



## ZONING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

August 16, 2023

PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

**Project Address:** 702 Pflaum Road  
**Project Name:** La Follette High School Campus  
**Application Type:** Approval of a Major Alteration to an Approved Comprehensive Design Review  
**Legistar File ID #** [77012](#)  
**Prepared By:** Chrissy Thiele, Zoning Inspector

The applicant is requesting an amendment to a previously approved Comprehensive Design Review (CDR). The Urban Design Commission approved the original Comprehensive Design Plan on September 18, 2002, for the Lussier Stadium Ground sign, as a wayfinding sign and approved an amendment January 15, 2020, for the La Follette High School wall signs facing the parking lot and the new ground sign in front of the school. The subject property is located in the Campus Institutional (CI) District and the high school shares the lot with Sennett Middle School and Lussier Athletic Stadium. This lot has four existing ground signs with primary street frontage being Pflaum Road (4 lanes, 40 mph), and has two small walkway access paths from Spaanem Ave (2 lanes, 25 mph).

### CDR 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.*

Signs Permitted for Schools by Sign Ordinance: Summarizing 31.14(1)(e), **one wall and one ground sign per street frontage may 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 square feet in net area. No sign shall project higher than one story, or 12 feet above the curb level, whichever is lower.

Proposed Signage: The applicant is proposing to replace two existing wall signs that face the high school parking lot (east) with two above canopy signs. Both signs would have an overall height of 17", with the La Follette Fine Arts sign having a total net area of 21.89 sq. ft. and the La Follette Athletics sign having a total net area of 21.78 sq. ft. The signs will be non-illuminated individual anodized aluminum letters.

The applicant is also proposing to install a wall sign on the front façade of the building, mounted on an architectural feature near the building entrance. The net area noted in the application for this sign is incorrect (the boxes do not touch), however based on the dimensions provided, the sign would have a total net area of 142.42 sq. ft. The signs will be non-illuminated individual anodized aluminum letters.

Staff Comments: The previous CDR permitted two wall signs facing the parking lot instead of the street, both over 32 sq. ft. in net area; however, recent additions to the high school have changed the façade and entrances where these signs were located. The school would now like to have these two signs approved as above canopy signs, as the canopies constructed as part of the addition would block visibility of any wall sign installed above the entrances. Above canopy signs are not a permitted sign type for Group 1 properties, however the proposed size and height would otherwise comply with the sign code. Having signs mounted above the canopy will provide better visibility to visitors in the parking lot and the similar size, height, and material create a cohesive look.

The applicant is also proposing a wall sign at the front of the building, where there currently is not a sign, but is eligible as it faces a street. The proposed sign would be over four times larger than what the sign code permits and is shown to be partially above the roofline, mounted on an architectural feature by the front entrance. The letter of intent indicates the architectural feature was designed to display a large sign in order to evoke concepts of school pride and belonging, and a sign larger than permitted by code is needed in order to clearly identify the front entrance, which is shown to be about 120' away from the property line.

While staff agrees that a 32 sq. ft. sign is probably too small and not very legible where placed, the proposed size appears out of scale with the building and the surrounding residential uses. Signs at schools, especially those in residential areas, are designed with a sensitivity to context and place, given the potential impact of the signage on the surrounding property. Further, signs in the Group 1 district are not meant to be located high up on buildings or above the roof, nor as large as what would typically be found at a commercial or employment establishment. As proposed, the wall sign on the street facing façade is larger than the largest permissible sign at any establishment in the City. The school is surrounded by residential properties and parks, and already has two ground signs (both of which are larger in size, as well as being installed closer to the property line than permitted by code). For these reasons, staff believes that justification for the proposed wall sign and its size, in conjunction with the existing ground signage, appears to be inconsistent with CDR criteria no. 2 which speaks to necessity due to site or architectural constraints limiting signage. When considered together with the existing ground signage, the proposed wall sign appears to be unnecessary in meeting the identification needs of the school, and where a smaller, more code compliant sign could be just as functional and contextually more appropriate.

At staff's request, the applicant has provided both an example of a code compliant wall sign and an example of an above canopy sign above the doors to show alternate options. With regard to the wall sign, while staff believes

that a smaller wall sign would be more contextually appropriate, the preference is for an above canopy sign in order to maintain consistency across the sign plan and which would also be appropriate contextually. The above canopy sign would have a letter height of two feet and total net area of 50 sq. ft., and while this type of sign is also not permitted in the Group 1 districts, the sign is code compliant in the Group 2 and Group 3 districts. Staff believes the above canopy sign shown clearly identifies the front entrance, while the smaller size fits better with the use and surrounding neighborhood. The sign would also maintain the cohesive look with the other building signage proposed for the CDR.

**Recommendation: Staff has no objection to the CDR request for the two above canopy signs and recommends the UDC find the standards for CDR review have been met. However, Staff does not believe the applicant has satisfied the criteria for CDR approval for the large wall sign on the front façade and recommends the UDC find the criteria for CDR review have not been met and either refer the request for more information or approve the shown above canopy sign. This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.**

Staff Conditions/Required Plan Revisions:

- The applicant shall revise the sign graphics to correct the boxing on the wall sign on the front facade.
- The applicant shall update the CDR package to show an above canopy sign on the street facing elevation above the main entrance.
- The applicant is advised that the addition of horizontal metal bars to the architectural feature on the street facing elevation will require additional review/approval.