

City of Madison, Wisconsin

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**REPORT OF:** URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

**PRESENTED:** December 18, 2013

**TITLE:** 2102 West Beltline Highway –  
Amendment to an Existing Comprehensive  
Design Review for “Culver’s.” 14<sup>th</sup> Ald.  
Dist. (32470)

**REFERRED:**

**REREFERRED:**

**REPORTED BACK:**

**AUTHOR:** Alan J. Martin, Secretary

**ADOPTED:**

**POF:**

**DATED:** December 18, 2013

**ID NUMBER:**

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Members present were: Richard Wagner, Tom DeChant, Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Dawn O’Kroley, John Harrington.

**SUMMARY:**

At its meeting of December 18, 2013, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED FINAL APPROVAL** of an amendment to an existing Comprehensive design review for “Culver’s.”

Appearing on behalf of the project were Mary Beth Growney-Selene, Susan Bulgrin, Brian Haugen, Wayne Harris, Tom Farley, Delora Newton, Katie Bulgrin and Rich Modjeski.

Growney-Selene noted that this is an amendment to original comprehensive design review to deal with an issue of obstruction from a bike bridge. Bulgrin is owner of Culvers with Brian Haugen, General Manager for 17 years. In 1995 they first looked at property to construct the restaurant and its signage which had the best visibility. We now have obstruction of a bicycle bridge. Bulgrin is very supportive of the need to connect bicycle traffic as well as vehicular traffic. A significant issue is the visibility of the sign. The Culver “Oval” is obstructed by the mass of support structure of the bridge; you are not able to see the oval when approaching from east to west, because of this people are saying they can’t see the property. They are missing out on episodic traffic. They would just like to raise the oval elevation so that it would show over the top of the bridge. Growney-Selene noted that the key is the Culver logo and is critical for identification.

The site is 10 feet below the Beltline. The existing sign is 28 feet and it seems like it exceeds code and it does if you take the grade of the sign. It is actually 18 feet above the Beltline. They would like a 38 feet minus the 10 feet in elevation so we would become 6 feet in excess of the 22 foot code. Staff has been out to the site. Started talking about being 50 feet and worked their way down. The sign structure is 25 wide and 16 ½ tall and is massive. The current sign structure will not support the height from an engineering standpoint, if the new sign and the sign will have to be moved slightly to the north to avoid the current footing and by doing so they can keep the height 4 feet lower. They hope this is the least obtrusive remedy beyond the control of the business and property owner.

Tom Farley, registering in support and wishing to speak. Farley said the brand is crucial to Culvers. Used to be an A&W and they took the same structure and replaced the logo with the Culver one. When you lose one half of

the sign coming from the east it is a big problem. Numerous roofs and changes to Culvers building. The logo has stayed the same. It is the key to the business.

Wayne Harris, registering in support and wishing to speak. Harris stated that he had previously been an executive for McDonalds and that the restaurants that have good visible signs do good business. When they were looking for viable sites for a restaurant and found that the sight was not visible for good signage they walked away. Visible signage is imperative for a fast food restaurant. The sign he had in Ohio was worth about a \$1 million dollars per year in sales due to good visible signage and was good for 20 to 25 more jobs in that community. Jobs are affected by signage. He referred to a study from a NY Advisory Committee on the importance of signage and they found that 35 - 40% of visits in restaurants the customer said they saw the sign. Much of the business is due to impulse especially in this location where you have the University and the Alliant Center you have people moving through that you don't normally have through that area. Being part of a branding company he knows how important cycling is important to the Madison area. It draws businesses and consumers to the community.

Tucker stated that they measure height from the grade not from the grade of the highway. 1994 was when the original sign was approved. Site is very close to the bridge. The Birkenstone property is an example of same issue. This is critical to east standpoint. The bridge has had negative impacts on the surrounding properties. The sign would be shifted over slightly north.

Staff said looking at the Comprehensive Design Guidelines criteria, provision 31.043(4)(b)2 states "each element of the sign plan shall be found necessary due to unique or unusual design aspects in architecture or limitation in the building site and surrounding environment."

This situation speaks to this provision; where it is appropriate to make a finding in favor of the proposal and not provide for a precedent.

Staff stated that if this bridge structure blocks other businesses the other business would have to show significant hardship. There may be other proposals in near future.

Comments by the Commission were as follows:

- This is a unique situation.
- The existing electronic is an advertising piece. It may be modified to fit in context with the larger relocated sign.
- In regards to the "WiFi" sign it was noted that:
  - In the future we must include that all must be compliant with City Codes so we don't find non-complaint requests. Remove to be code compliant.

### **ACTION:**

On a motion by DeChant, seconded by Goodhart, the Urban Design Commission **GRANTED FINAL APPROVAL**. The motion was passed on a vote of (4-0). The motion cited that the increase in height of the ground sign was consistent with the requirements of Section 31.043(4)(b)2, M.G.O. and does not provide for a precedent and required address of the comments relevant to the relocation of the electronic readable copy sign and removal of the non-compliant "WiFi" sign.