

ZONING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

June 12, 2024



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 8000-8040 Excelsior Drive
Project Name: Old Sauk Trails Park
Application Type: Approval for Comprehensive Design Review of Signage
Legistar File ID # [83454](#)
Prepared By: Chrissy Thiele, Zoning Inspector

The applicant is requesting a Comprehensive Design Review for signage for five existing office buildings that are part of a larger Planned Multi-use site that shares parking lot access with a hotel to the north. Four of the five properties in this application are zoned Suburban Employment Campus (SEC), and one other property is zoned Planned Development (PD). The five subject properties abut Excelsior Drive (2 lanes, 35 mph), Old Sauk Road (4 lanes, 35 mph), and West Beltline Highway (4 lanes, 55 mph). The Planned Multi-use site, including the hotel, currently has nine ground signs, of which the applicant is requesting to replace three of them.

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.*

Ground Signs Permitted by Sign Ordinance: This planned multi-use site is allowed up to two ground signs with a combined net area of 160 sq. ft., and a maximum height of 12' for monument style signs, based off the prevailing speeds and number of traffic lanes. The ordinance also allows for lots with frontage 500' or more, as well as a vehicle entrance on that frontage, to have an additional monument-style ground sign, no larger than eight feet in height, with 32 sq. ft. per side, located at each vehicle entrance.

Proposed Ground Signage: The applicant is proposing to replace three existing ground signs with internally illuminated single-sided monument styled ground sign on a zoning lot that already has more than two ground signs. Each sign will have an overall height of 6' 6" and a net area of 11 sq. ft.

Staff Comments: As stated earlier, this zoning lot currently has a total of nine approved ground signs, with one of them under the ownership of the hotel which is under different ownership and not controlled by this application. The offices in the zoning lot were not always connected to the hotel lot. Before the connection was created, each parcel was permitted to have two ground signs as they didn't meet the sign ordinance regulations of a single zoning lot. Only when the office lots were fully connected in 2008 with the hotel lot to the north did the lots meet those regulations, turning the zoning lot non-conforming with the amount of ground signs. The CDR is proposing to replace three existing ground signs that are dilapidated and cannot be restored through maintenance. The new signs are designed to be very similar to the signs being replaced in terms of height, design, and location. The only real difference is that the addresses would light up.

The proposed height and net area of sign would comply with the sign ordinance if they were located at the driveway entrance; however, as the five office buildings share driveway entrances and the parking stalls, it makes more sense for the signs to be located by the building entrances to help identify the businesses inside. The signs are uniform in design and the neutral color goes well with the other neutral colors used on the office buildings and other ground signs found on the lot. **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.**