



Project Address: 1050 E. Washington Avenue
Application Type: Other – Signs in an UDD, Comprehensive Design Review Amendment
Legistar File ID # [70520](#)
Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary
 Matt Tucker, Building Inspection Director

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Fetch Rewards | Allie Novitske, Sign Art Studio

Project Description: The applicant is seeking Final Approval of a Comprehensive Design Review [signage] amendment to allow for additional signable areas above the first floor and for approval of a specific wall sign in Urban Design District No 8.

Approval Standards: The Urban Design Commission (“UDC”) is an **approving body** on this request. The project site is located in Urban Design District 8 (“UDD 8”), which notes that “*All development in the District (including, but not limited to new buildings or structures, additions to existing buildings or structures, **street graphics** and new parking facilities...) shall require approval of the Urban Design Commission...*”. As part of their review, the UDC shall evaluate signage for consistency with the design guidelines outlined in UDD 8, and in the UDC’s consistent practice of treating this area as an extension of the greater downtown area.

In addition, the proposed wall sign was not included in the original Comprehensive Design Review (“CDR”) approval, or UDC Final Approval. As such an amendment to the existing CDR is required to clarify the allowable signage on this elevation. As part of their review, the UDC shall also evaluate the proposed wall sign for consistency with the CDR review criteria as outlined in [Sec. 31.043\(4\)](#), MGO.

Project Background and Site Context

Project Background. Originally approved in January 2, 2019, the Arden, otherwise known as Lyric Phase 3, included the development of an 11-story mixed-use building, including commercial/retail, office and market rate residential uses, and a four-story building housing the Youth Arts Consortium ([Legistar No. 53254](#)). As part of the Final Approval, and as noted on the plans on file, sign areas and types were included on the final building elevations. In this case, the East Washington Avenue façade elevations included wall signs for first-floor tenant spaces and two projecting signs for the upper story tenant spaces, as pictured in the images below.





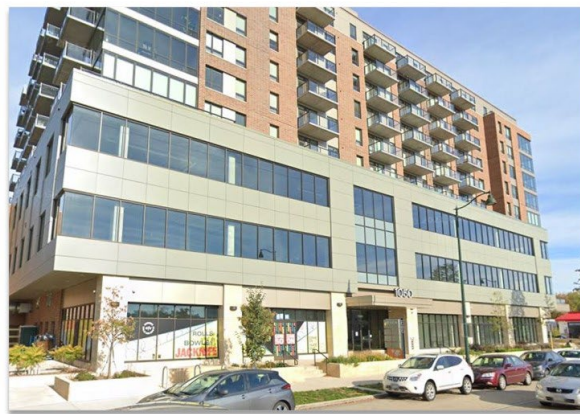
In March 2021, a CDR ([Legistar No. 64508](#)) was approved for the development that focused primarily on signage for the Madison Youth Arts Organization. In particular, the CDR included approvals for three ground signs. In addition, the CDR noted that *"signage for the Arden commercial tenants facing East Washington Avenue will also comply with the Sign Ordinance."* As noted above, when the building architecture was approved, two projecting signs were shown facing East Washington Avenue. The originally anticipated projecting signs comply with Chapter 31 and could be approved administratively. As proposed, the additional wall signs are not code compliant; they are in excess of the maximum permitted sign areas above the first floor. Such requests may only be reviewed and approved as part of a CDR.

The request to allow for up to five signable areas above the first floor requires an exception to the Sign Code, which can be approved via CDR. The proposed wall sign does comply with the Sign Code, but because it was not included in the original UDC Final Approval for building architecture, or the subsequent CDR approval, staff believes the only eligible signs above the first story facing East Washington Avenue are the identified projecting signs.

Site Context. For contextual purposes, please refer to the images provided below for existing signage within the project site block, sign types, and wall signage found within UDD 8.

Sign Types within UDD 8 – Project Site/Block

(from top to bottom: Lyric and Arden)

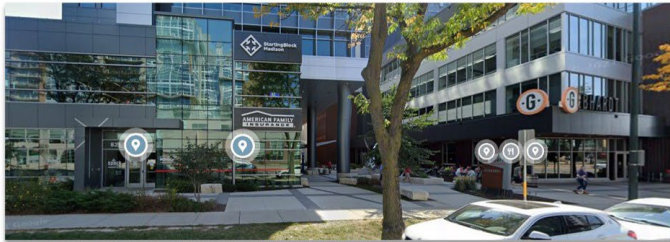


Sign Types within UDD 8

- Window signs on upper floors
- Multi-tenant projecting signs
- Projecting signs

(from bottom left to bottom right: Galaxy, Galaxy, Constellation)





Wall Signage within UDD 8

- Limited to two per street frontage on upper stories
- Clear sign areas
- CDR Approval

(from top left to bottom right: Spark, Gebhardt Building, Festival Foods)



Wall Signs Permitted by the Sign Code. Pursuant to Chapter 31, 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 space, each tenant is allowed a signable area as reasonably close to its tenant space as possible. The maximum net area of the sign shall be no more than forty percent (40%) 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 only one sign per occupant, per façade.*

Chapter 31 allows for up to **two additional signable areas** per street facing façade, above the first story, with no limitation on height of placement. With regard to the first floor signage, the code allows for one signable area per tenant space, to be located as close to the tenant space as possible. As proposed, the five signable areas along the E Washington Avenue frontage are in excess of the maximum permitted sign areas above the first floor. Such requests may only be reviewed and approved as part of a CDR.

Design Considerations

Staff requests the Commission's feedback and findings on the design considerations noted below as they relate to the sign guidelines and requirements in UDD 8 and the CDR review and approval criteria. A staff analysis is included below as it relates to the UDD 8 design guidelines and requirements as well as CDR review and approval criteria, including those that specifically speak to preferred sign types, illumination, and character, as well as the CDR criteria that speaks to creating visual harmony, maintaining character consistent with redevelopment in the corridor and generally consistent with signage in the greater downtown area, and mitigating sign limitations as a result of a unique design aesthetic.

1. **Proposed Sign Type.** Is the shift from a projecting sign type to a wall sign type consistent with design intent of the Final Approval, applicable UDD 8 design guidelines, and CDR review criteria?

Consideration should be given to the overall design aesthetic and existing context within UDD 8, and the appropriateness of the proposed sign type as it relates to the tenant space, streetscape, and building architecture. As indicated in the site context photos provided above, while various sign types are existing

within the district, new development has primarily utilized window and projecting signage, especially on upper stories.

Staff Analysis: Staff has concerns with the shift in sign type as it relates to consistency with both UDD 8 design guidelines and CDR review criteria. While the proposed sign type is among the preferred sign types in UDD 8, original approvals only anticipated wall signage for ground floor tenant spaces. As shown in the Final Approval plans above, projecting signage was anticipated for upper story tenant spaces, in two locations within vertical elements, which resulted in an overall clean, simple building façade and articulation within the building’s vertical elements. As proposed, the wall signage for upper story tenants would increase the overall amount of signage on the building’s front façade. In conjunction with the ground floor tenant spaces, this would result in visual clutter along the building’s street facing façade. In addition, a shift in practice to allow for wall signs as requested may result in similar requests at other properties in the corridor, which currently do not have wall signs above the second story. In at least one case, such an allowance would be a reversal of the UDC’s decision for signage approval (The Constellation).

Similarly, with regard to sign locations or signable areas, the building design does not lend itself to clearly identifiable sign areas other than the three vertical elements on the elevations, two of which were anticipated to host signage. As shown in the Final Approval elevations, the projecting signs were proportional to and centered within the two identifiable sign areas. While the proposed wall signs could certainly be centered within the proposed sign areas noted in the application materials, they are not proportional to the horizontal building element in which they would be mounted.

Lastly, given the streetscape elements, traffic speeds, and East Washington Avenue street classification, the visibility of wall mounted signage will undoubtedly be limited, not only from a pedestrian perspective, but also by vehicles passing by. Therefore the size and location of wall mounted signage plays a key role in the overall visibility of the sign. A larger projecting sign, on the other hand, mounted above the first story would result in a higher level of visibility, free from impediments.

Overall, staff is not supportive of the shift in sign type. Maintaining the projecting sign type would not only be consistent with original approvals, but also limit sign clutter, potentially improve sign visibility, and also maintain the overall building design aesthetic.

2. **Proposed Sign Location.** Are the proposed wall sign areas (five total) consistent with the applicable UDD 8 design guidelines and CDR review criteria, including those that speak to the integration of signage with architectural details, materials, style, character, etc.?

Due consideration should not only be given to the proposed wall sign, but also potential future signage as it relates to both its location above the first story, as well as the quantity of signage in terms of creating visual clutter.

With regard to signage above the first floor, historically, within UDD 8, signage above the first floor has been primarily approved through the CDR process, for predominantly commercial buildings, where clearly identifiable sign areas were existing. In this case, while projecting sign areas were depicted generally at the second floor level, specific wall sign areas at or above the first floor were not previously presented. Specific examples within the district where wall signage above the first floor have been approved, include the Gebhardt Building and the Spark. In both of these cases, the buildings were strictly nonresidential, and the proposed wall signage above the first floor was limited to two signs per street frontage and which

were located within clearly identifiable sign areas. These wall signs were reviewed and approved as part of CDR requests. As it relates to the subject proposal, except for the vertical elements that were originally identified on the Final Approval elevations, the architectural detailing of the building does not lend itself to clearly identifiable wall sign areas as it relates to the upper story tenant spaces. The Final Approval architectural elevations identify projecting signage as the anticipated sign type (two total) and corresponding sign areas.

With regard to sign quantity, as noted above, wall signage above the first story that has been approved in UDD 8 has been limited to no more than two signs per street frontage, and only on the south side of the street, in buildings entirely comprised of nonresidential uses. As proposed, five wall sign areas are shown across the East Washington Avenue building façade, all above the first floor. As noted above, the UDC Final Approval of the building architecture indicated both specific locations for signs and types of signs in these locations. A shift from projecting signs to wall signs would negatively impact the overall appearance of the building by introducing additional sign areas and increase the number of signs on the building elevations. Coupled with the ground floor tenant signage, the building would lose its simple, clean appearance.

Staff Analysis Summary: As noted in both the historical precedent and contextual images provided above, wall signage has been historically limited throughout the corridor, in terms of location and number. As proposed, the additional wall signage introduces sign areas that were not anticipated as part of the original design intent, and that accentuate the building's horizontal elements versus the vertical. Staff has concerns with regard to the proposed increase in the number of signs on the street facing building façade, as well as maintaining consistency within the corridor and original design intent. Introducing additional signage, beyond what the code would allow and that is inconsistent with past practices, could potentially lead to sign clutter and unintentionally create precedence within the corridor and district.

Given the Final Approval plans and visibility of the project site, a unique or unusual design aspect does not present itself in this case; there are identifiable sign areas and sign types that are possible. However, given the applicant's request for multiple signs for upper story tenants, consideration could be given to allowing additional signage that is consistent and compatible with that of the original design intent. Potential solutions could include allowing for additional projecting signage or allowing for co-location opportunities and larger projecting signs, perhaps even one for each vertical element, above the first floor. Such signage appears to be prevalent in the district and generally consistent with UDD 8 guidelines.

3. **Precedential Considerations.** In reviewing past practices, wall signage above the first story has been limited within the East Washington Avenue corridor. As noted above, past Comprehensive Design Review approvals have limited wall signage in number (two per street frontage) and location (to clearly identifiable sign areas that are integrated in the overall building architecture). Staff notes concerns with regard to the proposed wall sign areas in terms of quantity and location, specifically as it relates to:

- Consistency with past practices within the corridor and prevalent sign types;
- The overall impact to the general appearance of the building façade and creating sign clutter;
- Sign visibility given the streetscape, traffic speeds, street classification, etc.; and
- Lack of a clearly identifiable sign area.

Recommendations and Conditions

Staff recommends that the UDC review the request and make findings based on the relevant guidelines and standards of UDD 8 Sec. 33.24(15) and the CDR review and approval standards pursuant to [Sec. 31.043](#)(4), MGO.

Overall, given the surrounding context and the limited use of wall signs on mixed-use buildings, not only within UDD 8, but also within the immediate context, staff is **not** supportive of the proposed change in sign type, or the number of wall sign areas as noted in the application materials. More specifically, staff finds that the proposed five wall signs are not consistent with UDD 8 design guidelines that speak to preferred sign types, illumination, and character, as well as the CDR criteria that speaks to creating visual harmony, maintaining character, and mitigating sign limitations as a result of a unique design aesthetic.

If the Commission finds that the proposed wall sign and sign areas are generally consistent with design guidelines and requirements of UDD 8, as well as the CDR review and approval criteria, staff requests the Commission provide findings on the following items in their formal motion:

- Signage locations above the first story both in relationship to the subject application, as well as generally within UDD 8; and
- Sign types as it relates to the subject proposal.

UDD 8 – Sign Design Guidelines – Staff Analysis - Section 33.24(15)(e)(10)(a), MGO:

- i. Preferred sign types include **building mounted signs, window signs, projecting signs, and awning signs.**
- ii. Signs should be simple and easy to read.
- iii. Sign colors should relate to and complement the primary colors of the building facade.
- iv. Sign design and placement should **fit the character of the building** and not obscure architectural details.
- v. Signage should generally be centered within the prescribed signable area of the building.
- vi. Plastic box signs are highly discouraged.
- vii. Signs displaying illuminated copy should be designed so that when illuminated, the sign appears to have light-colored copy on a dark or non-illuminated background.
- viii. Individually mounted backlit letters are an encouraged form of signage.
- ix. The use of small, well-designed **building-mounted light fixtures** is a preferred method of illuminating signage.
- x. Freestanding signs should be attractively designed. Signs should be coordinated with adjoining properties and public street signage to avoid visual clutter.

Comprehensive Design Review – Review Criteria – Staff Analysis - Section 31.043(4)(b), MGO:

1. The proposal 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 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 proposal shall not violate any of the stated purposes described in Secs. 31.02(1) and 33.24(2).
4. All signs must meet minimum construction requirements under Sec.31.04(5).
5. The proposal 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 proposal 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 proposal 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.