

ZONING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

June 26, 2024



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 339 West Gorham Street
Project Name: The Hub
Application Type: Approval for Comprehensive Design Review of Signage
Legistar File ID # [83457](#)
Prepared By: Chrissy Thiele, Zoning Inspector

The applicant is requesting a Comprehensive Design Review for signage for a new mixed-use building, which has 386 residential units and over 23,000 sq. ft. of commercial space. This development is in a Planned Development (PD) district, which allows for signage as permitted in the Urban Mixed-Use (UMX) district. The property abuts West Gorham Street (2 lanes, 25 mph), State Street (2 lanes, 25 mph), North Broom Street (2 lanes, 25 mph), and West Johnson Street (3 lanes, 25 mph). In addition to having a CDR, the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines apply.

Comprehensive Design Review and 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.*

Canopy Signs Permitted per Sign Ordinance: Summarizing Section 31.071, the signable area for a canopy fascia sign shall not project beyond the limits of the canopy in any direction and shall be no wider than the width of the canopy. Any canopy fascia sign shall be in-lieu of an above-canopy or below-canopy signage.

Above-canopy signs can be installed instead of canopy fascia signs, but are restricted to the business name and logo, be constructed of freestanding characters which shall have a max height of 2' and with the logo being a max size of 4 sq. ft. These signs also cannot be wider than the width of the canopy or the corresponding façade, whichever is narrower. Above-canopy signage may not project further from the building than the canopy to which it is attached, and a sign that crosses architectural detail may not be displayed closer than three feet from the nearest face of the building.

Proposed Signage: The applicant is proposing that each commercial tenant has the ability to have an above-canopy sign, and have the option to extend signage, up to 5" on the canopy fascia, except for one of the tenant spaces on West Johnson Road that would not have a canopy. This proposal is a mix between an above-canopy and a canopy fascia sign, with most the sign copy and logo being located above the canopy, with a portion of the logo extending onto the canopy fascia. This causes a portion of the above-canopy sign to project further from the building than the canopy to which it is attached.

Staff Comments: The applicant is proposing tenants be limited to above-canopy signage in-lieu of wall signage on the building, but with the option to allow logos and copy to extend onto the canopy fascia as well up to 5". This style of signage can be found at a few other sites, which were also approved through CDR. The proposal will allow for flexibility and creativity for tenants while still providing a uniform look and high-quality signs, as above-canopy signs are required to have individual channel letters and a logo. **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.**

Projecting Signs Permitted per Sign Ordinance: This zoning lot is allowed one projecting sign on every elevation facing a street with a maximum net area of 20 sq. ft. per side, based on the number of traffic lanes. Also, 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 a blade sign for each commercial tenant on the first floor, whereas the code would only permit one projecting sign per street-facing elevation. Each tenant would be permitted a blade sign that does not exceed 14 sq. ft. per side, have an under clearance of 11' 6", and the height cannot go beyond the second-floor ceiling deck.

Staff Comments: Downtown and in particular the State Street and campus areas is notable for their heavy pedestrian traffic, as well as pedestrian scale. As the Hub building is on a single parcel, it is only permitted one projecting sign per elevation facing a street. That being said, the building occupies a good portion of West Johnson block and the entire block on West Gorham, and is designed with the appearance of being a collection of buildings versus one building. Permitting each tenant space a projecting sign will be consistent with the surrounding commercial properties in and around the area, especially those within the State Street corridor, as well as provide more effective business identification to visitors.

With that, staff notes two potential design considerations related to the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines, including:

- (1) Those guidelines that speak to too many signs creating sign clutter on a building, block or street, especially as it relates to the proximity of the proposed “Stuffed Olive” and “Double Tap” blade signs to each other, potentially impacting their visibility and effectiveness, and
- (2) Those guidelines that speak to integration with architectural compatibility and integration, as well as CDR criteria No. 1 which speaks to creating visual harmony between signs as it relates to the design of the “Roxxy” blade sign being different from the other proposed blade signs both in orientation and the extent of the signs’ projection from the wall (“Roxxy” is 4 feet where all others proposed are 2 feet). Staff notes that the main building identification sign has a projection of just over 4 feet. In addition, as shown in the graphic for this sign, there are significant void areas, which contribute to the signs overall bulky appearance and weight. One consideration would be to eliminate the void portions of the sign and mount the logo/copy on a raceway, similar to other “Roxxy” locations in the Midwest as shown below Iowa City, IA:



Recommendation: As noted above, staff has concerns related to whether the proposed projecting signs for the “Stuffed Olive” and “Double Tap” are consistent with the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines that speak to sign clutter given their close proximity to each other. In addition, staff has concerns related to the “Roxxy” projecting sign as it relates to the sign’s consistency with CDR Criteria No. 1 (creating visual harmony), as well as the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines (integration and compatibility with architectural scheme). If the UDC can find that both the CDR approval criteria and the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines have been met, staff requests the UDC make specific findings related to the two considerations noted above as part of the Commission’s action.

This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.

Requirements:

- It should be noted in the final CDR “Future signage submittals not specifically addressed by this document shall comply with the standards of Chapter 31.”
- The setback of the building from the property line for the “Roxxy” projecting sign will need to be determined for the final CDR packet. This sign shall not exceed that maximum projection into the right-of-way (2 feet).