

ZONING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

June 29, 2022



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 701 Gardener Road
Project Name: Madison Yards – Block 2
Application Type: Approval for Comprehensive Design Review of Signage
Legistar File ID # [70848](#)
Prepared By: Chrissy Thiele, Zoning Inspector
Reviewed By: Matt Tucker, Building Inspection Director

The applicant is requesting Comprehensive Design Review of signage for the new Madison Yards zoning lot currently under construction. The six Madison Yards parcels in this zoning lot are zoned Planned Development (PD) district, which allows for signs as permitted in a Commercial Corridor – Transitional (CC-T) district. However, as the ownership for each parcel is different separate applications will be submitted for each parcel. This application will address the building signage located in the parcel adjacent to University Avenue and North Segoe Road. The applicant is requesting for three wall signs and an above canopy sign larger than what the code permits and parking signage larger than what the code permits. This lot abuts University Avenue (five lanes, 35 mph), North Segoe Road (four lanes, 30 mph), and Sheboygan Avenue (two lanes, 30 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(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 Section 31.07, there shall be one signable area for each façade facing a street or parking lot 33 feet in width or greater. For a single occupancy, stand-alone, non-residential building with twenty-five thousand (25,000) square feet or more in floor area, or a non-residential occupancy or tenant space with twenty-five thousand (25,000) square feet or more in floor area in a multi-tenant building, the maximum net area of all wall signs shall be thirty percent (30%) of the signable area. In no case shall a wall sign exceed one hundred twenty (120) square feet in net area.

Proposed Signage: The applicant is proposing three wall signs for Whole Foods tenant space and a wall sign for the apartment building, "EO".

The grocery store is proposed to have a wall sign facing University Avenue and a wall sign for each interior private street abutting the building. The south elevation facing one of these private streets will have a total net area of 180 sq. ft., and the north and west elevation (facing University Avenue and the other private street) will each have a total net area of 145 sq. ft. The proposed signs consist of internally illuminated face-lit individual channel letters.

The EO wall sign complies the sign ordinance, so a CDR exception is not necessary, but is shown since it is part of the proposed signage for this zoning lot. The sign will face University Avenue and have a total net area of 16.5 sq. ft., which would be 7.9% of the signable area. This sign would also consist of an internally illuminated face-lit channel letter.

Staff Comments: The applicant is requesting CDR approval for the Whole Foods proposed wall signage as two of the signs face internal driveways, as well as all three wall signs would have a net area larger than allowed by code. The applicant indicates in the letter of intent that it is necessary for Whole Foods to have larger wall signage as it will be the largest/anchor commercial tenant within the Madison Yards development and the signage would provide the visibility necessary for building identification and for vehicular/pedestrian safety. Staff agrees it makes sense for the grocery store to have the additional wall signage facing the drive aisles, as the west elevation will provide identification to vehicles heading east bound on University Avenue, and the sign on the south elevation provides identification to pedestrians and vehicles entering the zoning lot from Sheboygan Avenue. However, since private streets are not right-of-way or an appropriately sized parking lot, these elevations technically do not qualify as a signable area, and therefore need a CDR exception from the sign ordinance. Staff is supportive of these elevations being qualified for signage.

In regard to the proposed size for the signs, staff does not believe it is necessary for the Whole Foods site to have signage larger than what the code would allow, and even at the maximum size permitted by the ordinance, they signs may be out of scale or appropriateness for this type of sign in an urban design district. As noted above, the property is in an urban design district, and the commission can be more restrictive than code maximums.

The proposed signage in the renderings appears to be overly large, while the code compliant signage appears to fit better in the signable area. This is especially true for the proposed sign on the west elevation, which appears cramped in the dedicated signable area, while the code compliant sign appears to have a better balance of space around the sign. Also, larger signage is also unnecessary for signs facing inside the Madison Yards site, as the number of lanes and speed limit isn't extraordinary, and a sign up to 120 sq. ft. (or potentially less) would be reasonably visible to vehicles and pedestrians within the site. There has not been evidence submitted to support the larger size from a necessity standpoint (CDR criteria #2). **Recommendation: Staff has no objection to the CDR request for having signage facing the private streets in the zoning lot, however staff does not believe the applicant has satisfied the criteria for CDR approval for having signage larger than what the code permits, 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 wall signage with the condition that the signs comply with a sign size up to but not exceeding requirements. This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.**

Canopy Signs Permitted per Sign Ordinance: Summarizing Section 31.071, above-canopy signs can be installed instead of canopy fascia signs or wall signs, but are restricted to the business name and logo. The sign shall consist of freestanding characters and are limited to a maximum height of 2'. A logo is also permitted, however it is not limited in height. Instead the logo may only have a maximum net area of 4 sq. ft. These signs also cannot be wider than the width of the canopy or the corresponding façade, whichever is narrower. Above-canopy signage may not project further than from the building than the canopy to which it is attached and a sign that crosses architectural detail may not be displayed closer than three feet from the nearest face of the building.

Proposed Signage: The applicant is proposing an above canopy sign with an overall height of 3' 3" and a total net area of 19.5 sq. ft., with the face of the sign extending 6" beyond the canopy façade and have an overall depth of 6'. The sign would be an internally illuminated channel letter.

Staff Comments: The applicant is requesting CDR approval for an above canopy sign 1' 3" taller than permitted by code, as well as project 6" beyond the edge of the canopy. The sign code does not have any regulations about the depth of channel letters above the canopy, but it should be noted that the proposed 6' channel letter depth is unique and creative in design. The sign will be situated above the main entrance to the apartment building facing the private drive just off of North Segoe Road, which noted above is an elevation that does not qualify for signage as it does not face a street or parking lot.

The applicant states that the sign is designed to enhance the architectural uniqueness of the building while complementing the modern and inclusive feel of the overall development and that the 6" projection beyond the edge of the canopy adds creative interest to the sign. The applicant also provides proposed and code compliant renderings of the sign and how it relates to the overall size of the apartment building. The tall windows behind the code compliant sign appear to dwarf the code compliant sign, while the proposed sign appears more to scale with the building design and size. The sign is unique and of high design, having a channel letter depth of 6'. Staff is not convinced the projection of 6" beyond the canopy edge will add to the creativity in addition to having a 6' deep sign, and would prefer that the sign comply with the sign ordinance by lining up with the edge of the canopy. Staff requests UDC decide whether the projection beyond the canopy edge adds or detracts from the high design of the sign. **Recommendation: Staff has no objection to the CDR request and recommends the UDC find the standards for CDR review have been met for the additional height, however staff request UDC determine whether the sign should extend beyond the canopy edge. 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 ft., 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 for parking identifying signage that would consist of three 9 sq. ft. wall signs and three 12 sq. ft. projecting signs next to the parking garage entrance on each side of the building, and a 16 sq. ft. "Loading Only" wall sign facing University Avenue. The wall signs consist of internally illuminated channel letters and the projecting signs will also be internally illuminated.

Staff Comments: There are four entrances to the parking garage in this zoning lot, as well as a loading garage located on University Avenue. One of the four garage entrances is for the residents of the apartment building next door, so it is important that the parking directional signage be easily seen by vehicles coming to this site. The proposed signage clearly identifies the garage entrances meant for the grocery store, as well as identifying garages that are meant just for loading. The proposed parking lot signage appears appropriate in size and location for providing identification for vehicles coming to the grocery store. **Recommendation: 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.**