

## ZONING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

June 29, 2022



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

**Project Address:** 4728 Sheboygan Avenue  
**Project Name:** Madison Yards – Block 6  
**Application Type:** Approval for Comprehensive Design Review of Signage  
**Legistar File ID #** [70849](#)  
**Prepared By:** Chrissy Thiele, Zoning Inspector  
**Reviewed By:** Matt Tucker, Building Inspection Director

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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 private streets along with the commercial space and central green space located in the middle of the zoning lot. The applicant is requesting for three ground signs larger than what the code permits and twelve banners projecting off of light poles located within the zoning lot. 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.

**Ground Signs Permitted by Sign Ordinance:** This zoning lot is allowed up to two ground signs with a combined net area of 144 sq. ft., and a maximum height of 10' for monument style signs, based off of the prevailing speeds and number of traffic lanes. The ordinance also allows for lots with frontage 500' or more, as well as a vehicle entrance on that frontage, to have an additional monument-style ground sign, no larger than eight feet in height, with 32 sq. ft. per side, located at each vehicle entrance. Also, if a ground and projecting signs are displayed on the same a zoning lot, only one (1) of such signs, where permitted may exceed twelve (12) square feet in net area.

**Proposed Signage:** The applicant is requesting four ground signs, all monument styled. Three of the ground signs will be located at the entrances to the zoning lot along University Avenue, North Segoe Road, and Sheboygan Avenue. These proposed signs would be 16' tall, with each sign having a total net area of 161.76 sq. ft. These signs would be made of a silver metal base with internally illuminated letters for the top part of the sign, and routed face push-thru acrylic letters for the tenant panels. It appears the signage on the sides of the sign would not be push-thru, just routed faces, however no information was provided as to how it would be constructed.

The applicant is also requesting a ground sign in the center of the zoning lot surrounded by landscaping, which would have an overall height of 6' 3", and a total net area of 57.19 sq. ft. This sign would be made of Corten steel, with a logo made of the same material with edge-lit illumination, and the "place" name routed out and illuminated internally.

**Staff Comments:** It is not unusual for a zoning lot of this size to request to exceed the allowed square footage for ground signage via CDR. The applicant is requesting to exceed the number of ground signs permitted by two, with the cumulative net area of 542.47 sq. ft., which is 398.47 sq. ft. more than what the sign ordinance permits. Three of the ground signs would also be 6' taller than what is permitted for a monument ground sign at this zoning lot. The letter of intent states these signs enhance the architectural uniqueness of each building while complementing the modern and inclusive feel of the zoning lot. The three ground signs located at each driveway entry to the zoning lot has the Madison Yards logo at the top of the sign, the site name spelled out on the sides, and individual tenant panels below for internal site identification and branding. Each tenant panel would have a net area of 6.71 sq. ft. per side, except for the Whole Foods tenant panel, which would have a net area of 9.1 sq. ft. per side. The application includes rendered comparisons of the proposed sign and a code compliant sized sign in relation to the building, however staff does not believe the rendered views provided are an accurate representation of the signs being viewed from the street by pedestrians and vehicles. Staff believes additional images are needed from different points viewed from the street to give the commission a better understanding of the proposed size.

Staff also has concerns about the amount of signage proposed for the three ground signs. The proposed multi-tenant ground signage in addition to the *place* logo appears to be over-signed and bulky. Other large zoning lots (like Hilldale Mall, West and East Towne Malls, etc.) do not have multi-tenant ground signs, but instead have "place" signage, so the signs identify the destination or create a branded place that businesses in the site use for locational identification. NOTE: Hilldale does have a small sign with individual tent names on Midvale, which is practically unnoticeable. Staff is concerned the approval of this sign could create precedence for other large commercial and mixed-use sites also requesting multi-tenant ground signs in addition to their *place* sign. Staff requests Commissioners determine if the proposed sign is appropriate for the zoning lot, or if the sign should be either just a *place* sign or a multi-tenant sign.

As for the Landscaping ground sign located in the center of the zoning lot, the proposed sign creates a sense of place for visitors within the zoning lot. The sign will be surrounded by landscaping and is of high design with the routed face and edge-lit illumination, however the material used does not relate with the other ground signage proposed for the zoning lot. The sign will also have smaller cut out spaces that will light up at night, to give the illusion of a starry sky.

**Recommendation:** Staff does not believe the applicant has satisfied the criteria for CDR approval for the ground signs, and recommends the UDC find the criteria for CDR review have not been met and refer the request for more information. This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.

**Banner-type Signs Permitted per Sign Ordinance:** The closest allowable sign type for the proposed banners is a promotional or decorative banner. Sign code definitions:

*Banner, Decorative . A banner containing no message or logo that is displayed for the purpose of adding color and interest to the surroundings or to the building to which it is attached.*

*Banner, Promotional . A banner or series of banners containing a noncommercial message displayed to call attention to cultural events, charity campaigns or neighborhood sponsored activities or any other noncommercial event or message.*

However, the proposed signs do not meet either of these definitions because they include Madison Yards branding, a commercial message.

**Proposed Signage:** The applicant is proposing twelve (on map) or fourteen (in text) banner signs projecting from the light poles located along private streets within the zoning lot. Each banner would have a net area of 15.63 sq. ft. per side, however these the applicant is proposing the banners be allowed to change throughout the year. Some examples include (although not finalized by the developer yet) sense of place, seasonal themes, and promotional, with all of the banners having the branded Madison Yards logo or words associated with the zoning lot.

**Staff Comments:** The proposed projecting banners are not permitted as the sign ordinance only permits the signs without commercial messages. The applicant is requesting through this CDR to install a banner on every light pole within the zoning lot (indicated as the orange dot on the site map) and have the ability to change the copy of the banner throughout the year, with either additional branding with the Madison Yards logo that may or may not have decorative images, as well as to promote events taking place in the central area within the zoning lot.. These banners can create a sense of place as well as add festivity to the surrounding area. Staff supports the banners under the condition that commercial branding/logos/commercial message be removed, to align these with the decorative and promotional banner allowances in the sign code. **Recommendation: Staff has no objection to the CDR request for having changeable copy banners, and recommends the UDC find the standards for CDR review have been met, with the condition that compliance with the definition of decorative or promotional banners be met. This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.**

**Notes:**

- Resolve conflict between text and graphics for the number of banners, 14 or 12.