

ZONING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

March 5, 2025



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 849 East Washington Avenue
Project Name: Baker's Place
Application Type: Comprehensive Design Review for Signage
Legistar File ID # [87165](#)
Prepared By: Chrissy Thiele, Zoning Inspector; Lisa McNabola, Development Review Planner

The applicant is requesting a Comprehensive Design Review (CDR) for signage for a new mixed-use development that consists of two buildings with a combined commercial floor area of 10,000 sq. ft. and 226 dwelling units. The parcel is in the Traditional Employment (TE) Zoning District, as well as Urban Design District No. 8, and abuts E Washington Avenue (35 mph, 6 lanes), S Paterson Street (25 mph, 2 lanes) and E Main Street (25 mph, 2 lanes). As part of the CDR request, the applicant is requesting:

- Multiple projecting signs that do not face a street, including those that are internal to the site, oriented towards the "alleyway,"
- Two projecting signs facing E Washington Avenue that are larger than what the code would allow (12 sq. ft.) at 14 sq. ft.,
- Two legacy signs, which are painted on the building, and
- One ground sign.

Comprehensive Design Review and 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.

Urban Design District No. 8 Sign Guidelines

Section 33.24(15)(e)10., Signage Guidelines for Urban Design District No. 8, indicates the Urban Design Commission shall consider in each case those of the following guidelines as may be appropriate to signage:

a. Guidelines.

- 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.*

Projecting Signs Permitted per Sign Ordinance: Summarizing Section 31.09, occupants may display a total of one projecting sign on a façade facing a street or on a corner of a building. This zoning lot is allowed one projecting sign, 32 sq. ft. per side for the elevation facing E Washington Avenue and 20 sq. ft. per side for projecting signs facing S Paterson Street and E Main Street. Projecting signs must vertically clear any pedestrian area by at least ten (10) feet and vehicular ways by at least fourteen (14) feet. Also, if a ground and projecting sign are displayed on the same a zoning lot, only one of such signs where permitted may exceed 12 sq. ft. in net area.

Proposed Signage: The applicant is requesting five projecting signs facing the “alleyway,” each with a net area of 4.22 sq. ft. and have a 9-foot vertical clearance from grade, instead of 10 feet. The applicant is proposing external illumination of these signs. The applicant is also requesting up to two projecting signs facing E Washington Avenue, each not to exceed 14 sq. ft. in net area.

Staff Comments: This site is uniquely designed to have a plaza-like space between the two buildings (labeled the “alleyway”), where most of the primary entrances to the commercial tenant spaces are located. The projecting signs would provide better visibility for pedestrians walking by than wall signs or window signage, however this elevation does not face a street, and there would be more than one projecting sign; CDR approval is needed. CDR approval is also needed for the required vertical clearance, as the building façade limits the projecting sign from being installed high enough to provide a 10-foot clearance from grade. The signs are designed to have a

uniform look with each other and the proposed ground sign. With regard to these projecting signs, staff has recommended two conditions of approval to ensure the proposed external illumination is appropriate and complies with the City's ordinances.

The applicant also needs CDR approval for having both a ground sign and projecting sign larger than 12 sq. ft. The request is for a 27 sq. ft. ground sign located at the entrance of the "alleyway" and two projecting signs up to 14 sq. ft. each on the E Washington Avenue façade. The requested sizes for these projecting signs are smaller than what would be permitted by code without the ground sign (20 sq. ft.) but sufficient in size to provide identification to the tenant spaces facing the street and are in scale with the development. Given that projecting signs are a preferred sign type, and the size of the signs are limited to 4.22 and 14 sq. ft., staff believes that the proposed signs are generally consistent with the UDD No. 8 guidelines for signage.

Recommendation: Staff has no objection to the CDR request and recommends the UDC find the standards for CDR review for signage have been met, as well as UDD No. 8 guidelines for signage have been met, subject to the recommended conditions of approval. This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.

Ground Signs Permitted per Sign Ordinance: This zoning lot is allowed up to two ground signs with a combined net area of 144 sq. ft., and a maximum height of 11 feet for monument-style signs, based off the prevailing speeds and number of traffic lanes. Also, if a ground and projecting signs are displayed on the same a zoning lot, only one of such signs where permitted may exceed 12 sq. ft. in net area.

Proposed Signage: The applicant is requesting a double-sided externally illuminated monument styled ground sign located at the entrance of the "alleyway," with a total net area of 27 sq. ft.

Staff Comments: As the applicant is requesting both projecting signs on the E Washington Avenue elevation and a ground sign to be larger than 12 sq. ft., CDR approval is required. The requested ground sign creates a sense of place for the property and helps identify the entrance to the "alleyway" where most of the primary commercial entrances are located. The proposed ground sign itself complies in height and size and is of similar color and materials as the projecting signs proposed for the "alleyway," creating a uniform look. Staff have recommended two conditions of approval to ensure the ground sign illumination is appropriate and complies with the City's ordinances. Given the design and location of the ground sign, staff believes that the proposed sign is generally consistent with the UDD No. 8 guidelines for signage subject to the recommended conditions of approval.

Recommendation: Staff has no objection to the CDR request and recommends the UDC find the standards for CDR review for signage have been met, as well as UDD No. 8 requirements for signage have been met, subject to the recommended conditions of approval. This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.

Legacy Signage Permitted per Sign Ordinance: After a public hearing as provided in Sec. 33.24(4)(e)3., the UDC may permit a "Legacy Sign" as follows:

One or more wall signs on a building that was constructed in whole or in part for a commercial or employment use, if the proposed sign or signs depict solely one or more of the following:

- 1. Business name;*
- 2. Name of the building;*
- 3. Logo;*

4. *Description of an accessory use that was accessory to a prior use of the building or zoning lot (may include a product name);*
5. *An exact replica of a known prior sign displayed on the building.*

Each of the elements listed in 1. through 5. above, if included in the sign in question, must be found to have a provable, demonstrated historical relationship to a prior sign on the building that pre-dates 1940 or to a prior use of the building that pre-dates 1940. The UDC shall find that there is direct historical relationship between the proposed sign and a pre-1940 use of the building.

The UDC shall approve the materials, design, size, and location of the sign with specificity and the proposed sign shall match the original to the extent that any details of the original sign are known. The sign must blend appropriately with the historic nature of the building and shall not be illuminated. The location and size of the sign must be found by the Urban Design Commission not to interfere with existing signage on the zoning lot. If the appearance of a prior sign is known, the proposed sign shall match the prior sign completely and this will satisfy the criteria of this section. A sign that includes the name of a business or product that is not currently on the premises of the building cannot be approved unless the business or product is no longer in existence, or unless the business or product name can be shown to be commonly known as the name of the building. This section shall not be used to approve an advertising sign or off-premise sign as defined in this ordinance.

Number and Location of Legacy Signs . Legacy signs under this section may be approved on not more than two (2) façades per building. There is no limit to the number of legacy signs per façade but each sign must be found to be eligible under sub. (j)1. through 5. above.

A legacy sign shall take the place of, not be in addition to, a wall sign that would otherwise be allowable under Sec. 31.07(2)(a) and (b), except that a legacy sign may not be approved as an alternative to Secs. 31.07(2)(a)1. or 2. and may not be approved as a roof or above-roof sign. A legacy sign also shall not be approved in lieu of a wall sign under Secs. 31.07(5) or (6). The UDC shall consider all existing wall signs on the façade when considering an application for a legacy sign. Legacy signs may only be displayed within an allowable signable area as defined in Secs. 31.07(2)(b) and 31.03(2), unless the proposed sign is an exact replica of a prior known sign on that building and the location of the prior sign is also known, in which case the sign may be displayed in the prior location, as long as the building exterior has not been significantly modified in that location.

No Additional Wall Signs . Once a permit has been approved for legacy sign(s) on a façade under this section, no new permits for wall signs will be issued.

Proposed Signage: The applicant proposes to repaint two faded signs on the main building (one on the north elevation and the other on the south elevation of the building), both of which say Gardner Baking Co. Both are an exact replica of the known prior sign displayed on the building, a condition of additional sign code approvals UDC can grant (31.043(3)(j)). No other signage is being requested on these elevations.

Staff Comments: These styles of signs are unique to Madison, having approved only a few somewhat similar signs in the past. The repainting of the signs will add to the historic and industrial look of the building, as well as create a sense of place. The proposal is an additional approval UDC can grant, however since this applicant is

requesting CDR approval for other signage on site, this is also being requested through the CDR process. Staff believes that the legacy signs are generally consistent with the UDD No. 8 guidelines for signage.

Recommendation: Staff has no objection to the CDR request and recommends the UDC find the standards for CDR review for signage have been met, as well as UDD No. 8 requirements for signage have been met. This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.

Wall Signs Permitted per Sign Ordinance: Summarizing 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.

Proposed Wall Signage: The applicant is requesting that the tenant spaces in the building facing E Washington Avenue be allowed wall signage as permitted in the Sign Ordinance. As of now, there are two tenant spaces along E Washington Avenue, but the request would permit more signage if the building is modified to have more commercial spaces. Wall mounted signage will consist of individually or raceway mounted channel letters, routed face cabinet signage with acrylic backed letters or push-throughs and non-illuminated dimensional lettering. No plastic slideface or multi-tenant cabinet signs will be allowed on this façade.

Staff Comments: The proposed sign will comply with the sign ordinance and does not need any exceptions. Although the applicant is proposing to allow cabinet signage, it would not be plastic slideface which is discouraged in UDD No. 8. Staff believes that the proposed signs are generally consistent with the UDD No. 8 guidelines for signage.

Recommendation: Staff has no objection to the CDR request and recommends the UDC find the standards for CDR review for signage have been met, as well as UDD No. 8 requirements for signage have been met. This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.

Canopy Signs Permitted per Sign Ordinance: Summarizing Section 31.071, 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 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, be constructed of freestanding characters and the logo, have a max height of 2' and the rest of the logo being a max size 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 from the building than the canopy to which it is attached and a sign that crosses architectural detail may not be displayed closer than three feet from the nearest face of the building.

Proposed Signage: The applicant is requesting above-canopy signage facing E Main Street, located above the garage doors leading to the underground parking area. The letters are 7" tall and have a total net area of 3.74 sq. ft.

Staff Comments: The proposed sign complies with the sign ordinance in size and height and does not need any exceptions. Staff believes that the proposed signs are generally consistent with the UDD No. 8 guidelines for signage.

Recommendation: Staff has no objection to the CDR request and recommends the UDC find the standards for CDR review for signage have been met, as well as UDD No. 8 requirements for signage have been met. This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.

Conditions of Approval:

1. The applicant shall provide light fixture cutsheets for the proposed sign lighting for the ground and projecting signs.
2. The applicant is advised that all lighting shall comply with the City's ordinances that speak to lighting, including MGO 29.36, MGO Chapter 31, and MGO 33.24(15).