

ZONING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

May 26, 2021



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 640 West Washington Avenue
Project Name: Madison Train Depot
Application Type: Approval for Comprehensive Design Review of Signage
Legistar File ID # [65456](#)
Prepared By: Chrissy Thiele, Zoning Inspector
Reviewed By: Matt Tucker, Zoning Administrator

The applicant is requesting Comprehensive Design Review of signage for an existing commercial building with various retail and restaurants located in the historic station and train cars. This property is zoned UMX, and abuts West Washington Avenue (4 lanes, 25 mph) to the east and a multi-use path to the south. The applicant received their Certificate of Appropriateness from the Landmarks Commission May 3, 2021.

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.*

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. 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 a “place” sign on the façade facing West Washington Ave. This sign would have a total net area of 87.78 sq. ft. and cover about 82% of the signable area. There is also an existing historic sign for the train station also facing West Washington Avenue, on a second story elevation behind the shown storefront.

The applicant is also requesting for two vinyl adhesive wall signs on the westernmost train car, each with a total net area of 7 sq. ft. One sign would face the parking lot, however the other sign would face the multi-use path located south of the property.

Staff Comments: The layout of the commercial spaces at this site is unusual in that most of the entrances to businesses are from the parking lot and all but one do not have frontage on West Washington, which prevents these tenants from having wall signs identifying their space. That is why the applicant is proposing a “place” sign at the front of the building to help identify the overall site. The elevation facing West Washington has limited signable areas, and only one signable area close to the street. With a signable area of 107.33 sq. ft., the code would permit a sign with a net area of 32.2 sq. ft. which is much smaller than the current sign. That sign (which was for the tenant space and therefore allotted a sign two feet per lineal foot of tenant frontage) was approved at 80 sq. ft. in net area, so the proposed sign would be 7.78 sq. ft. larger. The sign will be a hand painted ACM panel and will not be illuminated.

The applicant is also requesting for signage on the train to identify tenant locations inside the cars. The signs appear to be of compliant size, however the signable area has not been provided. One side of the train will face the parking lot and therefore not need special approval. However, the applicant is proposing a second sign facing the rail road and multi-use path, which is not considered a qualifying signable area. While the zoning lot is not accessible from the multi-use path, it functions like a right-of-way with the pedestrian and bicycle traffic. The signs will be made of vinyl decal, which will be directly applied to the train car. The sign design and material is subtle and appears appropriate on the train car.

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.

Ground Signs Permitted by Sign Ordinance: This zoning lot is allowed up to two ground signs with a combined net area of 64 sq. ft., with a maximum net area of 32 sq. ft. per side, and a maximum height of 8’ for monument style signs, based off of the prevailing speeds and number of traffic lanes. 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 Ground Signage: The applicant is proposing to remove their existing ground sign located further back on the property and not easily visible from the street with multi-tenant panels mounted to the ornamental fencing located in front of the parking lot. The overall net area would be 34.37 sq. ft., which is 2.37 sq. ft. larger than what the code would allow, and the fencing where the signs are to be placed is just over 7’ tall. The tenant panels would be made of PVC, and would match the coloring of the main wall sign of the building.

Staff Comments: The previously approved ground sign for the site was not very visible to vehicular traffic and partially blocked by the ornamental fencing boarding the sidewalk. The applicant is proposing to remove the sign and instead install tenant panels on the ornamental fence near the driveway entrance. Each tenant panel would be individually mounted to the fence and have a net area of 3.82 sq. ft., making the total net area 34.37 sq. ft. This is slightly larger than what the code permits, however the proposed sign appears to fit the scale and size of the building and site. The signs would have the same colors as the proposed main wall sign and also does not appear to be illuminated, and are made of hand painted PVC panels, which is a lightweight and durable material. **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 a projecting sign 32 sq. ft. per side based on the number of traffic lanes. However, 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 projecting sign above the entrance to The Harvey House that would have a net area of 20.58 sq. ft. per side. The sign projects off the east wall, into a courtyard area between the restaurant and the main depot building occupied by a bicycle shop. Submitted graphics show a small portion of the sign may be incidentally viewable through a small view corridor from West Washington.

Staff Comments: The applicant is requesting a projecting sign to direct customers to the entrance of The Harvey House restaurant, 8.58 sq. ft. larger than the maximum 12 sq. ft. permitted by code. The sign ordinance requires projecting signs to project from a wall that faces a street, so the sign would hang on the corner off the restaurant wall facing West Washington Avenue (east) instead of directly above the entrance, which faces the parking lot (north).

The sign appears to be of high quality design and material, and would have the same colors as the main wall sign and ground sign, however staff believes the applicant has not provided justification for the sign to be larger than 12 sq. ft. per side. The applicant is already requesting a “place” sign to help identify the site and a multi-tenant ground sign next to the driveway entrance. Having a projecting sign larger than what the code permits does not appear necessary in this case, given the uncertainty relative to how viewable it will be from West Washington Avenue and that the sign is truly intended to identify the entrance form the parking lot. In addition, the proposed orientation of the sign (to the east) will not be functionally viewable to customers traveling down the parking lot towards the restaurant. Staff believes a code compliant sign of 12 sq. ft. per side would be sufficient, and also recommends a CDR exception for the projecting signs to project from the north wall of the restaurant, from the same general location above the restaurant entrance. This would provide visibility to vehicles driving through the parking lot toward the restaurant, clearly identifying the entrance.

Staff recommends UDC find the CDR standards are not met and refer the request for the projecting sign, or deny the request. However, staff would recommend a 12 sq. ft. sign in a similar location on the building, but projecting off the north wall. This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.

Notes:

- 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.”

- Harvey House projecting sign needs to show the clearance from grade on the artwork.
- Provide signable area for train signs.
- Correct dimensions for ground sign net area in letter of intent.
- Add photo of existing historic sign for train station.