



Staff Report

Community Services – By-law Enforcement

Report To: 122
Meeting Date: April 13, 2026
Report Number: CS.26.013
Title: St. George’s Anglican Church Sign Requests
Prepared by: Debbie Young, Manager of By-law and Licensing

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report CS.26.013, entitled “St. George’s Anglican Church Sign Requests”;

AND THAT Council directs staff to proceed with Option # ___ as further described within the analysis section of Staff Report CS.26.013.

B. Overview

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with information and options related to a request from St. George’s Anglican Church (“Church”) to install a digital sign and a ground sign on its property located at 166 Russell Street East. The Application request is for two signs. Firstly, a ground sign that does not that comply with the Town’s Sign By-law, and secondly, a proposed digital sign integrated into a ground sign that does not comply with the provisions of the Town’s Sign By-law.

A representative of the Church appeared as a deputation before the Committee of the Whole on December 1, 2025, to outline the request and the rationale for the proposed sign. As the request cannot be approved administratively, Council direction is required. Staff completed a review of the Application and the Town’s Sign By-law and the review is attached.

C. Background

On December 1, 2025, Council directed as follows:

THAT Council of the Town of The Blue Mountains received the Deputation of Michelle Hughes, Outreach Coordinator and Rev’d Grayhame Bowcott, Rector, St. George’s Anglican Church regarding WAYGATE Project;

AND THAT Council directs staff to provide a report in response to the St. George’s Anglican Church deputation to allow digital signage in order to advance the St. George’s Waygate Project, in accordance with The Blue Mountains Sign By-law.

The Church located at 166 Russell Street, East, is an established institutional use within the Town of The Blue Mountains. The Church has requested permission to install a digital sign to display information such as service times, community events, and Town news.

Under the Town's Sign By-law, digital signs are regulated with respect to location, size, illumination, message transition, and zoning permissions. The proposed sign does not comply with one or more of these regulations, including but not limited to:

- Maximum permitted sign area is 0.5 m² (proposed 0.95 m²);
- Imagery requirements of one image per 60 seconds (proposed up to 3 images per 60 seconds with one image available to the Town for news);
- The ground sign does not comply with the by-law in relation to the 3-metre setback from the property line. The sign is proposed to be located 0.8 m from the property line and 1.1 metres from the public sidewalk and would be entirely on the Church property.

As a result, the proposal cannot be approved through the standard sign permit process.

D. Analysis

The Church has requested permission to install a ground sign and an integrated digital sign at 166 Russell Street East. Staff's review determined that the proposal does not comply with the Town's Sign By-law in several respects, including:

- maximum sign area, where 0.5 m² is permitted and 0.95 m² is proposed;
- message transition frequency, where the by-law permits one image per 60 seconds and the proposal requests up to 3 images per 60 seconds; and
- setback, where a 3.0 metre setback from the property line is required and the proposed sign is located 0.8 metres from the property line and 1.1 metres from the public sidewalk. As a result, the proposal cannot be approved through the standard sign permit process. Staff also reviewed comparator municipal sign by-laws from Collingwood, Clearview, Meaford and Grey Highlands. That review indicates that while neighbouring municipalities do contemplate ground signs and, in some cases, changeable-copy or electronic message display signage, they generally regulate such signage through defined standards respecting size, location, transition timing, illumination and/or variance review.

In Collingwood, a ground sign may include a changing copy sign, provided that the changing copy area does not exceed 50% of the sign face, and changeable copy may not be changed more than once in a five-minute interval. Collingwood also applies a 3.0 metre street line setback for ground signs and prohibits ground signs within 3.0 metres of a driveway entrance or exit. These provisions are materially more restrictive than the Church's proposal respecting message transition frequency and setback.

In Clearview, a ground sign area of up to 1.86 m² with a minimum property line setback of 1.68 metres. This shows that the Church's proposed digital sign area is not unusual in scale relative

to at least one comparator, but the proposed 0.8 metre setback remains more permissive than Clearview's identified standard.

In Meaford, electronic message display signage is permitted in combination with other sign types, may occupy up to 50% of the maximum sign area of the parent sign, and must maintain a minimum display time of two minutes, with a transition of no more than one second and no visual effects. Ground and pylon signs are to be located 2.0 metres from all street lines and property lines in the reviewed provisions. This again indicates that while digital signage is permitted in principle, the comparator is more restrictive than the Church's proposal with respect to both setback and message timing.

For Grey Highlands, the materials reviewed do not provide the same level of digital sign standards; however, the framework emphasizes compatibility with surroundings, protection of visual character, minimizing distraction or safety hazards for pedestrians and motorists, and minimizing adverse impacts on nearby properties.

Based on this review, staff are of the opinion that the Church's request is supportable in concept, in that neighbouring municipalities do permit ground signage and, in some cases, electronic or changing copy sign components. However, the proposal is not closely aligned with comparator operational controls, particularly with respect to setback and message transition frequency. Comparator municipalities also generally rely on a permit and/or variance process when a sign does not comply with the applicable by-law.

Accordingly, staff advise that the cleaner and more defensible path is to address the proposal through a Sign Variance application or a site-specific exemption with clear conditions, rather than through routine permit approval. Should Council wish to support the request in principle, consideration should be given to attaching conditions respecting dimming/illumination, message dwell time, transition effects, and final placement, in addition to any required approval from Grey County given the property's location on a County Road.

Council has the following options:

Option 1 – Council Approval and By-law Waiver

Council may choose to approve the digital and ground sign as requested and grant a site-specific exemption or waiver from the Sign By-law. This option would allow the sign to proceed without a Sign Variance application.

Considerations:

- Sets a precedent for similar requests from other institutions or properties;
- Bypasses the public notice and review associated with a Sign Variance;

Option 2 – Require a Sign Variance Application

Council may direct the Church to apply for a Sign Variance to the Sign By-law. This option follows the established regulatory framework and allows for public input.

Considerations:

- Ensures transparency and consistency with other non-compliant sign requests;
- Provides an opportunity to assess site-specific impacts;
- Involves application fees and processing time for the applicant.

Option 3 – Site Specific Exemption

Council may choose to approve a site-specific exemption to the Sign By-law for the subject property at 166 Russell Street East, subject to conditions that address the unique circumstances of the site and mitigate operational and safety impacts. This option would allow the Church to proceed without a full Sign Variance application, while ensuring that any approval is limited to this property and this specific sign proposal. The exemption could be granted for the digital sign and associated ground sign only and would not amend the Sign By-law generally. In this scenario Council authorizes staff to finalize and issue the permit, subject to the applicant satisfying all applicable Town and County requirements, including safety and operational requirements, to the satisfaction of staff.

Considerations:

- Allows Council to recognize the site-specific nature of the request without creating a broader policy change;
- Provides more control than a general waiver by allowing Council to impose conditions related to illumination, message timing, placement and operation;
- May reduce precedent risk if the exemption is expressly limited to this property, use and sign design;
- Does not provide the same level of public notice and formal review as a Sign Variance application;
- Would require clear implementation direction to staff and, if necessary, preparation of a site-specific exemption by-law or other formal Council authorization mechanism.

The Church is situated on a County Road, and they will require the County's consent to move forward with the proposed digital sign as well. Staff conducted a preliminary inquiry with the County and were advised that:

“The proposed drawing shows sign behind the sidewalk so it should not cause any maintenance issues. The illumination is allowed under County sign policy as long as the glare/light does not affect passing traffic, this sign can be dimmed at night and is far enough from the road where I do not believe it will be an issue.”

E. Strategic Priorities

1. Communication and Engagement

We will enhance communications and engagement between Town Staff, Town residents and stakeholders

3. Community

We will protect and enhance the community feel and the character of the Town, while ensuring the responsible use of resources and restoration of nature.

4. Quality of Life

We will foster a high quality of life for full-time and part-time residents of all ages and stages, while welcoming visitors.

F. Environmental Impacts

None

G. Financial Impacts

There are no direct financial implications for the Town associated with Council's decision. If a Sign Variance application is required, applicable fees would be borne by the applicant in accordance with the Town's Fees and Charges By-law.

H. In Consultation With

Officer Gurjot Singh, By-law Enforcement

Ryan Gibbons, Director of Community Services

Tim Murawsky, Acting Director of Planning and Development Services and Manager Building Services/Chief Building Official

Jim McCannell, Manager of Roads and Drainage

Grey County Operations Staff

I. Public Engagement

The topic of this Staff Report has not been the subject of a Public Meeting and/or a Public Information Centre as neither a Public Meeting nor a Public Information Centre are required. However, any comments regarding this report should be submitted to Debbie Young, Manager of By-law and Licensing, bylawadmin@thebluemountains.ca.

J. Attached

1. Review of Sign By-law prepared by staff.
2. Deputation of St. George's Anglican Church sign request.
3. By-law 2016-71 (Sign By-law).

Respectfully submitted,

Debbie Young
Manager of Bylaw and Licensing

For more information, please contact:
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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	CS.26.013 St. George's Anglican Church Sign Requests.docx
Attachments:	- Attachment 1 - By-law Review Officer Singh.docx - Attachment 2 - St Georges Anglican Church Deputation.pdf - Attachment 3 - 2016-71 Sign By-law.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Apr 1, 2026

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Ryan Gibbons - Apr 1, 2026 - 5:14 PM