported subject to consideration of specific review criteria**

Section 19.0 of the Sign By-law states that when considering an application for a variance, the Development Services Committee and Council shall have regard for the following:

*(a) Special circumstances or conditions applying to the land, building or use referred to in the application:*

Staff opine that the use of a religious institution constitutes a special circumstance for which the Sign By-law provides an exception intended to provide temporary information regarding the times of services and programs offered by the institution.

*(b) Whether strict application of the provisions of this By-law in the context of the special circumstances applying to the land, building or use, would result in practical difficulties or unnecessary and unusual hardship for the applicant, inconsistent with the general intent and purpose of this By-law:*

Staff opine that the strict application of the Sign By-law in the context of the special circumstances applying to the subject property would result in an unnecessary and unusual hardship that is inconsistent with the intent and purpose of the Sign By-law.

Section 10.0 of the Sign By-law, which applies to properties within the City's four heritage districts and properties individually designated under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*, was intended to help maintain the historic character of these properties by prohibiting features such as plastic backlit signs. Section 10.4.3 provides an exception for religious institutions to permit readograph signs with manually changeable letters to allow the institution to inform the public regarding the times of programs and services.

The proposed ground sign would occupy only 1.2 % of the overall 1.3 ha (3.3 ac) subject property, which is located at the southeast corner approximately 6.1 m (20 ft) away from modern portions of the church complex, and 14 m (46 ft) away from the historic church. The proposed location of the sign will not negatively impact the historic church as the sign is sufficiently distant from the historic church and is significantly smaller in scale than the modern portions of the church complex of buildings.

However, Staff note that the intent of the exception to Section 10.0 of the Sign By-law was only to allow religious institutions to provide information on the times of services and programs, and not for the display of distracting, unrelated, and overly elaborate messages or videos.

*(c) Whether such special circumstances or conditions are pre-existing and not created by the owner or applicant:*

There are no special circumstance or conditions created by the applicant and, therefore, this section is not applicable.

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*(d) Whether the sign that is the subject of the variance will alter the essential character of the area:*

The subject property is located in a typically suburban setting with commercial properties to the south having large backlit signage. An electronic message board displaying the times of church services and programs will not alter the essential character of the area.

**Heritage Markham supports the proposed ground sign**

Heritage Markham had no objection to the proposed sign and delegated final review of any application necessary to approve it to the City (Heritage Section) Staff (see Figure 7).

**Staff support the proposed variance for the ground sign**

Staff have reviewed the application with respect to Section 19.5 of the Sign By-law and have concluded that the proposed ground sign with an electronic message board can be supported on the condition that it only provides information on the times of the religious institution's programs and services, and is not used for overly elaborate, fast moving, distracting, unrelated messages and videos.

**INTER-DEPARTMENTAL IMPLICATIONS:**

By-law Enforcement and Regulatory Services is responsible for the inspection and enforcement of the Sign By-law.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Figure 1 – Applicant

Figure 2 – Site Location

Figure 3 – Photograph of the Historic Church and Existing Ground Sign

Figure 4 – Proposed Location of the Ground Sign

Figure 5 – Proposed New Ground Sign with Electronic Message Board

Figure 6 – Existing Ground Sign with Backlit Readograph Sign

Figure 7 – Heritage Markham Extract

**RECOMMENDED BY:**

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Giulio Cescato, MCIP RPP  
Director of Planning and Urban Design

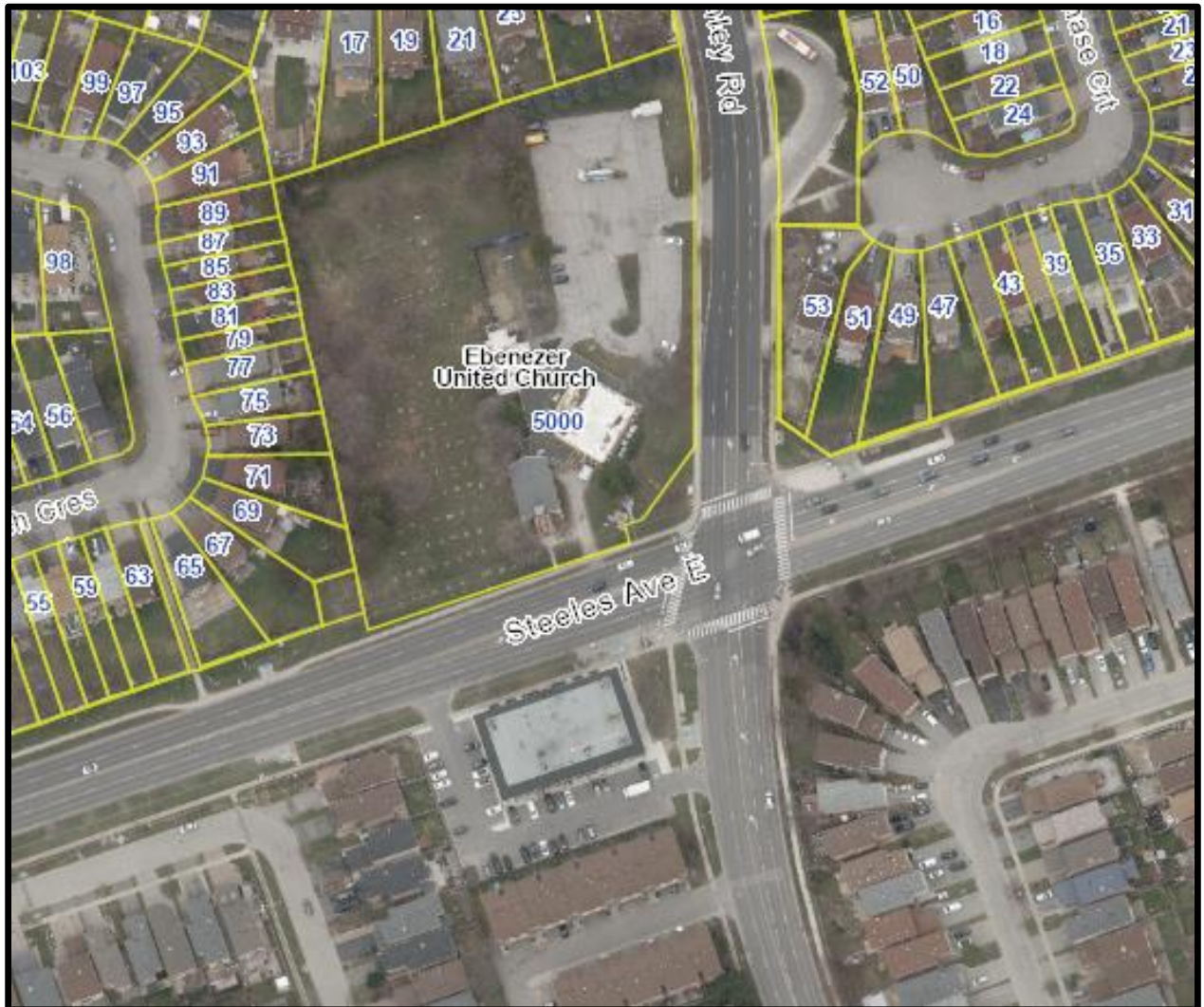
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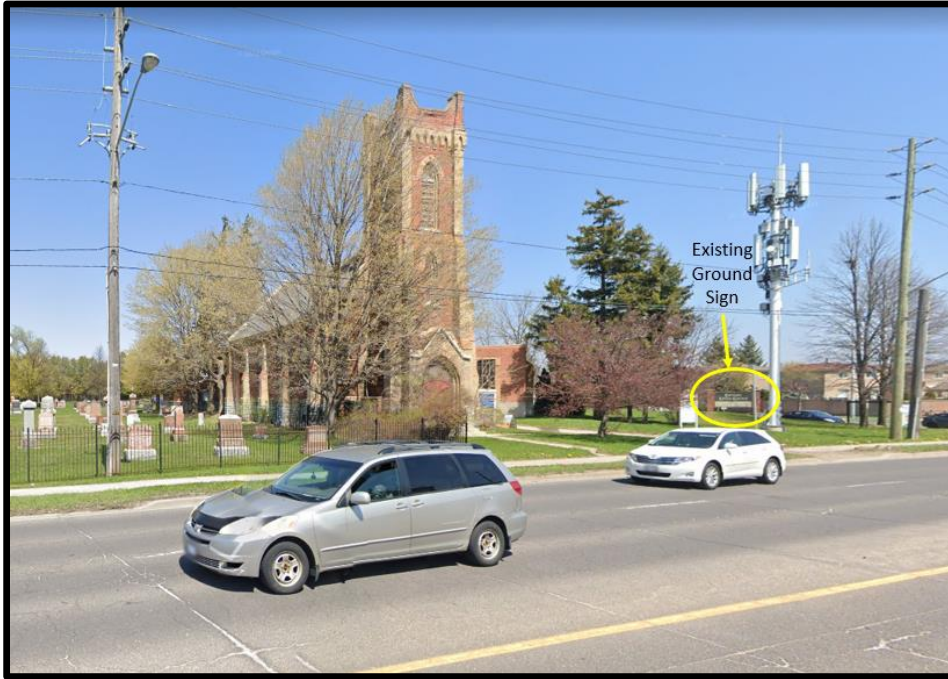
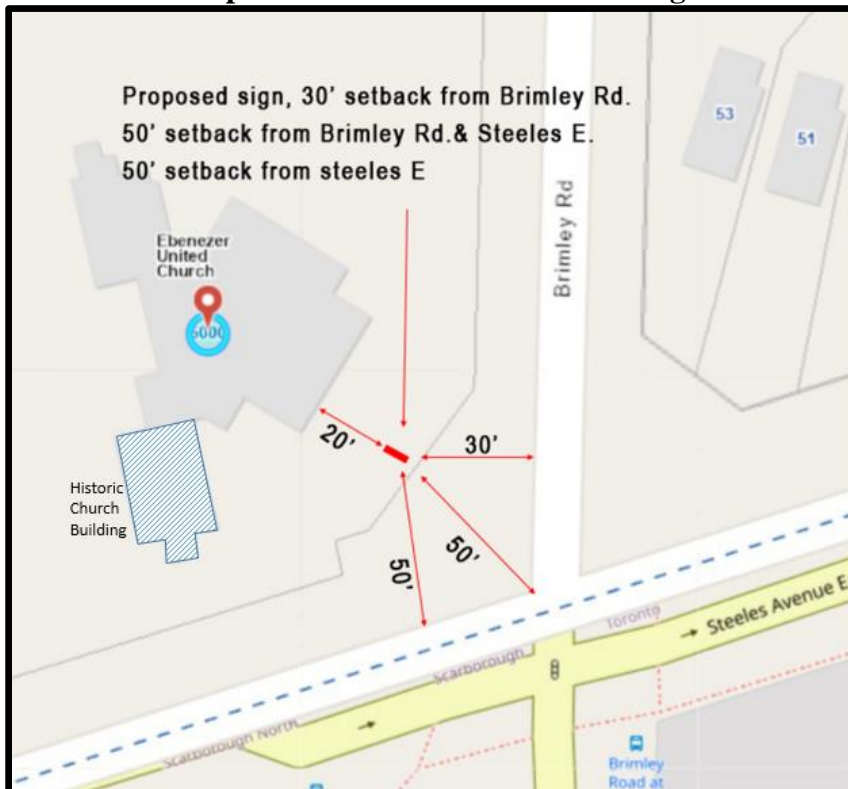
Arvin Prasad, MCIP RPP  
Commissioner of Development Services

**FIGURE 1 – Applicant**

**Ebenezer United Church, 5000 Steeles Avenue East, Markham**

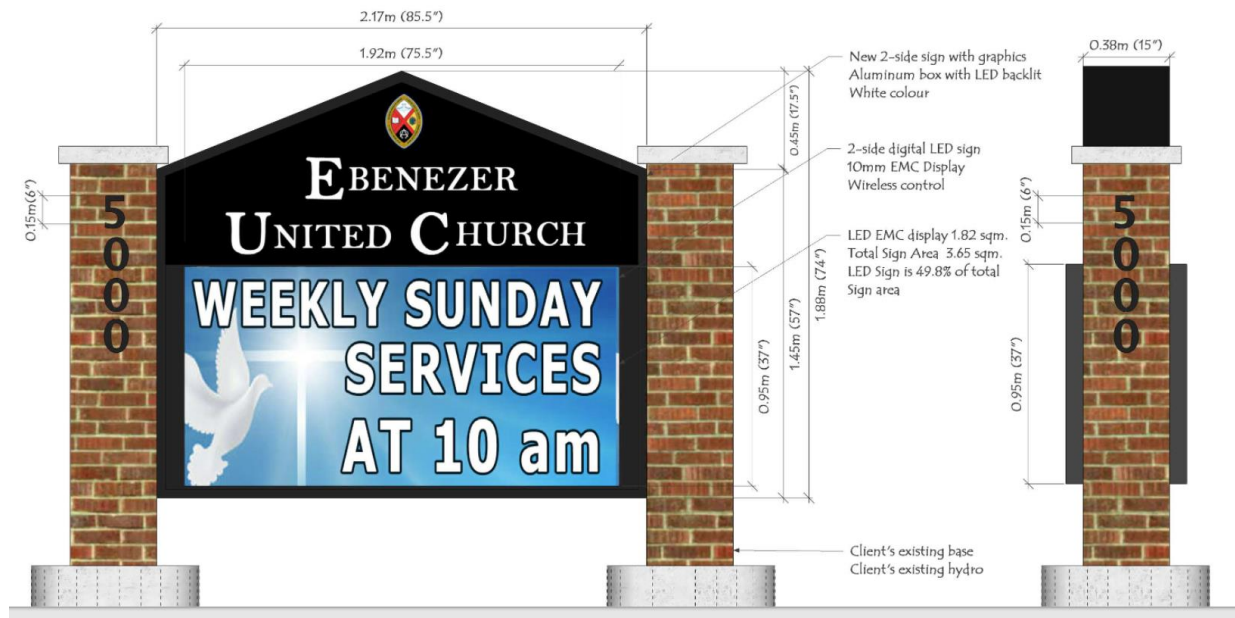
**FIGURE 2 – Site Location**



**FIGURE 3– Photograph of the Historic Church and Existing Ground Sign****FIGURE 4– Proposed Location of the Ground Sign**



**FIGURE5 – Proposed Ground Sign with Electronic Message Board**



**FIGURE 6 – Existing Ground Sign with Backlit Readograph Sign**



**FIGURE 7 – Heritage Markham Extract**

**HERITAGE MARKHAM  
EXTRACT**

Date: December 23, 2022

To: R. Hutcheson, Manager, Heritage Planning  
P. Wokral, Senior Heritage Planner

EXTRACT CONTAINING ITEM # 5.5 OF THE TWELFTH HERITAGE MARKHAM  
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON DECEMBER 14, 2022

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**5.5 BUILDING OR SIGN PERMIT**

**PROPOSED LED ILLUMINATED SIGN  
5000 STEELES AVE E (16.11)**

FILE NUMBER:  
SPC 22 257706

Recommendation:

THAT Heritage Markham has no objection to the proposed new permanent sign for the Ebenezer United Church at 5000 Steeles Avenue East (File SP 22 257706) and delegates final review of any application required to permit its erection to the City (Heritage Section) staff.

**Carried**