

ZONING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

May 20, 2026



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 316 West Washington Avenue
Project Name: 316 West Washington Avenue
Application Type: Alteration to a Previously Approved Comprehensive Design Review
Legistar File ID # [92296](#)
Prepared By: Chrissy Thiele, Zoning Inspector; Jessica Vaughn, AICP, Urban Design Commission Secretary

The applicant is requesting to amend an existing Comprehensive Design Review for Signage for an existing commercial building in the downtown area. The original sign package for this building was approved by the Urban Design Commission secretary on July 19, 2016, which limited tenant wall signage on the first floor of the building and allowed for two ground signs, one on each street frontage (W Washington Avenue and W Mifflin Street), not to exceed 64 sq. ft. in net area. The applicant is seeking to modify this existing sign plan through Comprehensive Design Review to add three additional wall signs for the major tenants in the building, including those which are not located on the first floor. This site is located in the Urban Mixed-Use (UMX) Zoning District and abuts West Washington Avenue (two lanes, 25 mph) and West Mifflin Street (two lanes, 25 mph).

As part of the CDR request, the applicant is requesting:

- A total of four designated signable areas on the first floor West Washington Avenue elevation for the major tenants in the building, some of which will not be located on the ground floor. The CDR amendment is seeking two modifications to the Sign Ordinance, including size limitations and location. The proposed signage exceeds 40% of the signable area at 75% and the signable areas are not located as reasonably close to the tenant spaces as possible.
- As part of this CDR amendment, the applicant is updating the CDR to remove the ground sign previously approved along the W Washington Avenue frontage. This sign was never installed and the property owner no longer wishes to install it. The remaining ground sign on W Mifflin Street is code compliant.

Comprehensive Design Review - 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.*

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 multi-story buildings with more than one vertical occupancy, there may be up to two additional signable areas per façade displayed above the first story, with no limitation on the height of placement, but a total of only one sign per occupant, per façade.

Proposed Signage: The applicant is proposing a total of four 20' wide x 3' tall signable areas on the first story elevation facing West Washington Ave., with each signable area allowing a maximum sign net area of 45 sq. ft. or 75% of the signable area. The existing and future wall signs are to consist of individual channel letters, either internally illuminated or halo lit, mounted directly to the building.

Staff Comments: The building elevation facing W Washington has a limited number of reasonably sized signable areas due to the extensive windows, mural, and materials used on the building façade, which create architectural details breaking up potential signable areas. The UDC has also historically limited signage in the downtown area to no higher than the second story of buildings in order maintain consistency with the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines which speak to signage contributing to creating a positive building orientation to the street and an active pedestrian environment. While there are two consistent bands above the first story windows that would be permitted areas to install wall signage, the Sign Code limits the use of these areas for signage to the first-floor tenants only. Given the limitations for the placement of signage higher on buildings and the Sign Code limitations to locating signage as close to a tenant space as possible, businesses located on the upper floors are prevented from installing signage on the building (CDR Criterion No. 2).

The CDR application proposes four singable areas on the W Washington Avenue façade, above the first-floor windows. These signable areas would be available to any tenant within the building, not just the businesses on the first floor. This would allow larger businesses currently occupying spaces higher in the building signage facing the primary street. The proposed signable areas are equally balanced along the first-floor wall with plenty of space between the signable areas to prevent sign clutter, and the allowed wall signs will have a uniform design consisting of individual channel letters, either internally illuminated or halo lit (CDR Criterion No. 1).

As part of this approval, the applicant would limit the amount of ground signs to just one, the existing sign located on West Mifflin Street, which has a total net area of 32 sq. ft.

Recommendation: Staff have no objection to the CDR request and recommend that 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.