



**Agenda Item #:** 3

**Project Title:** 66 West Towne Mall – Comprehensive Design Review (CDR) of Signage. 9<sup>th</sup> Ald. Dist.

**Legistar File ID #:** 73265

**Members Present:** Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Lois Braun-Oddo, Tom DeChant, Shane Bernau, Jessica Klehr, Christian Harper and Juliana Bennett.

**Prepared By:** Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

## Summary

At its meeting of September 7, 2022, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED FINAL APPROVAL** of a Comprehensive Design Review of Signage (CDR) located at 66 West Towne Mall. Registered and speaking in support were Mary Beth Growney Selene, Kenneth Wittler and David Burke.

The applicant is requesting that an east-facing set of Von Maur letters be mounted below the center entrance to West Towne Mall, specific to the 85,000 square-foot store, which does not have visibility at the main entry or surrounding roads to the development and is located approximately 850 feet from the nearest street frontage from Mineral Point Road. The proposed sign creates visual harmony through design and placement, and relation to other exterior existing signs, and is intended to provide for identification on the east elevation similar to other major retailers such as JC Penney, Hobby Lobby, Total Wine and Dick's. This will provide wayfinding as Von Maur is located directly through the entrance doors to the mall. The proposed sign is visible and readable from Gammon Road and the outer ring road, well-proportioned to the signable area, and complies with the variance criteria. The staff report makes note about setting precedent; Macy's at Hilldale is an example of not having a direct facade to the exterior where this exception was applied. CBL is stringent about their properties, and by virtue of the architectural details of the façade, the proposed Von Maur will not overshadow the West Towne sign under which it is located.

Matt Tucker, Building Inspection Director, noted that staff had no concerns with the preexisting wayfinding signs that are part of this CDR, and that this CDR will also help clean up existing signage not otherwise dealt with in the Sign Code. In address of the Von Maur sign on the façade not adjacent to the tenant space, this does establish a precedent and is a matter the City has been very thoughtful on over time. Allowing signs not adjacent to tenant spaces can result in anyone wanting signs on any street facing wall, which leads to sign clutter and gets away from the intent of our Sign Code, which is to identify places. Conversations were had about the unique situation of this property, the large format commercial tenant space with little to no visibility from the surrounding streets. It is a policy question that needs to be considered, it is rare and unusual, but legal and within the grounds of a CDR for the UDC to allow. Staff would like to hear what the Commission thinks, and therefore did not make a strong recommendation. Practically speaking staff does not agree that the size of the proposed sign would be visible from the surrounding streets. It comes down to the size and balance of the sign on this façade. The West Towne Mall sign has space around it, other signs throughout the property are on very large signable areas; the smaller sign shows more balance and fit with that.

Ken Wittler spoke in support. They are excited and happy to have this addition to West Towne Mall; it will complement the property very nicely. The Von Maur store is a single-story building with a roofline lower than the mall. Visibility from Gammon Road and other major thoroughfares is very restricted, making this signage very important.

David Burke spoke in support, focusing on the unique aspect of this site and its limited opportunities for signage that is visible from major roadways.

The Commission discussed the following:

- Dick's does not have signage facing eastward, they have a large sign visible from the Beltline. Neither mall location has signage facing the roadway.
- What is the front of the mall? Gammon is the prominent entry but there are three sides. Both West Towne and East Towne Dick's have prominent street facing walls with signs.
- Another example would be Flix at East Towne. That is totally hidden from E. Washington Avenue, did they put anything on the front to direct people to them?
  - They approached us with a similar scenario, we expressed the same concerns we have over Von Maur and the precedential nature of things. There's an existing large non-conforming ground sign on the Red Lobster property, and they have located on the bottom of that. They do have a little bit of a street frontage on that northeast view. Those are the two areas in Madison that have this situation.
- Seeking clarification on what possible precedence we've had on this.
  - (Growney Selene): While Dick's does not have an east elevation sign, they do have a Beltline elevation sign.
- Tucker: West Towne has a south facing and east facing sign.
- This does not have direct adjacency similar to Macy's. It could send people with accessibility needs in the wrong direction. I'm not sure if it's that close, usually you would drive around the mall because you want to park next to the building you're going into. This has you going half the distance of the mall to get to the store.
- Von Maur didn't come out of nowhere, Boston Store didn't need this and they were there for years.
- The comparisons to Hilldale, it's not the same thing; Macy's is just shortly inside the front and not separated by a rather lengthy walk. Having pointed out both those things, I personally don't really have a problem with having a sign out front just because they are a major tenant and new. But I'm sympathetic to the City's position of not setting a precedent.
- Isn't there a box sign with tenant signage currently at West Towne Mall?
  - There is not. There is one main identification sign for the mall with no tenant names on it.
- I am a bit averse to the signage. I worked at West Towne Mall, some of the signs currently there make it a bit confusing. It is more important to have clearer signage within the mall, there are other ways to know Von Maur is at the mall, including the use of internet sources, etc.
- (Tucker) There are no ground signs at the mall because the City many years ago was directing places like this to create a sense of place to identify where you were, otherwise it becomes an issue of sign clutter.
- Boston Store had the sign located towards the ring road on that façade where their tenant space was.
- This should be a narrowly defined approval, a scenario that says this is only approved at a common entry and not above any other tenant space, must be directly in line with a store and no other visibility from a public street.
- Von Maur has a cupola above the roofline, just like you can see Dick's from the Beltline you're going to see Von Maur. The current entrance has a pretty sizable signage area that will be visible from the Beltline.

## Action

On a motion by Braun-Oddo, seconded by Klehr, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED FINAL APPROVAL** of the wayfinding signage portion of the Comprehensive Design Review, and **DENIED** the Von Maur sign not adjacent to a tenant space portion of the CDR. The motion was passed on a unanimous vote of (6-0).