

ZONING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

September 21, 2017



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 6310 Town Center Drive
Project Name: Steamfitters Training Center
Application Type: Comprehensive Design Review Initial/Final Approval
Legistar File ID # 41870
Prepared By: Chrissy Thiele, Zoning Inspector
Reviewed By: Matt Tucker, Zoning Administrator

The applicant is requesting Comprehensive Design Review INITIAL/FINAL APPROVAL. This property is located in a Planned Development (PD) District, with Zoning text allowing for signage as compared to the Suburban Employment (SE) district. The lot abuts I-94, which has six lanes and speed limit of 70mph. The lot also neighbors the City of Madison Fire Station #13, with the remaining lots currently undeveloped or agriculture use.

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.*

Wall Signs Permitted by 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, 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 Wall Signage: The applicant is asking for two signable areas on the on the north and south facades of the building. The total square footage provided for the “code-compliant” signs on both elevations do not appear to be accurate, as the applicant did not count the space between the individual signs. To determine the net area of the sign, up to three squares/rectangles may be drawn, but each one must be immediately adjacent to the next so that there is no space between them. It does not appear that the applicant used this method.

In addition to the request for two signable areas on the North elevation, the applicant is asking for one of the wall signs to exceed the maximum allowed size of 120 sq. ft.

Staff Comments: As the correct boxing method was not shown on any of the elevations for the net calculations, staff cannot confirm any of the total square footage provided. The applicant has made the argument that having two signable areas creates balance and symmetry to the building. Staff looks to the commission for their thoughts on this argument. For the both elevations, staff does not support allowing for wall signage larger than what would be allowed in the primary signable area (the “Steamfitters 601 Training Center” sign), which is 120 sq. ft. for the North elevation, and 97 sq. ft. for the South elevation. The applicant argues that the signage on the North elevation would be rendered ineffective and visually unappealing, yet does not provide any imagery or visual representations of how the signs would be seen from the interstate to support this argument. **Staff believes further information should be provided by the applicant relative to the criteria of approval for a CDR to support the approval of the larger sign. Otherwise, if approved, the signs should be no larger than what would otherwise be permitted for the one signable area.**

Ground Signs Permitted by Sign Ordinance: This lot is allowed up to two ground signs with a combined net area of 288 sq. ft., based off of the prevailing speeds and number of traffic lanes. Also, depending on the size of the sign’s base, *pole signs* have a max height of 22’ and *monument signs* have a max height of 13’.

The Sign Ordinance defines a pole sign as a *Ground Sign that is supported by one or more poles or other supporting structures, if the total width of the pole(s) or supporting structure(s) is one third (1/3) or less than the width of the net area of the sign copy it supports. The width of all pole(s) and supporting structures at their widest point and any space between poles or supports shall be included when measuring the total width of the pole(s) and supporting structure(s).* A monument sign has a support structure more than 1/3 the width of the sign copy it supports.

Proposed Ground Signage: The ground sign by the interstate has a base width larger than 1/3 of the sign copy it supports, which classifies it as a monument sign. The net area of the sign calculates to 120 sq. ft. per side (240 sq. ft. total). The applicant is asking for a height exception of an additional 37 feet above what would otherwise be allowed. The monument sign near the driveway is at a code-compliant height and has a net area of 24 sq. ft. The combined net area of the two signs calculates to 288 sq. ft.

Staff Comments: The applicant argues that the 50’ height for the ground sign near the interstate is necessary for the message center to be clearly and easily read by traffic heading east and west bound. However, besides stating that 13’ allowable height renders the sign not visible due to it being below the grade of the interstate,

there is no supporting evidence provided that a 50' tall sign is necessary for the sign to be visible. The applicant has chosen to design the sign with two supporting poles at the proposed width, rather than a single pole which would qualify the sign as a pole sign. By designing the base of the sign 1/3 or less, the sign becomes a pole sign and is then allowed 22' in height. Staff does not agree with the applicants' argument that the sign must be designed with two poles, as a single pole design can be easily engineered to support the sign, which would allow for a 22' tall sign. The applicant has chosen to utilize an *Electronic Message Center Sign*, and with this choice comes the limited ability to convey messages. The applicant has argued that this choice of a sign at a code-compliant height renders the message ineffectively visible at the allowed height, but has not provided any view perspectives of how an otherwise code-complaint sign would be viewable from the highway. This sign does not appear to meet the first two criteria of the Comprehensive Design Review, specifically: there is no harmony between the sign and the building site, the sign design is not exceptional in any way, and the sign height is out-of-scale with the buildings and building site. The Commission should also keep in mind that there will be other commercial development adjacent to this site and approval of this sign could establish precedent for signage in this corridor. **Based on the current design of the sign and lack of supporting evidence, staff does not support CDR exception for a 50' tall monument-style ground sign. Further information should be provided by the applicant relative to the criteria of approval for a CDR to support the approval of the taller sign that what would be otherwise allowed.**

Staff Comments regarding other shown signage: The "Bucky Badger" sign and the parking lot directional sign appear to comply with the Sign Ordinance. Therefore, these signs do not need special exceptions as part of the Comprehensive Design Review.