



## ZONING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

June 14, 2023

PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

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

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The applicant is requesting an amendment to a previously approved Comprehensive Design Review. 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).

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 sq. ft. 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 sign 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 in 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 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.

However, while staff agrees 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 in primarily residential areas are typically sensitively designed and placed, given the potential impact of the signage on the surrounding property. Further, signs in Group 1 are not meant to be mounted high on buildings or as large as what would be found at a commercial or employment establishment. The proposed sign 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). Staff believes having the proposed wall sign in addition to the two ground signs appears unnecessary to meet the identification needs of the school, and a smaller sign would be functional and more appropriate. For example, the façade includes a canopy over the entrance, and an above canopy sign with two-foot tall letters would still clearly identify the front entrance, as well as maintain the cohesive look with the other building signage. The rendering showing the complaint size on the architectural feature is not the only option here, and a smaller sign, either on the architectural element or on the canopy as suggested above, could be explored. Other options should be presented for staff review and UDC consideration.

**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. With regard to the wall sign on the front façade,**

**staff does not believe the applicant has satisfied the criteria for CDR approval. Staff recommends that the UDC find the criteria for CDR review have not been met and that the UDC 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.**