

# Appearance Review Commission Handbook

**Members:**  
**Bill Bradford, Chair**  
**Daniel Elkins**  
**Mason Miller**  
**Craig Phillips**  
**Carrie Woleben-Meade**

**APPEARANCE REVIEW COMMISSION (ARC)  
REVIEW FUNCTIONS**

<b>Appearance Review Certificate</b>	<b>Sign Review</b>	<b>Sign Variation</b>	<b>Variation from Landscaping or VC Design Guidelines</b>
Review of exterior modifications	Review of signs that conform to sign regulations	Review of signs that Do Not conform to sign regulations	Review of plans that Do Not conform to landscaping or Village Center design standards

**APPEARANCE REVIEW CERTIFICATE**

The ARC reviews proposals and issues Appearance Review Certificates prior to the issuance of any permit or certificate of occupancy for any work that includes the following:

- New construction
- Exterior Remodeling
- Construction or renovation of off-street parking areas, including lighting and landscaping
- Installation or alteration of any sign, canopy, or awning
- Installation or alteration of any fence
- Construction or alteration of wireless telecommunications equipment
- Some modifications are exempt including work to single family homes and religious institutions

**CONSENT AGENDA SIGN REVIEW**

In an effort to minimize the amount of time required to obtain a Sign Permit, the ARC created the Consent Agenda for conforming signage proposals. If staff review reveals that the proposal is conforming, the case will be scheduled for the next Consent Agenda. No notification to surrounding properties is required by the petitioner.

**VARIATIONS FROM THE SIGN ORDINANCE**

The ARC also hears requests for variations from the Sign Ordinance and makes recommendations on their approval to the Village Board of Trustees. Sign variation requests require notification to all properties that abut or lie directly across a street or alley from the subject property. The ARC determines if a variation request meets the standards of review for sign variations (Appendix III) and forwards their recommendation to the Village Board.

**VARIATIONS FROM LANDSCAPING AND VC DESIGN STANDARDS**

Most variations are reviewed by the Zoning Board of Appeals with the exception of variations from sign regulations and variations from Article 15, Landscaping; and Article 10, Sections 7 & 9 Village Center Design Standards. These requests require all properties within 250 feet from the subject property to be noticed. The ARC determines if a variation request meets the standards of review (Appendix IV) and forwards their recommendation to the Village Board.

## LOCAL SIGN ORDINANCES

A shopping center owner, any association of merchants doing business within a specific area within the Village, or an office park owner may establish specific signage regulations for their specified area. There are currently three local sign ordinances in the Village:

- Edens Plaza, 3232 Lake Avenue
- Plaza del Lago, 1515 Sheridan Road
- West Lake Plaza, 3217 – 3223 Lake Avenue

For signage that conforms to a local sign ordinance, a sign permit can be issued by Community Development staff without review by the Appearance Review Commission. Applications must contain a sign proposal drawn to scale, a photograph of the existing activity, and the completed ARC application found on the last page of the ARC Handbook.

### TIME-LINE

You will be provided with a proposed time-line of events when you first inquire into the process to obtain a sign permit, Appearance Review Certificate, or variation. The amount of time that will transpire between the submission of your application and the issuance of your sign or building permit depends upon your type of case. **The ARC meets the first Monday of every month.**

**Local Sign Ordinance (1 to 3 days):** Once a conforming proposal is submitted, staff can issue the sign permit as soon as they can review the proposal for conformance. This applies only to those in Eden's Plaza, Plaza del Lago, and West Lake Plaza.

**Conforming Sign Review (1 to 4 weeks):** If you are applying for Consent Agenda approval of a conforming sign, you will be placed on the next available agenda for the Commission. If approved, the sign permit will be issued on the day following the public hearing. **Applications are due at least one week prior to the meeting.**

**Appearance Review Certificate (4 to 8 weeks):** The Zoning Ordinance requires a waiting period of at least 15, but no more than 45, days between the time of public notice and the actual meeting. This 15 day waiting period, plus at least a week for staff to process the application and prepare the petitioner's notice packet, usually mandates that the process takes at least one month. Once the Certificate is issued, staff can sign off on the zoning portion of your building permit. The permit request will then be reviewed by the Building, Electrical, and Plumbing Inspectors (if applicable). **Applications are due at least one month prior to the meeting.**

**Variation from the Zoning Ordinance (6 to 10 weeks):** A request for a variation from the Zoning Ordinance will be heard by the ARC and then sent onto the Village Board of Trustees with a recommendation to grant or deny the request. This can add two to three weeks to the time involved. **Applications are due at least one month prior to the meeting.**

**APPEARANCE REVIEW COMMISSION**  
**REVIEW PROCEDURES**

**MEETINGS**

The Appearance Review Commission meets on the first Monday of every month. The meetings are generally held at 7:30 p.m. in the second floor training room of the Wilmette Village Hall located at 1200 Wilmette Avenue, Wilmette, Illinois. At least four out of the seven members on the Commission must be present for the cases to be heard. If there is not a quorum, the meeting will be cancelled and all of the cases will be continued until the next scheduled meeting.

**APPLICATION SUBMISSION**

It is highly recommended that you schedule a **pre-application meeting** as early as possible with the Department of Community Development staff to discuss the proposal and familiarize yourself with Village requirements and procedures. Upon receipt of the following materials, the case will be assigned to the next available hearing:

- **Completed application:** must outline the facts of the case and include authorization from the property owner if different than the petitioner.
- **Plat of Survey:** must accurately reflect existing site conditions and display a legible legal description of the property. A plat is only required for an Appearance Review Certificate or Variation.
- **Variation Letter:** should be included if a variation is being requested. The letter should explain the need for the variance, and demonstrate how the proposal meets the standards of review.
- **Submittals:** depends upon the type of case and may include plans, drawings, photographs, and/or material samples (see page 8).

**NOTIFICATION**

**Village Responsibilities**

For variation requests, the Community Development Department will provide a legal notice in the newspaper and a legal posting of the property not less than 15 days prior to the hearing. These notices will state the nature of the hearing, the case number, and the date, time, and place of the hearing.

**Petitioner Responsibilities**

The degree of petitioner involvement in the notification process depends on the type of case proposed by the petitioner. The table below indicates what type of notice is required.

Case Type	Personal Notice	Published Notice	Posted Notice
Appearance Review Certificate			
New Construction/Addition	Adjoining properties	Newspaper	Posted by Village
Modification	-	-	Posted by Village
Sign/Awning	-	-	-
Sign Variation	Adjoining properties	Newspaper	Posted by Village
Variation	250 foot radius	Newspaper	Posted by Village

## **Personal Notification**

When public notice is required, Community Development staff will provide the petitioner with a Petitioner's Packet containing:

- Instructions for delivering personal notices
- Copies of the Notice of Public Hearing
- A Sidwell Tax Map showing all properties which are to receive notice of the hearing and a list of the Property Identification Numbers (P.I.N.)
- Affidavit of Compliance

The petitioner is required to present, by hand delivery or first class mail, a notice of public hearing prepared by Community Development to all property owners and occupants.

If an adjoining or abutting property is a multi-tenant building, the petitioner may notify the president of the condo/townhouse association or building owner and receive a signed affidavit from this person that the other tenants have been notified by posting the notice in the building, newsletter or association meeting. If the condo association president or building owner is not contacted, then the petitioner shall notify all the building tenants.

After mailing or delivering the public notice, the petitioner will file a notarized affidavit provided by Community Development staff indicating that all the notices have been properly distributed.

## **STAFF REPORT**

During the week prior to the hearing, the Community Development Department will prepare a written report summarizing the facts of the case and including all relevant submittals. The report is distributed to the ARC prior to the hearing.

## **THE CONSENT AGENDA**

Sign requests that conform to the Zoning Ordinance are placed on the Consent Agenda. Items placed on the Consent Agenda are typically voted on without discussion by the Commission. In some cases, a Commissioner may remove an item from the Consent Agenda for discussion later in the meeting. If this happens it is important for the petitioner to be in attendance to answer any potential questions the Commission may have.

If a Commissioner has concerns in advance of the hearing, they can remove the case from the Consent Agenda and request that the petitioner be present. Staff will call the petitioner by 1:00 p.m. on the Monday of the hearing if their presence is required. This will give the petitioner the opportunity to answer the Commission's questions directly. If the petitioner is unable to attend the hearing that night, the case will be continued to the next meeting of the ARC.

## HEARING PROCEDURE

### Attending the Hearing

It is important that the petitioner be represented by someone capable of discussing components of the proposal and someone possessing the authority to make amendments or changes. If the Commissioners request amendments or changes to the proposal, **the petitioner not being properly represented may cause delays.**

### At the Hearing

1. The Chairman calls the case.
2. Staff gives a background summary and briefly describes the request to the Commissioners.
3. The petitioner presents their proposal, being sure to state how and why the proposal does or does not conform to the standards of review.
4. The Commission opens discussion of the request with the petitioner. At this time, Commissioners may give an indication of their stance on the proposal and the petitioner may elect or may be requested to amend the proposal.
5. The Commission opens discussion to any interested parties that may be present.
6. The Chair entertains a motion.
7. The Commission will discuss the motion on the proposal relative to its conformance to the guidelines. There is no petitioner involvement in this discussion.
8. A vote on the proposal is called. The ARC can take one of three actions on the case: vote to grant the petitioner's request; vote to deny the petitioner's request; or vote to continue the case in the event that the ARC requires additional facts or the petitioner wishes to present new information.

**If the applicant is simply requesting an Appearance Review Certificate, the ARC decision is the final step in the process.**

For those applicants requesting a variation from the Zoning Ordinance, the ARC makes a recommendation to the Board of Trustees. The decision is based on the standards of review for a variation contained in Appendices III, and IV.

Any case that the Appearance Review Commission denies may be appealed by the petitioner to the Board of Trustees.

The Appearance Review Commission has the authority to accept or reject any proposal or request before the Commission based on relevant Ordinance standards.

## **APPEARANCE REVIEW COMMISSION REPORT**

Following the hearing on a variation, a report is prepared which outlines the facts of the case and includes the recommendation of the ARC. The case is placed on the agenda of the next meeting of the Village Board of Trustees. The report of the Appearance Review Commission is forwarded to the Village Board and the petitioner prior to the Village Board meeting.

The Village Board may take one of three actions on a petition: vote to grant the petitioner's request, vote to deny the petitioner's request, or vote to refer the case back to the Appearance Review Commission for further consideration.

## **APPENDIX I: REPORT SUBMITTALS**

All drawings must be drawn to scale and be no larger than 11" x 17". Please provide **nine** color copies of all submittals. All sheets shall be legible with a minimum letter height of 1/16". Sheets to be labeled with title, sheet number, date drawn/revised.

No freehand sketches will be accepted. Photographs should be taken of both the subject site and neighboring sites.

Please be prepared to submit any material samples to staff. The samples will be recorded as part of the case record. Any other types of document distributed during a meeting will become part of the public record and will be held at Village Hall.

### **Site Plan**

- Dimensioned and drawn to scale (1"=20')
- Include parking layout, lighting fixture locations, building dimensions
- Equipment locations (HVAC, generator)
- Show accessory structures (dumpster, fence, signage)

### **Landscaping Plan**

- Dimensioned and drawn to scale (1"=20')
- Planting locations
- Planting types labeled on plan
- Plant schedule (botanical/common name, size, quantity)
- Color photos of proposed plants

### **Additions/New Construction**

- Floor Plans drawn to scale
- Plat of Survey
- Building elevations drawn to scale of all sides indicating material type
- Building Section(s), drawn to scale
- Material and color samples

### **Signs**

- An elevation of the building drawn to scale showing: the sign relative to the building and the lettering style
- The signage proposal drawn to scale showing: dimensions (in inches), lettering style and size (in inches), colors (using the Pantone system), construction details
- Material and color samples
- Site plan showing sign location

### **Awnings**

- Elevation drawn to scale
- Dimensional plan or shop drawing
- Material and color samples

### **Fences**

- Site plan or plat showing fence location
- Scaled elevation showing fence detail or cut-sheet of proposed fence

### **Lighting**

- Photometric plan
- Cut sheets of lighting fixtures (indicate bulb type and size)

## APPENDIX II: APPEARANCE REVIEW CERTIFICATE STANDARDS OF REVIEW

When reviewing an application for an Appearance Review Certificate, the ARC shall endeavor to ensure that the proposal is designed in accordance with the standards set forth below. **Architectural style is not restricted.** Rather, evaluation of the appearance of a project shall be based on the quality of its design and its relationship to the pattern and character of development on surrounding properties.

1. All sides of a structure receive design consideration.
2. If the side or rear of the structure faces a street, a residential use, or a property located in a residential zoning district, the exterior materials used on the side or rear are comparable in character and quality to the exterior materials used on the facade of the structure.
3. Materials used in the construction and design of the structure are of durable quality.
4. Mechanical equipment is located or screened so as not to be visible from surrounding streets and properties.
5. The scale and placement of the structure on the site is appropriate to the proportion of the site covered by the structure and the location of the structure in relation to its lot lines.
6. Building design and placement must take into consideration natural grade conditions, existing vegetation, and other natural features.
7. Excessive similarity or dissimilarity in design in relation to surrounding or adjoining structures is discouraged, including but not limited to building height, exterior materials, building mass, roof line, and architectural features.
8. Design takes into consideration the relationship to the street and the pedestrian environment.
9. Parking, storage, and refuse areas are located and screened so as not to negatively affect neighboring properties.
10. Landscape is designed to maintain existing mature trees and shrubs to the maximum extent possible.
11. Landscape provides an aesthetically pleasing design and, where applicable, provides for the screening of parking, storage, refuse, and utility areas from the street and adjacent residential properties.
12. Selected plant materials shall be suitable to Wilmette's climate and to their location on the site. The use of invasive species is prohibited. Invasive species shall be those included in the "Chicago Botanic Garden" list of "Invasive Plants in the Chicago Region."
13. Parking areas are designed to achieve efficient traffic flow and minimize dangerous traffic movements.
14. Signs are of the appropriate design, color and placement to the structure, site and adjoining properties, in terms of materials, height, setback from the street, and proportion.
15. Accessory structures, exterior lighting and fences, complement the overall structure and site design, in terms of materials, size, and architectural character.
16. For new two-unit dwellings, review is limited to whether or not the proposed structure maintains the external appearance of a single-family dwelling.

**APPENDIX III: SIGN VARIATION**  
**STANDARDS OF REVIEW**

No sign variation may be recommended for approval by the Appearance Review Commission and approved by the Village Board unless finding have been made, where the evidence presented in the particular case shows that:

**Approval Standards for Sign Variations, (Section 20-5.5.D.)**

1. **Unusual Circumstances:** A variation will serve to relieve the petitioner from an unusual difficulty due to the location, topography, or circumstances on the petitioner's property, or a peculiar attribute existing on the neighboring property which directly affects the petitioner's property.

2. **Character and Appearance:** A variation will be consistent in design and scale with other signs nearby, and will not alter the essential character of the commercial streetscape in the vicinity of the subject property.

3. **Not Self-Created:** The plight of the property owner was not created by the owner and denial of the variation will impose undue hardship or difficulty on the owner's ability to conduct business on the subject property.

4. **Health, Safety and Welfare:** A variation will not create a traffic or safety hazard and will not impair the utility of neighboring properties' signage.

5. **Purpose of Ordinance:** A variation is in harmony with the purpose and intent of the Sign Ordinance.

## APPENDIX IV: LANDSCAPING AND VC DESIGN VARIATION STANDARDS OF REVIEW

No variation may be recommended for approval by the board or commission and approved by the Village Board unless findings have been made, based upon the evidence presented at the public hearing, to support each of the following conclusions:

### **Approval Standards for Variations, (Section 20-5.4.F.)**

- a. The particular physical conditions, shape, or surroundings of the property would impose upon the owner a practical difficulty or particular hardship, as opposed to a mere inconvenience, if the requirements of this Ordinance were strictly enforced.
- b. The plight of the property owner was not created by the owner and is due to unique circumstances.
- c. The difficulty or hardship is peculiar to the property in question and is not generally shared by other properties classified in the same zoning district and/or used for the same purposes. This includes the need to accommodate desirable existing site landscape or reflect unique conditions created by the age and character of the property.
- d. The difficulty or hardship resulting from the application of this Ordinance would prevent the owner from making a reasonable use of the property. However, the fact the property could be utilized more profitably with the variation than without the variation is not considered as grounds for granting the variation.
- e. The proposed variation will not impair an adequate supply of light and air to adjacent property or otherwise injure other property or its use, will not substantially increase the danger of fire or otherwise endanger the public health, safety and welfare, and will not substantially diminish or impair property values within the neighborhood.
- f. The variation, if granted, will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood and will be consistent with the goals, objectives and policies set forth in the Comprehensive Plan.
- g. With respect to building materials, unforeseen advances in technology, appearance or quality render a prohibited material to be suitable and in keeping with the appearance goals of this code when used in the form presented by the applicant.



**Appearance Review Application**  
**Application for Appearance Review Hearings & Sign Review**

Project Address \_\_\_\_\_ Unit \_\_\_\_\_  
Business Name \_\_\_\_\_

Property Owner Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Property Owner Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Property Owner Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_  
Property Owner Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\*Separate signed letter from property owner is acceptable

Applicant Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_  
Email \_\_\_\_\_

**Application for:**

- Appearance Review Certificate (\$123 fee)
- Sign Review
- Variation Request (\$123 fee)

**Description of Request:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Submittal Checklist:**

**For Appearance Review Certificates  
& Variation Requests**

**Conforming Sign Requests**

- Application Fee
- Proof of Ownership
- Report Submittals (See Appendix I)

- Report Submittals (See Appendix I)
- Eden's Plaza: sq. ft. occupied \_\_\_\_\_
- Plaza del Lago: bldg. & space # \_\_\_\_\_