

The Richland Township Zoning Hearing Board met December 30, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. to hear the Appeal or Application of the Applicant, Argus, Inc., for property located on Doe Lane, Richland Township, Cambria County, Pennsylvania, which is zoned L-1 Light Industrial. The Applicant requested a special exception to install a billboard, as permitted under Section 240-104G of the Richland Township Zoning Ordinance. The Applicant was also seeking a variance to place two (2) billboards on the lot from Section 240-114B(6), a 45' setback variance for each billboard from Section 240-104G(1), a size variance of 372 sq ft for each billboard from Section 240-104G, a height variance of 34' for each billboard from Section 240-104G(3), a variance from the static display of three (3) seconds for each billboard from Section 240-114B(6) and a possible setback variance for each billboard from the center line of a limited access highway from Section 240-104G(7). This hearing was conducted in the Richland Township Meeting room, 322 Schoolhouse Rd., Johnstown, PA 15904.

Present:

William Patrick, chairman
Patrick Wess, vice-chairman
Rodney Kniss
PJ McGowan
David Strushensky
Alex Svirsko, Jr., solicitor
Tiffany Shomo, secretary

Mr. Svirsko stated the exhibits. Board Exhibit #1 was the appeal application with attachments. Board Exhibit #2 was the Richland Township Zoning Ordinance, by reference. Board Exhibit #3 was the posting of the municipal building, the property involved, advertising in the Tribune-Democrat and notification of this hearing to adjoining property owners via certified mail.

Court stenographer Ashley Hamilton swore in the following:

1. Joel Bezek of Argus, Inc.

Mr. Bezek stated that he has owned the property for approximately 4–5 years. He initially purchased the land with the intent to construct a small apartment building; however, a gas line running through the property is located too close to the surface to be moved, making development infeasible. SRG Construction reviewed the site and confirmed that building on the property was not viable.

Mr. Bezek explained that he is now proposing to install a billboard on the property, which he believes is an opportune location due to highway traffic volume. He stated that LED billboards represent the future of advertising, noting that traditional print media has declined and that billboards have regained prominence. He cited both commercial purposes and public benefits, including public service announcements and community messages such as birthday greetings.

The proposed billboard would be a monopole structure with two LED displays arranged in a 10-degree V-shape, allowing one face to be visible to northbound traffic and the other to southbound traffic on Route 219. Drivers traveling north toward Ebensburg would only see one face of the sign, not the back, and each side would display different advertisements. Mr. Bezek stated that a back-to-back configuration would reduce visibility.

The proposed height is 40 feet to the bottom of the sign, plus a 14-foot sign face, for a total height of 54 feet. Mr. Bezek explained that the size and height are necessary due to the high speed of traffic on the highway and visibility constraints. He stated that hills, exit signage, and service signs along Route 219 would obscure the billboard if it were placed lower or farther from the right-of-way. He also noted that if the billboard were moved farther into the property, a hill would block visibility for southbound traffic traveling from Somerset toward Ebensburg.

Mr. Bezek acknowledged that some trees would need to be removed to improve visibility and stated that the portion of land near the right-of-way is otherwise largely unusable. He referenced a photo simulation submitted with the application, explaining that the billboard company created images as close to scale as possible and placed the sign near the right-of-way to reflect realistic conditions. He stated that the next step would be a balloon test to confirm sightlines; however, high winds (over 40 mph) prevented this during a prior site visit.

Mr. Bezek stated that the billboard would be illuminated every night, with LEDs that automatically dim as ambient light decreases. He indicated that sign sizes are customizable, but that he relied on the manufacturer's recommendation for this location and did not specifically request a smaller option.

Regarding nearby residential areas, Mr. Bezek stated that the soundwall along Route 219 appears tall enough to block views of the billboard and that existing ambient light in the area would minimize impact.

Mr. Bezek stated that his assistant has had extensive communication with PennDOT and that the proposal complies with PennDOT regulations, including requirements for LED message duration. He noted that PennDOT permits would be required and that Township approval is the first step in that process.

Mr. Bezek stated that he contacted Lamar Advertising, which declined interest in the project. He plans to own the billboard but have it managed by a separate advertising company.

In response to questions, Mr. Bezek stated that the site is not within an airport restricted zone, though he agreed to look further into elevation concerns. He also stated that if the requested variance is denied, the project would likely not move forward, as the proposed size and height are necessary for visibility, particularly for southbound traffic. He indicated that installing a sign serving only one direction of travel may not be financially feasible.

There were no comments from the Township.

The board took a recess from 6:44 PM until 7:20 PM.

Mr. Patrick noted there were no residents present to comment.

Mr. Wess made a motion to deny the special exception permitted under 240-104G as requested by the applicant. The board feels this denial moots the point to make motions on the additional variance requests. Seconded by Mr. Kniss. All in favor.

Mr. Svirsko stated that the decision can be appealed to the Court of Common Pleas within 30 days.

Mr. Kniss made a motion to adjourn at 7:22 PM. Seconded by Mr. McGowan. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Tiffany Shomo, secretary