

ZONING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

July 29, 2020



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 4402 East Washington Avenue
Project Name: DoubleTree Hotel
Application Type: Comprehensive Design Review of Signage
Legistar File ID # [60925](#)
Prepared By: Chrissy Thiele, Zoning Inspector
Reviewed By: Matt Tucker, Zoning Administrator

The applicant is requesting Comprehensive Design Review of signage for an existing Hotel (built in 1987) under new ownership. The hotels is currently under renovation, and will provide hotel, convention center and accessory/non-accessory restaurant services to its guests. The façade changes were approved by UDC on May 27, 2020. This zoning lot is located in a Commercial Corridor – Transitional (CC-T) district, and abuts East Washington Avenue (8 lanes, 40 mph), Independence Lane (2 lanes, 25 mph), and Continental Lane (2 lanes, 25 mph).

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.*

Section 33.24(12)(d)3., Signage Criteria for Urban Design District No. 3, indicates the Urban Design Commission shall consider in each case those of the following guidelines and requirements as may be appropriate to signage:

Signs. The mixed land use patterns that characterize substantial portions of the district contribute to a proliferation of business and product identification signs.

a. Requirements.

- i. Signs in the District shall conform to all provisions of [Chapter 31](#) of the Madison General Ordinances.
- ii. Signs shall be integrated with the architecture of the building.
- iii. Electronic changeable copy signs, if permitted in the District, shall comply with [31.046\(1\)](#) which requires that electronic changeable copy signs in Urban Design Districts shall not alternate, change, fade in, fade out, or otherwise change more frequently than once every one (1) hour. Additionally, no sign or portion of sign shall change its level of illumination more than once every one (1) hour.

b. Guidelines.

- i. A sign should identify the activity without imposing upon the view of residents, businesses or activities of the District.
- ii. A sign should be appropriate to the type of activity and clientele at which its message is directed.
- iii. Signs should be designed so as to be legible to the intended viewer in relation to the surrounding circumstances.
- iv. Signs should avoid covering or impinging upon landscape features or significant structures.
- v. Internally illuminated signs displaying illuminated copy shall be designed in such a way so that when illuminated, the sign appears to have light-colored copy on a dark or non-illuminated background. (Am. by ORD-09-00091, 8-1-09)

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. On each façade exceeding 125 feet in length, where a primary wall sign is displayed, up to four additional accessory signs may be displayed. These accessory signs shall not exceed fifty percent (50%) of the size or fifty percent (50%) of the height of the permitted primary wall sign already displayed on that façade (Sec. 31.07(6)(a)).

Accessory Sign is defined in MGO 31.03:

A wall sign on a large building, subordinate in area to the principal sign, located elsewhere than the primary signable area, listing other businesses or generic services or departments in the building, such as pharmacy, optical, auto repair, garden center and excluding product brand names.

Furthermore, Section 31.07(3) states, "An above-roof sign is a sign, any portion of which is displayed above the roofline. Above-roof signs may be displayed in the IL and IG employment districts and as allowed in Sec. 31.04(2)(b)2.b.iii. and iv., if no wall or roof sign is displayed on the corresponding facade. The signable area for an above-roof sign is calculated on the corresponding wall facade and can be transferred above the roofline. An above-roof sign may extend to a maximum height of ten (10) feet above the roofline."

Proposed Signage: The applicant is requesting two above roof signs, one the east elevation and one on the west elevation. Each sign would have a total net area of 257.9 sq. ft. which is 137.9 sq. ft. more than the maximum size allowed (120 sq. ft.). The applicant is also requesting for three accessory wall signs, two of which will be located on the south elevation (the restaurant sign and conference center sign), which does not have a primary wall, roof, or above-roof sign. The third accessory sign (a second conference center sign) will be located on the west elevation, and is proposed to have an overall height of 44", which would be 14" taller than what the code would allow (30"). The proposed signs are generally of a consistent design, except for the restaurant sign, which will be branded according to the restaurateur. The proposed signs appear to be of high-quality.

Staff Comments: For the above-roof signs, the applicant requests signage that cannot be approved at any similarly zoned property without a UDC exception. Section 31.043(c) states the UDC can "permit the use of an above-roof sign when the architecture of the building does not provide a reasonable signable area". This hotel occupies nearly the entire block, and was designed with the intention of having signage on the roof when it was built in the 1987. This signage is intended to be viewed from a distance, so visitors to the site can find the hotel relatively easily from the adjacent roadway. The mansard roof area was designed and intended for signage. To have the signs elsewhere on the building would leave the hotel with an odd looking roof, not to mention there isn't a decently sized signable area elsewhere on the east and west elevations that would be practically visible. The previous hotel signs were approximately 340 sq. ft. each in net area. The new proposed signs, each with a total net area of 257.9 sq. ft., would be roughly 82 sq. ft. reduction in size.

The applicant is also requesting three accessory wall signs for the restaurant and the conference center that also located on the site with the hotel. NOTE: the submitted graphics show inaccurate signable areas and sign heights for the "conference center" signs.

One accessory sign would be the conference center wall sign on the west elevation, above one of the entrances to the space. This sign would comply as an accessory sign, since this elevation also has an above-roof sign, however it is larger than 30% of the signable area and is 14" taller than 50% of the primary sign overall height. The applicant provides examples of a code compliant sign and the proposed sign. The proposed sign appears more to scale with the façade, while the code compliant sign appears too small and would more likely be not clearly visible.

The other two accessory signs (one is for the restaurant and the other is for conference center) will be located on the south elevation. However, there is not a primary wall, roof, or above-roof sign on this elevation, and these signs would be taller and almost as large, if not larger, than the hotel canopy fascia sign also on this elevation. However, having the accessory signage face East Washington is appropriate, as the south elevation also has the primary entrances to the restaurant and the conference center, and the proposed sizes, again, appear reasonable in the graphics shown when compared to the code-compliant sizes.

Staff believes these signs could be found consistent with the criteria for CDR review, but notes the inaccuracy of the sizes of the signs and signable area calculations. These calculation errors should be resolved before the UDC approves a CDR exception for the signs. Staff recommends the UDC refer this portion of the request, to obtain accurate detail in the signage request. This matter could be clarified when the item is considered by the UDC.

Canopy Signs Permitted per Sign Ordinance: Summarizing Section 31.071, a 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. 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.

Proposed Signage: The applicant is requesting for the sign to have a total net area of 64.38 sq. ft., which would be 16.98 sq. ft. larger than what the code would allow (47.4 sq. ft.).

Staff Comments: The ordinance would allow for a sign with a total net area of no more than 30% of the signable area, whereas the proposed sign is slightly over 40% of the signable area. The applicant states they need the larger sign in order to provide identification to the hotel from Independence Lane and East Towne Boulevard intersection as well as be viewable from the East Towne Mall parking lot. This size request is in addition to the oversized ground sign and mansard roof signs. There is also developed lots between the hotel and the mall to the south, making the visibility of the proposed canopy sign questionable. {Note: The proposed mansard signs are visible due to size and placement on the facades, and staff supports that request.} The City's sign code is not generally intended to accommodate signage to be viewed over/above/across development lots and blocks, and approving a sign because this level visibility is desired can establish a precedent contrary to the code. Lastly, the difference between the size examples shown for the proposed and code compliant sign are very minimal, and do not appear noticeable to a level that would warrant granting an exception. **Staff does not believe the applicant has provided a substantial argument for the larger sign and recommends the UDC find the criteria for CDR review have not been met and refer the request for more information, or allow for a sign of similar design in compliance with the size and height regulations of Chapter 31.**

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

Proposed Ground Signage: The applicant proposes to remove an existing 39' tall nonconforming ground sign and requests a double sided monument styled ground sign that would have an overall height of 12', with a total net area of 194.04 sq. ft., which would be 1 foot taller and 50.04 sq. ft. larger than code allows.

Staff Comments: As noted above, the mansard (above roof) signs will provide signage for the long views, providing identification for the hotel visible blocks away. The intent of the ground sign is to provide identification for the hotel for vehicles if they miss the turn in advance of the hotel. Furthermore, the applicant argues having a 12' tall monument styled ground sign is the smallest brand standard sign that would still permit visibility above vehicles parked by the sign, and provides examples of a code compliant sign versus the proposed sign. However, after analyzing the images, staff has determined the examples appear inaccurate or do not represent how the signs are intended to be viewed. Some of the images show the proposed sign sitting on the concrete base of the existing sign, which has not calculated as part of the overall height for either of the new signs in the submitted graphics. The applicant also shows how the sign looks from the parking lot, not from how it will be viewed from East Washington, as it is intended to be viewed. In fact, the hotel site sits about 3'to 4' higher than the grade of the right of way, giving the sign additional height by right.

As for the argument about the sign not being visible, there are other options the applicant could employ to improve views of the sign besides requesting a larger ground sign. The applicant could request a pole sign to increase the height. This site would be allowed a pole sign with a maximum height of 18'. The applicant could also relocate the sign elsewhere on the lot where it wouldn't be blocked by cars in the parking lot. They also have the option to modify the parking lot to remove spaces adjacent to the sign and enlarge the landscape bed where the sign sits as well as move the sign closer to the street property line.

The removal of the 39' tall ground sign is an improvement for the site and surrounding area, and will help improve the aesthetics for the site. Also, having a ground sign to provide identification for the hotel to vehicles that are too close to the site to see the above roof signs is understandable. However, staff does not support the idea of approving a monument sign larger than what the code allows based on the provided information. **Staff recommends the UDC find the criteria for CDR review have not been met for the larger ground sign, and instead allow for a ground sign that would have an overall height of no more than 11' and a total net area of 144 sq. ft.**

Parking Lot Signage Permitted per Sign Ordinance: Summarizing Section 31.03(2) and 31.044(1)(l), parking lot directional signage are necessary for safety or prompting traffic flow to a location on the premises on which the sign is located. These signs can be a maximum size of 3 sq. ft. with a maximum height of 10 ft., and two signs per street frontage. These types of signs are exempt from permits.

Proposed Signage: The applicant is requesting to change the existing three 12 sq. ft. parking lot directional signage located above the garage openings on the south side of the structure. Vehicles can arrive at this location through driveway openings off Continental Lane and Independence Lane.

Staff Comments: This large zoning lot which also has a restaurant and convention center with to the hotel. The number and size of the directional signs are essential for wayfinding and directing visitors and guests of the hotel around the site. These signs are of similar design to the main ground sign and hotel brand, creating a uniform look. **Staff has no objection to this CDR request and recommends the UDC find the standards for CDR review have been met.**

Notes:

- The final CDR documents shall state that all other signage complies with MGO 31.