

ZONING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

May 11, 2022



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 231 South Pinckney Street
Project Name: Embassy Suites
Application Type: Approval for Comprehensive Design Review of Signage
Legistar File ID # [70889](#)
Prepared By: Chrissy Thiele, Zoning Inspector
Reviewed By: Matt Tucker, Building Inspection Director

The applicant is requesting Comprehensive Design Review of signage for the new Judge Doyle Square hotel currently under construction. The property is part of a Planned Development (PD) district, which allows for signs as permitted in a Downtown Core (DC) district. The applicant is requesting two projecting signs larger than what the code would permit, two wall signs on the same street-facing elevation, as well as an above canopy sign. This lot abuts East Doty Street (two lanes, 25 mph), South Pinckney Street (two lanes, 25 mph), and East Wilson Street (two lanes, 25 mph).

Note: Of the examples provide in the application, the sign for Rubin's Furniture is not a legal sign, and no permit or approval has been granted for this sign.

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.*

Projecting Signs Permitted per Sign Ordinance: Occupants may display a total of one (1) projecting sign on a facade facing a street. This zoning lot is allowed a projecting sign of 20 sq. ft. per side based on the number of traffic lanes.

Proposed Signage: The applicant is proposing two projecting signs, one facing East Doty Street and the other facing East Wilson Street. Both signs would be 18' x 1.67', or 30 sq. ft. per side. Both signs would extend above the third story. The signs consist of internally illuminated cabinets with routed out aluminum faces and backed with acrylic, and a Lexan faces for the logo.

Staff Comments: Doty and Wilson Street consist of one way traffic, each being two lanes and 25 mph. The overall width of the right-of-way is the typical 66 feet. The applicant indicates in their submittal materials that the larger projecting signs, located higher on the building are critical for visibility from busy one-way streets, would provide better legibility, and would vehicular turning on to South Pinckney Street. The examples provided show a code compliant sign with 20 sq. ft. per side and 10-foot clearance from grade, and the desired signage 30 sq. ft. per side. The proposed signs would also be higher on the building, with the projecting sign on Doty Street having a 13.75-foot of clearance from grade, sitting just under the fourth floor, and the projecting sign on Wilson Street would have a 16.5-foot clearance from grade, sitting above the third floor. The applicant also provided examples of other hotels downtown, most of which have also received CDR approval from UDC (the AC Hotel and Inn at the Park). The image of the Inn at the Park's projecting sign shown in the submittal is a code-compliant sign at 16.5 sq. ft. per side.

The provided renderings do not appear to match the elevations shown on the same page on the upper right corner. And though it is can be difficult to show an accurate representation for a project that is yet to be built, staff believes the provided renderings may not be accurate representations of the actual view of the signs, as pedestrians and motorists will view the site and signs. Instead the provided views appear to be elongated, making the sign appear farther away than it will actually be when viewed from the road. Recent photographs of the site have been attached to the Legistar file for this request.

Signage in the greater downtown area tends to be placed typically at the first story, where it is more in scale with the pedestrian and vehicular line of view. Signs placed higher on buildings can be appropriate, when limitations of the building site or other factors relevant to the particular property present challenge in view-ability for the sign. Staff believes sufficient evidence has not been provided to justify the request for projecting signs larger than 20 sq. ft. per side. Staff also believes the request for the projecting signs to be placed higher than 10 feet above grade does not aide in the visibility of the sign, as it is intended to be viewed. Therefore, staff recommends a placement closer to the 10-foot clearance minimum from grade, which is sufficient enough to be seen from the street; and if the signs were placed any higher on the building, they would go unnoticed. **Recommendation: Staff does not believe the applicant has satisfied the criteria for CDR approval for projecting signs larger than what the code permits, and feels the code compliant projecting signs are sufficient. Staff recommends the UDC find the criteria for CDR review have not been met and refer the request for more information or approve the projecting sign with a maximum net area of 20 sq. ft. per side and a placement near the 10-foot minimum grade clearance. This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.**

Canopy Signs Permitted per Sign Ordinance: Summarizing Section 31.071, MGO, signs may be displayed on a canopy fascia in lieu of a wall sign. The signable area for a canopy fascia sign shall not project beyond the limits of the canopy in any direction, and shall be no wider than the width of the canopy. Any canopy fascia sign shall be in lieu of an above-canopy or below-canopy signage.

Above-canopy signs can be installed instead of canopy fascia signs, but are restricted to the business name and logo. The sign shall consist of freestanding characters and are limited to a maximum height of 2 feet. A logo is also permitted, however it is not limited in height. Instead the logo may only have a maximum net area of 4 sq. ft. These signs also cannot be wider than the width of the canopy or the corresponding façade, whichever is narrower. Above-canopy signage may not project further than from the building than the canopy to which it is attached and a sign that crosses architectural detail may not be displayed closer than 3 feet from the nearest face of the building.

Proposed Signage: The proposed canopy signage consists of internally illuminated individual channel letters and a box logo. The sign is a mix between an above-canopy and canopy fascia sign, with the lettering placed above the canopy and the logo placed on and above the canopy fascia. This causes the logo portion above the sign to project forward of the canopy to which it is attached. The application shows the proposed size of the logo to be 7 sq. ft. in net area, with the overall height of 3 feet. The rest of the sign has channel letters with an overall height of 1.5 feet. The total net area of the proposed sign is 52.25 sq. ft.

Staff Comments: The applicant indicates the code compliant sign is so small, the sign is rendered illegible and not commensurate with the scale of the building, while the proposed sign would be more legible and reinforce the entry position. The examples provided show a code compliant above canopy sign, which has a logo with an overall height of 2 feet and 1-foot tall channel letters, and then the desired sign would increase the logo height by 1-foot, but the letter height increase by only 6 inches. The logo would also not comply with code requirements for an above-canopy sign, as it would extend beyond and be partially mounted on the canopy fascia.

Staff agrees that due to the requested branding of the hotel, the example noted as code compliant would appear with lettering that may be too small and not proportional with the scale of the building, and a larger sign could be more appropriate. However, staff does not believe the proposed sign would be of an appropriate scale either. The code permits channel letters with an overall height of 2 feet, yet it appears the desired branding requires the logo to be larger with the hotel font name smaller. Therefore, the desired sign has a logo element that is too large per code, while the individual letters are 25% under the maximum height allowed. The photos of other hotels near the capitol square show an above canopy sign for the AC Hotel, which that CDR approval consisted of 2-foot tall channel letters, which is more in scale with the building. Staff believes it could be appropriate for the logo to be removed and the name of the hotel to remain, with the letter height increased to 2 feet. This would create a sign more in scale with the hotel. **Recommendation: Staff does not believe the applicant has satisfied the criteria for CDR approval for the canopy sign, and recommends the UDC find the criteria for CDR review have not been met and refer the request for more information or approve an above canopy sign consisting solely of individual channel letters not to exceed 2 feet in height. This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.**

Wall Signs Permitted per Sign Ordinance: Summarizing Section 31.07, MGO, there shall be one signable area for each façade facing a street or parking lot 33 feet in width or greater. For a single occupancy, stand-alone, non-residential building with twenty-five thousand (25,000) square feet or more in floor area, or a non-residential occupancy or tenant space with twenty-five thousand (25,000) square feet or more in floor area in a multi-tenant building, the maximum net area of all wall signs shall be thirty percent (30%) of the signable area. In no case shall a wall sign exceed one hundred twenty (120) square feet in net area

Proposed Signage: The applicant is requesting two wall signs, one on either side of the entrance located on South Pinckney Street. These signs are identified as the hotel plaques in the application. Each sign would have a total net area of 1.875 sq. ft. Each sign appears to be no more than 30% of the signable area, however staff is

not able to confirm this as the signable area dimensions were not provided. These signs are made of steel with etched graphics.

Staff Comments: As the applicant is already proposing an above canopy sign on front facade, a wall sign is not permissible, and therefore must be approved with a CDR exception. The applicant states the two proposed wall signs are important identification for pedestrians on South Pinckney Street, as the above-canopy sign would not be visible. The two signs would also create a symmetrical look and reinforces the building's entry. The signs are small, oriented at a pedestrian scale, and would blend in with the building material. **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.**

Notes:

- Applicant shall add the note that all other signage not addressed in this CDR comply with Chapter 31.

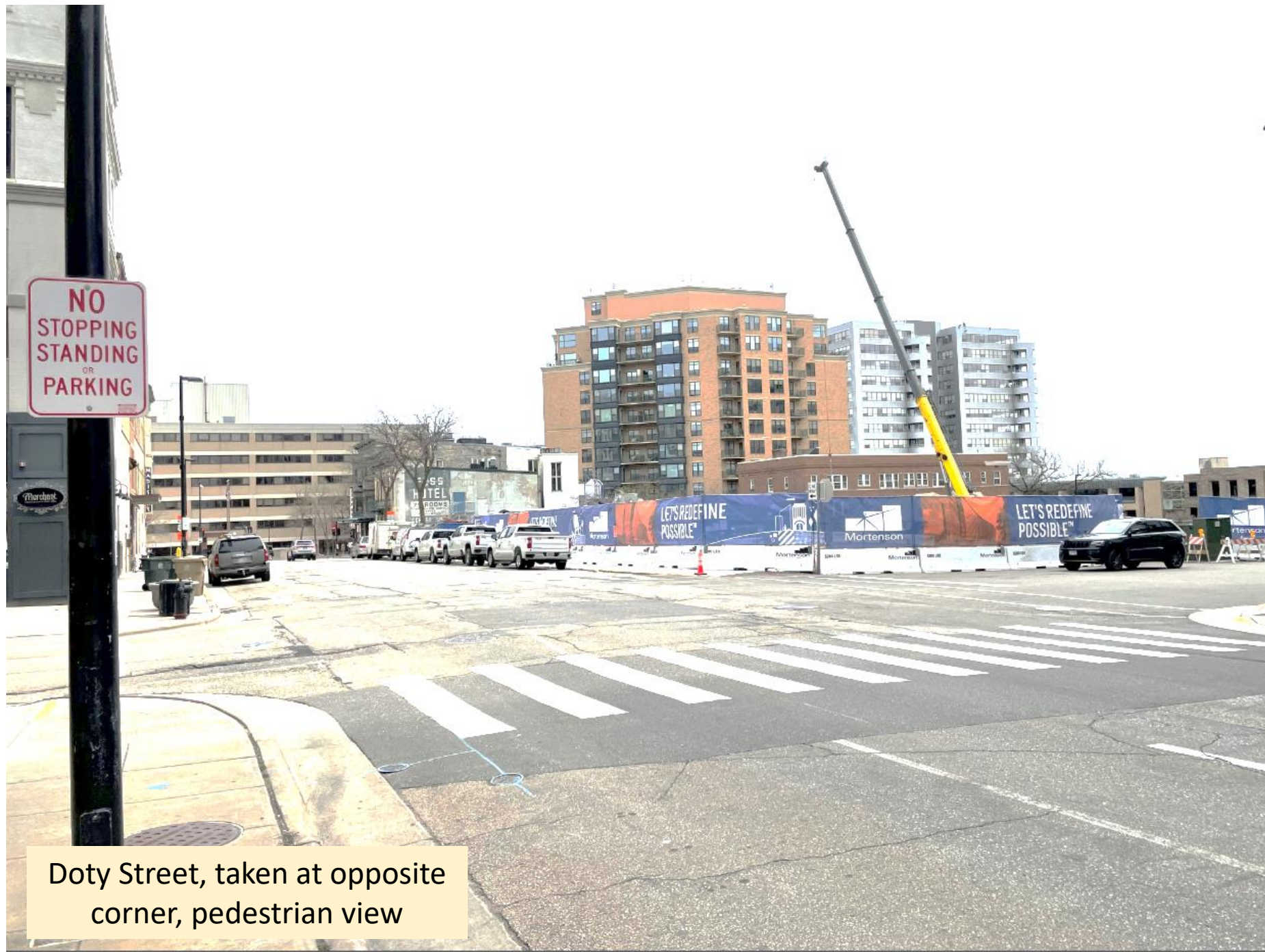


Wilson Street, taken at opposite corner, pedestrian view





Doty Street, taken near
same-side corner,
motor vehicle view



Doty Street, taken at opposite corner, pedestrian view



Taken near ramp entrance,
motor vehicle view