ZONING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

April 30, 2025

PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: **531 West Washington Avenue**

Project Name: **The Virtue**

Application Type: **Comprehensive Design Review for Signage**

Legistar File ID # 87953

Prepared By: Chrissy Thiele, Zoning Inspector

The applicant is requesting a Comprehensive Design Review for an above canopy sign for a new six-story apartment building with 140 units located in the central area of Madison. This parcel is in a Downtown Residential 2 (DR2) zoning district (Group 1 sign zone district) and fronts W Washington Ave., which is 2 lanes and 25 mph. The surrounding area has a mixture of building types and uses, with some having first floor commercial and residential units above, other multi-family buildings, and some small residential buildings.

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.*

Signs Permitted by Sign Ordinance: Summarizing MGO 31.14(1)(e), one wall and one ground sign per street frontage may be displayed identifying the entity, with a maximum of two ground signs and two wall signs per zoning lot. Signs, whether displayed on a wall or the ground, shall not exceed 12 sq. ft. in net area, nor be closer than ten feet to any lot line, except such signs may be increased in net area by one square foot for each additional foot that the sign is set back more than 12 feet from the street lot line. No sign under this section shall exceed 32 square feet in net area. No sign shall project higher than one story, or 12 feet above the curb level, whichever is lower.

Proposed Signage requiring CDR exception: The applicant is proposing one above canopy sign made of internally illuminated individual channel letters and a logo, with an overall height of 2' and a total net area of 19.67 sq. ft.

Staff Comments: The applicant is requesting an above canopy sign, which is not a permitted sign type for multi-family buildings in this district. The Sign Code only permits a 12 sq. ft. wall sign for Group 1 zone districts, including the Downtown Residential (DR) zoning districts. The building length is about 270 feet long and has a large amount of architectural elements that limit the amount of potential singable area spaces, reasonable in size and location, as well as in proximity to common building entrances. There are also a number of individual unit entries along the street-level as well. The proposed sign would be located above the main entrance to the building, which would assist visitors navigating the lobby/main entrance of the building. This sign would also be the only proposed sign identifying the site. As stated earlier, there are some neighboring buildings with first floor commercial spaces that have utilized above canopy signage, so the proposed signage would not appear out of character for the area. **Recommendation: Staff have no objection to the CDR request and recommends the UDC find the standards for CDR review and approval have been met. This recommendation is subject to further testimony and new information provided during the hearing.**