



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

**Project Title:** Amending Sections 28.060 & 28.071 of the Madison General Ordinance (Zoning Code)  
Add Exemption for Door & Window Requirements for Civic/Institutional Buildings

**Review Type:** Ordinance – Common Council Referral

**Legistar File ID #:** [78688](#)

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## Background Information

The Urban Design Commission (UDC) is being asked to provide an advisory recommendation on proposed changes to the Zoning Code. After a recommendation from the UDC, the proposed ordinance is scheduled to receive an advisory recommendation from the Plan Commission, with the Common Council making the final decision.

The proposed code change would add an exemption for Civic and Institutional buildings from having to meet certain door and window opening requirements.

As a reference, Madison General Ordinance (MGO) Sections 28.060 and 28.071 include detailed design standards for developments within the “Mixed-Use and Commercial” and “Downtown and Urban” zoning districts, respectively. These standards address a variety of considerations, including design requirements related to entrance orientation, façade articulation, exterior building materials, and door and window opening requirements. Such standards are in addition to the underlying bulk requirements for each zoning district or other specified building form requirements. These are not standards that can be waived or modified by the UDC or Plan Commission.

Specifically related to door and windows, the Downtown and Urban Zoning District standards require that for street-facing facades with ground-story non-residential uses, the ground-story door and window openings shall comprise a minimum of fifty percent of the facade area, and that for all buildings, upper story openings shall comprise a minimum of 15% of the façade per story. Likewise in the Commercial and Mixed Use zoning districts, upper level standards are very similar, while the ground level standards include a more complex formula requiring 60% total glazing along the length and at least 40% of the areas of the ground floor of the primary street façade, plus at least 50% of the windows on the primary street façade must have a lower sill within three feet of grade.

The proposed exemption is limited only to the aforementioned standards related to Door and/or Window Openings and would only apply to Civic or Institutional Buildings. As noted above, the current standards include relatively prescriptive requirements regarding the percentage of door and window openings required on a façade; requirements that are typically largely reflected in residential, office, hotel, and mixed-use building forms. Due to their prescriptive nature, such standards do not always reflect design considerations related to other types of building forms such as places of worship, museums, auditoriums/halls, or other uses that may traditionally have different window patterning or limitations beyond those of a typical residential or mixed-use building as a result of their use. While such benchmarks can be important to promote active facades, staff does not believe that the strict application of these standards for the relatively small number of civic and institutional buildings would necessarily result in more context-appropriate design, or a design that positively reflects form and function. Arguably, staff believes that the removing of the standard would also provide the UDC more discretion in determining whether a particular façade composition meets the applicable standards or guidelines.

Additionally, the proposed change does not alter other standards or processes, including UDC’s review for developments within Urban Design Districts, Planned Developments, or developments located in the Downtown Core or Urban Mixed Use zoning districts in which UDC review and/or approval is required.

As far as background, staff notes that this amendment has been proposed in response to the Wisconsin History Center development on the Capitol Square. While that development appears likely to meet the ground floor glazing requirements, as a result of the programming needs of the use, it has proven difficult to meet the upper level floors glazing requirements. While this code modification would impact that development, Planning staff believes such a change could also provide flexibility for Civic and Institutional Building forms throughout the City.

Planning Division staff support this amendment.