

ZONING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

August 13, 2025



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 4201 Buckeye Road

Project Name: Nuestro Mundo at Frank Allis Elementary School

Application Type: Comprehensive Design Review for Signage

Legistar File ID # [89408](#)

Prepared By: Chrissy Thiele, Zoning Inspector, Jessica Vaughn, Urban Design Commission Secretary

The applicant is requesting approval of a Comprehensive Design Review for Signage (CDR) for a new charter school occupying a former elementary school. The building was originally known as Frank Allis Elementary School, which closed in June 2023 when the school relocated to a newly built school on the south side. Nuestro Mundo has been leasing a building in Monona since 2012 but relocated to the project site in September 2023. This site is in the Suburban Residential – Consistent 1 (SR-C1) zoning district, which is a Group 1 district, and abuts Buckeye Drive (2 lanes, 25 mph) and Jerome Street (2 lanes, 25 mph). As part of the CDR request, the applicant is requesting:

- One wall sign, which is higher than 12 feet above grade, and
- One ground sign, which is larger than what the code allows.

Comprehensive Design Review - Approval Criteria

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.*

Permitted per Sign Ordinance: Sec. 31.14(3)(e) allows for a church, hospital, school, and residential building complex in a SR-C1 district one wall sign and one ground sign per street frontage to be displayed identifying the entity, with a maximum of two ground signs and two wall signs per zoning lot. Signs, whether displayed on a wall or the ground, shall not exceed 12 sq. ft. in net area, nor be closer than ten feet to any lot line, except such signs may be increased in net area by one square foot for each additional foot that the sign is set back more than 12 feet from the street lot line. No sign under this section shall exceed 32 sq. ft. in net area. No sign shall project higher than one story, or be 12 feet above the curb level, whichever is lower.

Proposed Signage: The applicant is proposing an internally illuminated monument style ground sign, with a total net area of 63.75 sq. ft., that is located roughly 36 feet way from the property line. The applicant is also requesting to install a non-illuminated wall sign above the main entrance of the school, 20 feet above curb level, with a total net area of 15.5 sq. ft.

Staff Comments: While this building, originally constructed in 1916, is not a designated historic place, it does add historic value to Madison's east side as one of the first school sites. The building we see today has undergone multiple additions through the years, most of which occurred between 1948 to 1960. The original Frank Allis School sign above the main entrance doors is part of the building façade and cannot be removed without damaging the façade. Instead of trying to cover the existing sign, and in an effort to minimize conflicts with architectural details, the applicant is proposing to place a new sign in a location that exceeds the mounting height limitation (12 feet above grade) at 20 feet above grade. Allowing the historic sign to continue to be displayed will reinforce the new school name while also preserving the history of the site. The proposed sign is simple in design, with flat cut letters and logo attached to a pan sign, which will give dimensional interest like the existing Frank Allis sign. Staff believe that the proposed location higher on the building, in a location that does not cross architectural details, is well-integrated into the building design, and the design reflecting dimensional lettering are consistent with the CDR criteria.

As for the ground sign, the proposed location is closer to the building's main entrance but will maintain a similar distance away from the street. While the proposed sign is increasing in net area, it will be slightly lower in overall height and length, so it will not appear imposing or out of place in comparison to what the school has now. Staff believe that given the location of the sign over 30 feet from the street and in proximity to the front, main entry doors, the additional square footage is needed for visibility. In addition, the ground sign will also display both names Nuestro Mundo and Frank Allis, and the design of the sign is the similar to other MMSD signage that has been approved by UDC in the past, maintaining consistency in school identification across the city. For these reasons, staff believe the proposed ground sign is consistent with the CDR criteria.

Recommendation: Staff have no objection to the requested wall sign or ground sign and recommend the UDC find the CDR criteria have been met. This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.