



ZONING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

March 27, 2024

PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 2222 East Washington Avenue
Project Name: East High School Campus
Application Type: Approval for Comprehensive Design Review of Signage
Legistar File ID # [82363](#)
Prepared By: Chrissy Thiele, Zoning Inspector

The applicant is requesting Comprehensive Design Review for signage at an existing public high school. The requests consist of an electronic message center ground sign, window graphics, and new wall signage. Landmarks Commission approved the proposed signage at this landmark site on March 18, 2024. The subject property is in the Campus Institutional (CI) District and abuts East Washington Avenue (6 lanes, 30 mph), North Fourth Street (2 lanes, 25 mph), East Johnson Street (2 lanes, 25 mph), and North Fifth Street (2 lanes, 25 mph).

Comprehensive Design Review and Approval Criteria. 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 square feet 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 the existing ground sign with an electronic message center sign while keeping the existing base. The ground sign will have an overall height of 13' 5" and a total net area of 62 sq. ft. The application also requests to retain a historic sign on East Washington Avenue, as well as install three non-illuminated wall signs, each on a different elevation of the schools that faces a street. The main proposed wall sign facing East Washington will have a total net area of 35.36 sq. ft., with the top of the sign installed 13' 9" above grade. The second wall sign is installed on the field house on the elevation facing North Fourth Street, having a total net area of 33.83 sq. ft., and located 31' 6" above grade. The last wall sign identifies the school's athletic center entrance and will have a total net area of 13.63 sq. ft. and installed 16' above the grade.

The applicant is also requesting for window signs that will comply with the sign code regulations for group two and three districts, as the sign ordinance does not permit window signs for properties in group one districts.

Staff Comments: While Sec. 31.043(3)(i) (Additional Sign Code Approvals) allows the UDC to approve an electronic changeable copy sign for a high school, the proposed ground sign does not meet the sign height and size permitted in Group One districts and therefore requires CDR approval. The existing ground sign was approved by the Urban Design Commission in 1999, but through a process different than Comprehensive Design Review. The bricks used for the base are like the bricks on the original construction of the East High School building, and by reusing the base for the electronic message sign the visual harmony between the sign and the school is maintained.

The proposed wall signage also requires CDR approval as some are larger in size than what the code permits and all three are higher than 12' above grade. The signs are simple in design while effective in directing visitors unfamiliar with the school layout to their destination. The CDR would also allow the original East High School sign carved above the main entrance doors, which has been in place since the school was built, to remain while also permitting the new Madison East High School sign, which also faces East Washington Avenue. The new sign is being proposed is non-illuminated, individual channel letters. The location will help identify the new accessible main entrance to the school. **Recommendation: Staff has no objection to the CDR request and recommends the UDC find the standards for CDR review have been met. This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.**