

## ZONING STAFF REPORT

February 28, 2024



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

**Project Address:** 702 N. Midvale Blvd.  
**Project Name:** Hilldale Mall  
**Application Type:** Approval for an Alteration to an Approved Comprehensive Design Plan  
**Legistar File ID #** [81789](#)  
**Prepared By:** Chrissy Thiele, Zoning Inspector; ; Jessica Vaughn, AICP, Urban Design Commission Secretary

The applicant is requesting an amendment to a previously approved Comprehensive Design Review. The original approval to allow signage for tenant spaces along Hilldale Way (the pedestrian mall) and allowing certain tenant spaces to have a third wall sign, which UDC approved September 7, 2016. An amendment was also approved on April 11, 2018, to locate a large wall sign for basement tenants and to allow signs to be mounted on windows. This property is Zoned PD with an equivalency district to Group 2 zoning districts, and is abutting University Avenue (6 lanes, 35 mph), North Midvale Boulevard (4 lanes, 30 mph), North Segoe Road (4 lanes, 25 mph), Sawyer Terrace (2 lanes, 25 mph), and Vernon Boulevard (2 lanes, 25 mph).

**Comprehensive Design Review and Approval Criteria.** Pursuant to Section 31.43(4)(d), MGO, any changes to the approved plan must first be approved by the UDC using the full Comprehensive Design Review (CDR) process under Sec. 31.043(4)(a):

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.*

**Urban Design District 6 Sign Requirements and Guidelines.** Section 33.24(13)(d)3, MGO indicates that the Urban Design Commission shall consider in each case those of the following guidelines and requirements as may be appropriate for 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 MGO 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 buildings with more than one tenant, each tenant is allowed a signable area as reasonably close to its tenant space as possible. Standard net area allows for 40% of the signable area, or two square feet of signage for each lineal foot of building frontage not to exceed 100% of the signable area. In no case shall the sign exceed 80 sq. ft. in net area. For a single occupancy or a 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.

Furthermore, Section 31.07(3) states, “An above-roof sign is a sign, any portion of which is displayed above the roofline. Above-roof signs may be displayed in the IL and IG employment districts and as allowed in Sec. 31.04(2)(b)2.b.iii. and iv., if no wall or roof sign is displayed on the corresponding facade. The signable area for an above-roof sign is calculated on the corresponding wall facade and can be transferred above the roofline. An above-roof sign may extend to a maximum height of ten (10) feet above the roofline.”

Proposed Wall Signage: The applicant is requesting to expand the current CDR, which treats drive aisles, small parking spaces, court yards, and pedestrian ways as if they were public streets to the newly approved development south of the mall. This would allow each tenant space that doesn't face a street or parking lot more than 33 feet in width signage as permitted in the Sign Code. The applicant is also requesting an above roof sign on an apartment building, which is to be mounted to the mechanical screen and with a maximum height of 3 feet. The application does not provide any information on length, so net area cannot be determined, and there is no information about what the sign will look like, but staff assumes it will be associated with Hilldale, as the letter of intent states it is an opportunity for branding.

Staff Comments: The Hilldale Mall layout is unique with many of their tenant storefronts facing pedestrian walkways and green courtyards instead of streets, and where parking areas are situated around the exterior of the mall. While the layout is designed to be pedestrian friendly, this also severely limits signage for tenants in the open-air shopping center. The intent of the first CDR was to provide an easy way to approve signage for tenant spaces that do not face a public street or parking lot larger than 33 feet in width by treating the pedestrian ways and drive aisles as if they were public streets. This application is to update the map of the Hilldale zoning lot, outlining the new courtyards and pedestrian areas where tenant spaces will need signage, but would otherwise be unable to have signage. Staff is supportive of this request.

The applicant is also requesting to have a sign mounted to the mechanical screening on Building 500, a mixed use building comprised of commercial space on a portion of the first floor, as well as residential units. This type of signage is considered an above roof sign, which is not permitted in Group 2 zoning districts. The letter of intent states signage in the space is a unique opportunity for identification and branding within the mixed-use district, to tie together the overall horizontal commercial district with vertical mixed-use buildings; however, it does not provide any specific information as to how this sign meets CDR criteria one and two. Signs high on the building are intended to be viewed from a distance, but this sign would only be practically visible from the residential properties in the hill farms neighborhood to the to the east: the residential neighborhoods, points on the UW campus, and the greater downtown area. All the other signs in the Hilldale zoning lot are lower on the buildings for pedestrian visibility, whereas this sign would be the only sign high on a building (relative to CDR criteria number one). Staff also believes this zoning lot does not have any limitations to the building site or surrounding environment, making it necessary to have a sign high on the building (relative to CDR criteria number two).

In addition, this application includes ground signs, directional signs, and community boards with Hilldale's name and brand on them, which is more appropriate for the pedestrian-oriented site and creates a more uniform look. **Recommendation: Staff has no objection to the CDR request to expand the approvals of the existing CDR to the approved new development areas as shown on the map and recommends the UDC find the standards for CDR review have been met.**

**With regard to the proposed above-roof sign, however, staff recommends the UDC find the standards for CDR review, as well as the UDD 6 sign guidelines and requirements, have not been met as follows:**

- **Consistency with CDR No. 1 and UDD 6 sign guidelines and requirements related to design, including being able to confirm size and scale, integration with building architecture, maintaining visual harmony between signage and buildings, unique or exceptional use of materials, colors, etc.**
- **Consistency with CDR Criteria No. 2, including as it relates to necessity as a result of a "...unique or unusual design aspects in the architecture or limitations in the building site or surrounding environment," and UDD 6 sign guidelines that speak "A sign should identify an activity without imposing upon the view of residents..." as well as those that speak to the appropriateness of signage for the use and context, and**

- **Maintaining general consistency with Group 2 signage and context.**

**This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.**

Ground Signs Permitted by Sign Ordinance: This planned multi-use site is allowed up to two ground signs with a combined net area of 64 sq. ft., and a maximum height of 10' for monument style signs, based off 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.

Proposed Signage: The applicant is requesting a total of seven monument styled ground signs for the site (signs labeled A, B, C, and H on the location plan). Five of these signs are replacing existing signage and two new signs are proposed to be installed, one located at the driveway entrance at University Avenue, and the other at Vernon Boulevard. Sign A replaces the existing Hilldale sign mounted on a landscape wall at the intersection of North Midvale Boulevard and University Avenue, with a proposed net area of 98.44 sq. ft. The two Sign B locations replace the existing ground signs at the driveway entrances on North Midvale Boulevard, each with a proposed net area of 84.75 sq. ft. Sign C would replace two existing signs on North Midvale boulevard and North Segoe Road, and one new one on University Avenue, each with a net area of 32 sq. ft. Sign H is proposed to be installed at the northwestern intersection of Vernon Boulevard and Price Place on a wall of an elevated patio area, with a net area of 15.28 sq. ft. This makes the zoning lot combined total net area 379.22 sq. ft.

Staff Comments: Most of the proposed ground signs are replacing existing signage, with many of them many of them maintaining their existing dimensions. These signs are located at corners of major intersections or main access points to the zoning lot. Two new signs will be placed further south at an intersection and access point when the new development is constructed. The proposed signs consist of high-quality material and are uniform in colors and design. Furthermore, these signs create a sense of place, providing identification to vehicles and pedestrians entering the zoning lot. **Recommendation: Staff has no objection to the CDR request and recommends the UDC find the standards for CDR review, as well as the UDD 6 sign guidelines and requirements have been met. 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', 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 a total of 33 signs that are considered directional, wayfinding, or directory signs. Two of these signs (E1.2) would replace existing ground directory signs by the parking garage with wall mounted community board signs that would have information about events and news, as well as directory information, with each sign would have a net area of 32.29 sq. ft. The proposal also includes one community board as a double-sided monument styled ground sign (E1), displaying the same information as the two walls signs in the new area to be developed, having a total net area of 67.25 sq. ft. An additional five directory ground signs (E2) are scattered throughout the site, each with a net area of 36.25 sq. ft.

Sixteen signs are proposed for two parking garages near North Midvale. The existing signage would be replaced with simpler names (P01), along with new enter and exit signs (P02), and four new blade signs (P07) illuminating the letter "P" near the parking garage entrances. The net area for each parking garage name is about 17 sq. ft., the enter and exit signs are 5 sq. ft. each, and the projecting signs are 8 sq. ft. each.

The remaining nine signs are for directing additional parking areas on site and providing direction to key site features. Two vehicular directional signs (D1) would have a net area of 11 sq. ft. each, four smaller vehicular directional signs (D2) would have a net area of 7 sq. ft. each, and the three tall destination directional signs (G) would have a net area of 14.78 sq. ft. each.

Staff Comments: The Hilldale Mall zoning lot consists of 32.28 acres, with all the amenities and stores entrances spread throughout and can be accessed from seven different access points among five different public streets. The proposed community board and directory signs, as well as the parking lot directional signage provide necessary guidance to navigate through the zoning lot to find a specific tenant or location. The existing parking garage signage is replacing existing signage that appears out of scale with the building with more modern and appropriately sized signage. The proposed signage incorporates similar colors, design, and branding found on the other ground signs proposed in this application, creating a uniform look. However, staff questions whether the destination directional signs proposed in this application are necessary and if they will create too much clutter. The letter of intent refers to this sign as a sign that will guide pedestrians to key site features and landmarks, but staff believes the community boards and directory signs would provide adequate direction, with the map showing the destination directional signs (G) and the community and directory signs (E1 and E2) placed relatively close to each other. Additionally, staff does not believe the destination directional signs provide useful direction, as most people coming to the site are looking for specific tenants. These signs would also be the only tall pole signs on the site, which could create clutter when considering the other street signs, light poles, and trees. **Recommendation: While staff has no strong objections to the proposed design of the various wayfinding and directional signage, staff requests the UDC review and make findings of the proposed signage related CDR Criteria No 2., especially as it relates to the demonstrated necessity as a result of a unique or unusual characteristic in the building site or surrounding environment that warrants the quantity proposed. Of particular concern are the destination signs (G), which are designed very similar to street signage and which appear to be located in close proximity to other wayfinding/directional signage.**

**This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.**