

ZONING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

February 1, 2023



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 1827 E Washington Avenue
Project Name: The Marling
Application Type: Approval for an Alteration to an Approved Comprehensive Design Plan
Legistar File ID # [75232](#)
Prepared By: Chrissy Thiele, Zoning Inspector

The applicant is requesting an amendment to a previously approved Comprehensive Design Review. The Urban Design Commission approved the original Comprehensive Design Plan January 9, 2018, to allow for the commercial spaces to have signage facing the Yahara River and for parking lot directional signage larger than what the code permits. This property is in the Traditional Employment (TE) District, as well as Urban Design District No. 8. This part of E Washington Avenue has 6 lanes of traffic plus two parking lanes, and a speed limit of 35 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(15)(e)10, Signage Guidelines for Urban Design District No. 8, indicates the Urban Design Commission shall consider in each case those of the following guidelines as may be appropriate to signage:

a. Guidelines.

- i. Preferred sign types include building mounted signs, window signs, projecting signs, and awning signs.
- ii. Signs should be simple and easy to read.
- iii. Sign colors should relate to and complement the primary colors of the building facade.
- iv. Sign design and placement should fit the character of the building and not obscure architectural details.
- v. Signage should generally be centered within the prescribed signable area of the building.
- vi. Plastic box signs are highly discouraged.
- vii. Signs displaying illuminated copy should be designed so that when illuminated, the sign appears to have light-colored copy on a dark or non-illuminated background.
- viii. Individually mounted backlit letters are an encouraged form of signage.
- ix. The use of small, well-designed building-mounted light fixtures is a preferred method of illuminating signage.
- x. Freestanding signs should be attractively designed. Signs should be coordinated with adjoining properties and public street signage to avoid visual clutter.

Ground Signs Permitted by Sign Ordinance: This zoning lot is allowed up to two ground signs with a combined net area of 96 sq. ft., a maximum of 48 sq. ft. per side, and a maximum height of 10' for monument style signs, based off of the prevailing speeds and number of traffic lanes. If ground and projecting signs are displayed on the same a zoning lot, **only one (1) of such signs**, may exceed twelve (12) sq. ft. in net area.

Proposed Ground Signage: The applicant is requesting one ground sign and a parking lot directional sign. The proposed sign is a 9' 6" tall, internally illuminated, double sided monument sign, with a total net area of 47.79 sq. ft., and located in front of the building on East Washington Avenue. The tenant signs are made of acrylic panels, however the applicant does not indicate what the materials are for the "P" and Marling parking sign. As the applicant currently has a projecting sign that is larger than 12 sq. ft. in net area, CDR approval is needed for the proposed ground sign.

Staff Comments: The proposed size and net area of the ground sign complies with the sign code, but as the applicant already has a projecting sign larger than 12 sq. ft., CDR approval is required. It should also be noted that the original CDR application from 2018 proposed a ground sign (14' tall pole sign), stating "Marling Parking" and directing to the parking garage. The UDC denied the proposed pole sign offering the following design related comments as taken from the report the "[The] pole sign seem[s] out of sync," "The pole sign is too tall," and "[Would] rather see the parking symbol on the blade sign than a pole sign."

The applicant is returning to the UDC to ask for a ground sign, citing that customers visiting the commercial spaces are having a hard time finding parking. Most customers do not realize the Marling parking garage also provides public parking for them in addition to the building residents. As noted in the applicants materials, the parking garage entrance is set back 100' from the property line and has no visibility from the street until you

come up to the driveway entrance, by which time it is usually too late to turn. The proposed sign will use an existing code compliant directional sign (which does not require a permit) and add a cabinet for tenant signage and an arrow for directing customers to the parking garage further in the zoning lot. The sign uses the same font found on the Marling projecting sign and leasing office sign, and incorporates the orange color used in the signs with the arrow point toward the garage doors. **Recommendation: Overall, staff believes that the CDR and UDD 8 criteria have been met as it relates a unique circumstance and site limitations, as well as design. 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.**

Parking Lot Signage Permitted per Sign Ordinance: Summarizing MGO Sections 31.03(2) and 31.044(1)(l), parking lot directional signage is 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 a parking lot directional sign with the words "PARKING" and an arrow pointing to the garage doors. This sign is mounted to the fence and would have a total net area of 11.56 sq. ft. This sign is made of individual routed aluminum letters.

Staff Comments: This is a sign that is currently installed on site, which does not have a permit, and does not comply with the sign code with regard to size. The applicant states the sign is less than 9', but based on the dimensions provided the sign is 11.56 sq. ft. in net area. In addition, the applicant indicates in the letter of intent that this sign will help provide directional information with the unique parking situation. Staff does not believe this sign is necessary if the proposed ground sign is approved, and instead would be redundant. The oversized directional sign is also set back further in the lot, so visibility of the sign is very limited, whereas the main ground sign would provide better visibility from the street. **Recommendation: Staff does not believe the applicant has satisfied the criteria for CDR approval for having the oversized parking lot directional sign. As such, staff recommends the UDC find the criteria for CDR review have not been met and refer the request for more information or deny the request as submitted. This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.**