

ZONING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

January 21, 2026



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 720 & 750 University Row

Project Name: UW Health Digestive Health Center

Application Type: Comprehensive Design Review for Signage

Legistar File ID # [91182](#)

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The applicant is requesting Comprehensive Design Review for Signage (CDR) for an existing UW Health Clinic that is being expanded with a four-story addition to provide specialty digestive health care in addition to urgent care and structured parking. This property is in a Planned Development (PD) district, which has an equivalency district of Suburban Employment (SE), abutting University Avenue (4 lanes, 35 mph) and University Row (2 lanes, 25 mph).

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

- One ground sign, which is code compliant,
- Two ground parking lot directional signs, which are code compliant,
- One above-canopy sign, which is code compliant,
- Four wall signs, two of which are code compliant. One of which is located on a non-qualifying elevation as it does not face a street or parking lot, and another one, which is larger than 30% of the signable area,
- One projecting sign, which is code compliant, and
- One oversized parking lot directional sign that is a combination of both a wall and projecting sign, which is not a code complaint sign in the Sign Ordinance.

Comprehensive Design 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.*

Urban Design District 6 Signage Requirements and Guidelines

Section 33.24(13)(d)3., Signage Criteria for Urban Design District No. 6, 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.

Wall Signs Permitted per Sign Ordinance: Summarizing MGO 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 requesting a total of four wall signs, two of which are code compliant as they face a street or parking lot and do not exceed 30% of their signable area. However, there are two wall signs that need an exception from the Sign Code. The first one is a proposed sign on the northwest elevation near University Avenue (WLI-2). This wall sign is less than 30% of the signable area, however it does not face a street or parking lot. This sign consists of internally illuminated channel letters, similar to the other UWHealth signs.

The second wall sign is above the parking garage entrance on the north elevation (WCI-1), which would face University Avenue, but that occupies 41.33% of the signable area where only 30% is allowed. The entrance and exit signs are routed face backed by acrylic, and the "P" is a channel letter with a channel border around it.

Staff Comments: The requested sign on the northwest elevation (WLI-2) could normally be approved through a sign exception under section 31.043(d), which states the UDC can *"permit the use of wall signs on building facades not adjacent to off-street parking areas where, due to a variation of building setbacks, a signable area exists, provided the area of the sign shall not exceed the area of the wall sign permitted on the front of the building"*. However, since the applicant is also requesting approval for other signage that does not meet the sign ordinance requirements, it is part of the Comprehensive Design Review approval. The applicant indicates in the letter of intent that this sign is currently hidden by trees on the front elevation and by moving it to the northwest elevation, it will provide identification for vehicles further away for visitors approaching from the east on University Avenue, where there is currently no business identification. The design of this sign will match the sign on the northeast elevation the currently exists (WLI-1) that provides visibility to vehicles heading westbound on University Avenue.

For the wall sign above the parking garage entrance on the north elevation (WCI-1), the applicant provides mockups of a code compliant sign and the requested larger sign to show the difference between the two as viewed from the patient drop-off point on the site. The applicant indicates in the letter of intent that the larger sign is needed to provide clear direction on how to get into the parking garage after dropping someone off. The sign size fits with the overall scale of the building, and the routed face and channel letter "P" add dimension and interest to the sign.

Recommendation: Staff have no objection to the two requested wall signs and recommend the UDC find the CDR criteria and UDD 6 guidelines and requirements have been met given the design aesthetic being of individual channel letters, placement being well integrated with the building design, and necessity for business identification. This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.

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', and two signs per street frontage. These types of signs are exempt from permits.

Parking lot regulation signs, on the other hand, designate the condition of use or identity of such parking areas. These signs can be a maximum of 9 sq. ft. and require a 10 ft. setback from the property line.

Proposed Signage: The applicant is requesting a parking lot directional sign that is a combination of a wall sign and a projecting sign. The proposed sign location is higher than that and the unique design of the sign is a combination of a projecting sign and a wall sign. The overall net area of the sign is 57.87 sq. ft. when counting both the wall and projecting sign area, which is larger than what is permitted in the Sign Ordinance. The entrance and exit signs

are routed face backed by acrylic, and the projecting "P" is a combination of a cabinet sign with a channel letter and channel border.

Staff Comments: Directional signage is only permitted to be wall or ground signage, with a maximum height of 10'. The size permitted for such signage is limited in size and legibility becomes questionable the further away you are from the sign. Since the south ramp entrance is supposed to be the main entrance to the parking garage for vehicles visiting the site, clear legibility and direction to the garage entrance is vital in order to prevent confusion and vehicle congestion. The location isn't visible from University Row until you start to enter the roundabout, and there is limited visibility for vehicles coming toward the site from Silvertree Run. The projecting part of the sign is intended to catch the attention of vehicles entering the roundabout, identifying the entrance to the parking garage, and as they approach the entrance, the sign mounted on the façade of the building designates the entrance and exist of the structure.

While the applicant could have chosen different types of signage to provide clear direction, it would require more signs than what is requested. In addition, Comprehensive Design Review was created in order to obtain approval for unusual or unique signage. The sign is of high design with the dimensional "P" and boarder, and the routed face for the Entrance and Exit portion of the sign, and the size of the sign fits with the scale of the parking garage, as well as provides clear direction to vehicles looking to park in the garage.

Recommendation: Staff have no objection to the requested parking lot directional signage and recommend the UDC find the CDR criteria and the UDD 6 guidelines and requirements have been met given the uniqueness in the sign design and wayfinding on the site. This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.