

## ZONING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

March 15, 2023



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

**Project Address:** 750 Regent Street  
**Project Name:** Atmosphere Madison  
**Application Type:** Approval for Comprehensive Design Review of Signage  
**Legistar File ID #** [76216](#)  
**Prepared By:** Chrissy Thiele, Zoning Inspector  
**Reviewed By:** Matt Tucker, Building Inspection Director

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The applicant is requesting Comprehensive Design Review for signage for a new 12-story 341-unit apartment building, located behind existing office buildings and next to a hotel. The property is zoned Planned Development (PD) with an assigned sign equivalency zoning district of UMX (group 2) and is part of a larger zoning lot, which has driveways connecting to Regent Street, (four lanes and 25 mph) and West Washington Avenue (four lanes and 25 mph). The zoning lot also abuts East Campus Mall, a drive entrance and pedestrian walkway, and a multi-use path to the north. This zoning lot has a few existing CDRs which UDC approved (780-700 Regent Street and 660 West Washington Avenue for the ground and wall signage and the Hilton Gardens hotel). However, the ownership of the apartment building is different from the noted existing CDR's.

Pursuant to Section 31.043(4)(b), MGO, the UDC shall apply the following criteria upon review of an application for a Comprehensive Sign Plan:

1. *The Sign Plan shall create visual harmony between the signs, building(s), and building site through unique and exceptional use of materials, design, color, any lighting, and other design elements; and shall result in signs of appropriate scale and character to the uses and building(s) on the zoning lot as well as adjacent buildings, structures and uses.*
2. *Each element of the Sign Plan shall be found to be necessary due to unique or unusual design aspects in the architecture or limitations in the building site or surrounding environment; except that when a request for an Additional Sign Code Approval under Sec. 31.043(3) is included in the Comprehensive Design Review, the sign(s) eligible for approval under Sec. 31.043(3) shall meet the applicable criteria of Sec. 31.043(3), except that sign approvals that come to Comprehensive Design Review from MXC and EC districts pursuant to 31.13(3) and (7) need not meet the criteria of this paragraph.*
3. *The Sign Plan shall not violate any of the stated purposes described in Sec. 31.02(1) and 33.24(2).*
4. *All signs must meet minimum construction requirements under Sec. 31.04(5).*
5. *The Sign Plan shall not approve Advertising beyond the restrictions in Sec. 31.11 or Off-Premise Directional Signs beyond the restrictions in Sec. 31.115.*
6. *The Sign Plan shall not be approved if any element of the plan:*
  - a. *presents a hazard to vehicular or pedestrian traffic on public or private property,*
  - b. *obstructs views at points of ingress and egress of adjoining properties,*
  - c. *obstructs or impedes the visibility of existing lawful signs on adjacent property, or*
  - d. *negatively impacts the visual quality of public or private open space.*
7. *The Sign Plan may only encompass signs on private property of the zoning lot or building site in question, and shall not approve any signs in the right of way or on public property.*

Projecting Signs Permitted per Sign Ordinance: Occupants may display one (1) projecting sign per facade facing a street. This zoning lot is allowed a projecting sign 20 sq. ft. per side based on the number of traffic lanes. In addition, if a ground and projecting signs are displayed on the same a zoning lot, only one (1) of such signs, where permitted may exceed twelve (12) square feet in net area.

Proposed Signage: The applicant is proposing two projecting signs on facades that do not face a street. One sign would face the multi-use path and have a net area of 26.83 sq. ft. per side (13' 5" x 2'). The second sign would face the drive aisle to the west of the apartment building and have a net area of 80 sq. ft. per side (24' x 3' 4"). The projecting signs would consist of individual trimless channel letters on an aluminum sign cabinet.

Staff Comments: The sign ordinance allows for a projecting sign on the face of a building that faces a street; however, since this building is located at the back of the zoning lot, none of the elevations qualify. The applicant is requesting projecting signage on the west and north elevations in order to provide identification for people on the multi-use path and vehicles entering the zoning lot from the driveway entrance on Regent Street. The applicant is requesting the sign on the west elevation to be 60 sq. ft. larger than permitted by code, while the sign on the north elevation would be 6.83 sq. ft. larger than permitted by the code. The argument provided for the size increase is to help identify the building as well as be more in scale with the apartment building's overall height. The apartment is set back about 190' from the street and does have limited visibility due to the office buildings located in front, but this sign is barely visible from the street. The only time a vehicle might see the sign is from eastbound traffic on Regent, in a slight viewable window, but this would be after the driver has already made the commitment to turn left to enter the lot. The practical function of this sign is to serve vehicles already entered into the site and making their way to the building. Staff believes 80 sq. ft. would be an excessively large sign for its purpose, as well as excessively large for a residential building, and would not be in scale with the other signage found on the zoning lot or greater downtown area. The proposed sign would also extend beyond the fourth floor, which is not in keeping with the historical requirements of the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines and the sign code. In addition, while not part of this application, the apartment building does plan on working with the neighboring office-building owners to update the ground sign east of the drive entrance, so that the apartment would have identification as viewed from the street. This sign will serve as the most effective identification for the apartment building viewable by traffic from Regent Street.

A residential apartment building does not generate a large number of unique visitors coming to the site on a daily basis, as a hotel or office use would. The apartments will have turnover, but this will be limited to certain times of the year and new residents and guests will quickly learn the route to the apartment building. Deliveries and emergency service providers also will know where this building is. NOTE: the adjacent hotel next to the apartment building requested overly large projecting signs in their CDR application, which UDC approved with the condition that the signs not exceed 32 sq. ft. If the apartment projecting signs were limited to 32 sq. ft. in net area, this would be more appropriate and uniform in scale with the other building signage found in the zoning lot.

The signs are of high design, consisting of individual trimless channel letters, which will allow the internal lights to illuminate the sides as well as the front. The design and materials are also used for the wall signs proposed for the building, creating a uniform look. **Recommendation: Staff has no objection to the CDR request and recommends the UDC find the standards for CDR review have been met, with the condition that the projecting signs do not exceed 32 sq. ft. This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.**

Wall Signs Permitted per Sign Ordinance: Summarizing Section 31.07, Wall signs may be attached flat to or affixed parallel with a distance of not more than 15 inches from the wall. No sign affixed flat against a building wall shall extend beyond any edge of such wall. There shall be one signable area for each façade facing a street or parking lot 33 feet in width or greater. For buildings with more than one tenant, each tenant is allowed a signable area as reasonably close to its tenant space as possible. Standard net area allows for 30% of the signable area. In no case shall the sign exceed 120 sq. ft. in net area.

Proposed Signage: The applicant is proposing three wall signs, all of which appear to be code-compliant in size; however, the application did not include boxing and dimensions of net area for staff to confirm this. One sign is located on the south elevation, which faces a parking lot shared on the zoning lot, and is noted to have a net area of 16.78 sq. ft. Another sign is placed on the west elevation above one of the main entrances to the apartment building. This elevation is not a qualifying elevation, as it faces a drive aisle next to the hotel, not an off-street parking area. The application states the sign will have a net area of 53.68 sq. ft. The last sign is placed on the north elevation, above the other main entrance to the apartment building. This elevation also does not qualify for signage, as it faces a bike path not a public street, and is noted to have a net area of 9.22 sq. ft. The wall signs would be made of individual trimless channel letters mounted on the perforated metal screening for the garages. The owner has confirmed that concrete walls will be installed behind the screen, which will prevent interior lights from illuminating the ventilation screening at night, and create a signable area.

Staff Comments: The wall sign facing the south elevation qualifies for wall signage as it faces a parking lot, and appears to be of a compliant size. The proposed signs on the west and north elevations need approval through CDR as they do not face a street or parking lot. Both signs appear to be of a compliant size and would be located above the main entrances to the apartment building, which are next to the drive aisle and the bike path. As stated earlier, the signs are of high design, consisting of trimless letters used on the projecting signs, and will create a uniform look for the apartment building. **Recommendation: Staff has no objection to the CDR request and recommends the UDC find the standards for CDR review have been met. This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.**

Other signage shown in the application:

- The monument styled ground sign near the driveway is under different ownership than the apartment building and shown for context purposes only. A separate application to amend that existing CDR will need to be applied for approval of the ground sign.

Required Plan Revisions:

- The applicant shall provide dimensions of signable areas for walls signs in the final CDR submittal.
- The applicant shall show dimensions of sign net area and calculations in the final CDR submittal.