

ZONING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

April 15, 2026



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 4710 East Towne Boulevard

Project Name: Applebee's/IHOP

Application Type: Comprehensive Design Review of Signage

Legistar File ID # [92295](#)

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The applicant is requesting Comprehensive Design Review for Signage (CDR) for an existing Applebee's restaurant that is being modified, both the interior and exterior of the building, to also include an IHOP restaurant. This property is in the Commercial Center (CC) district and abuts East Washington Avenue (6 lanes, 35 mph) and East Towne Boulevard (4 lanes, 25 mph).

As part of the CDR request, the applicant is requesting:

- One ground sign, which complies with the Sign Code,
- Four signs total on the north elevation, where the Sign Code only permits one sign,
- Five signs total on the east elevation, where the Sign Code only permits one sign, and
- Four signs total on the south elevation, where the Sign Code only permits one sign.

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.*

Comprehensive Design Review - Proposed Signage

Ground Signage

Ground Signs Permitted per Sign Ordinance: This zoning lot is allowed up to two ground signs with a combined net area of 144 sq. ft. A maximum height of 11' is permitted for monument style signs and 18' for pole style signs, based off the prevailing speeds and number of traffic lanes.

Proposed Signage: The applicant is requesting one double-sided pole-style ground sign, 15.21' tall with a total net area of 136 sq. ft. The cabinets consist of aluminum faces with internally illuminated individual channel letters.

Staff Comments: The proposed signage complies with the Sign Code in size and height and does not need any exceptions on its own. Staff have no objection to the ground sign that is part of this CDR request, however it was not addressed in the letter of intent as to how it meets the CDR criteria. Staff acknowledge the sign is of high design, with the sign face consisting of individual channel letters (CDR Criteria No. 1); however, the applicant did not address the necessity for the sign, and as the applicant is also requesting numerous signs on the building, staff question whether the ground sign is necessary for business identification purposes (CDR Criteria No. 2).

Building Signage – Sign Code Summary

Wall Signs Permitted per Sign Ordinance: Summarizing Section 31.07, MGO there shall be **one signable area for each façade facing a street or parking lot 33 feet in width or greater**. For a tenant space with less than twenty-five thousand (25,000) square feet in floor area, the maximum net area of wall signs shall be forty percent (40%) of the signable area, or two feet per lineal foot of tenant frontage, not to exceed 100% of the signable area. In no case shall a wall sign exceed eighty (80) square feet in net area.

Canopy Signs Permitted per Sign Ordinance: Summarizing Section 31.071, MGO a canopy sign may be displayed on the fascia of a canopy **in lieu** of a wall sign. Such sign shall be considered a wall sign, with the fascia of the attached canopy acting as the signable area, except that 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 sign under this section.

Awning Signs Permitted per Sign Ordinance: Summarizing Section 31.06, MGO an awning may be designated as a signable area **in lieu** of a signable area on the building façade. The maximum net area of the sign displayed on the awning shall be determined by measuring the available signable area for a wall sign on the building façade and calculating the maximum net area, as you would for a wall sign.

Building Signage – North Facade

Proposed Signage: The applicant is requesting three wall signs and one canopy sign, for a total of four signs on the north elevation. The IHOP wall sign is internally illuminated, consisting of individual channel letters, and has a total net area of 22.17 sq. ft., which occupies less than 40% of the signable area. The tagline wall sign is also internally

illuminated, consisting of individual channel letters, and has a total net area of 25.69 sq. ft., which occupies less than 40% of the signable area. The take-out wall signs are two internally illuminated box signs with acrylic faces, having a total net area of 8.67 sq. ft., which occupies less than 40% of the signable area. The canopy fascia sign is a box sign consisting of a routed aluminum face with push-thru acrylic letters and has a total net area of 15.22 sq. ft, which occupies 100% of the signable area.

Building Signage - East Facade

Proposed Signage: The applicant is requesting one wall sign, three awning signs, and one canopy sign, for a total of five signs on the east elevation. The wall sign is internally illuminated, consisting of individual channel letters, and has a total net area of 23.11 sq. ft., which occupies less than 40% of the signable area. The canopy fascia sign is a box sign consisting of a routed aluminum face with push-thru acrylic letters and has a total net area of 16.33 sq. ft, which occupies 100% of the signable area. The three awning signs each have a net area of 27.12 sq. ft.

Building Signage – South Facade

Proposed Signage: The applicant is requesting one wall sign and three awning signs for a total of four signs on the south elevation. The wall sign is internally illuminated, consisting of individual channel letters, and has a total net area of 41.51 sq. ft., which occupies less than 40% of the signable area. The three awning signs each have a net area of 27.12 sq. ft.

Building Signage – West Façade

There is no proposed signage on the west elevation.

Building Signage - Staff Comments

The applicant is requesting four signs on the north and south façades, and five signs on the east façade, and in a variety of sign types. The number of signs on each elevation and variation in sign types can only be approved through a CDR. While each sign, taken by itself, complies with Sign Code for size and location (on a qualifying elevation), the Sign Code only permits one wall sign per elevation facing a street or parking lot at least 33’ wide, or in lieu of a wall sign, an awning sign, or canopy sign. The intent of these limitations is to minimize the appearance of sign clutter.

While the applicant indicates in their application letter that the proposed signs and use of consistent brand colors are necessary for identification. The applicant notes that the purposed package is intended to create a lasting and memorable impression on all guests and is necessary as the concept of housing both brands in the same building is new and guests must be made aware of the dual brand update. They go on to state “[e]ach one of the smaller band descriptive signs carries a nostalgic message...that identifies the brands uniquely”. However, there are alternatives that could result in fewer signs, including but not limited to using window graphics, or using one sign instead of two to identify the carryout door, for example.

Staff **do not** believe the applicant has adequately addressed CDR Criteria No. 1, which speaks to creating visual harmony between the signs, the use of unique and exceptional use of materials, design, color, and result in signs of appropriate scale and character of their context, especially given the variation in sign types across each elevation and the variation in sign design.

In addition, staff **do not** believe the applicant has adequately addressed CDR Criteria No. 2, which speaks to necessity based on a unique design aspect in the architecture or limitations in the building site or surrounding environment that would necessitate additional signage on any of the building elevations, especially with the ground sign.

The proposed package has a variety of sign types proposed (box signs, individual channel letters), different fonts, and different colors for the building signage, and the number of proposed signs on the elevation goes beyond providing identification for each restaurant in the building.

Staff Recommendation: The purpose of the CDR process is to allow for exceptions to the city's Sign Code for signage that is of **both** an enhanced design aesthetic and necessary, given a unique or unusual design circumstances in a building design or location. As noted above, the trigger for this CDR application is the multiple signs proposed for the east, north, and south elevations. However, as part of a CDR application, the Urban Design Commission's purview is not just limited to the building signage, it also extends to the proposed ground sign on site, and as part of their review, the UDC shall evaluate all the proposed signage for consistency with the CDR criteria.

As noted above in the staff comments, while the ground sign the Sign Code compliant, and the proposed building signage are code compliant in size and location, staff has objection to the proposed amount of signage on each elevation. Staff **do not** believe that the proposed signs are consistent with the CDR criteria for review as they relate to:

- CDR Criteria No. 1, based on the overall design of the proposed signage ranging from individual channel letters, cabinet signs, and awning signs, as well as different font styles and colors, and
- CDR Criteria No. 2, as the necessity for having a ground sign and multiple types of building signage on each elevation, was not fully demonstrated.

For these reasons, staff recommend that the UDC find the criteria for CDR review have not been met and either refer the request for more information or deny the request for permitting more building signage than would be otherwise allowed. This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.