

ZONING STAFF REPORT

July 1, 2020



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

Project Address: 1954 E Washington Avenue
Project Name: The Grasskamp
Application Type: Approval for Comprehensive Design Review of Signage
Legistar File ID # [60814](#)
Prepared By: Chrissy Thiele, Zoning Inspector
Reviewed By: Matt Tucker, Zoning Administrator

The applicant is requesting Comprehensive Design Review for signage at a residential building complex, located at the corner of East Washington Ave., North 2nd St., and East Mifflin St. This property is located in a TR-U1 district, neighboring, surround primarily by single-family residences, but also has some 2 and 3-unit residential buildings, and a few commercial buildings. The construction of the building was reviewed and approved by UDC in February 2019. East Washington Ave. is six lanes with a posted speed of 35 mph, while East Mifflin St. and North 2nd St. are both two lanes with a posted speed limit of 25 mph.

Pursuant to Section 31.043(4)(b), 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.*

Signage Permitted per Sign Ordinance: Sec. 31.14(3)(e) allows for a church, hospital, school, and residential building complex in an TR-U1 district one wall and one ground signs 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 looking to install a projecting sign facing E. Washington Ave., which is not a permitted sign type in Group 1 districts. The applicant is requesting for the sign to be either 20 sq. ft. or 32 sq. ft. per side, with a preference for the 32 sq. ft. sign option. The proposed sign is to be located at the top of the third-story of the building. Both options are not proposed for illumination. The desired sign is equal to the largest size and highest placement allowance for any projecting sign in Group 2 or Group 3 districts.

Staff Comments: The newly constructed apartment building is located 24.5 feet away from the property line of E. Washington Avenue. Under the sign ordinance, a double sided ground sign would be allowed, with a maximum net area of about 10 sq. ft. per side, set back 20' from the property line. The ordinance also allows a wall sign up to 24 sq. ft., no higher than 12' above the curb height for this building.

East Washington Avenue has a right-of-way width of about 135', is six lanes with a boulevard, and a 35 mph speed limit. These factors lend to the visibility argument for possibly allowing a larger and taller sign than otherwise permissible. The architecture of the new building has limited space for a wall sign due to articulation. A projecting sign would complement the design of the building. A projecting sign would also be more legible considering factors noted above.

The petitioner describes the area as having a more "commercial feel" to which staff disagrees. This development is primarily surrounded by low density housing (single or two family dwellings) in adjacent blocks and across the street. A projecting sign with a net area of appropriate size and height could be compatible with the surrounding neighborhood and meet the needs of the petitioner. Both options provided by the applicant are made of high quality design and material, and would not be illuminated. However, Staff believes the standards of approval for CDR have not been satisfied for the preferred option for a 32 sq. ft., two sided, projecting sign at the top of the third-story. Instead, Staff believes the 20 sq. ft. option is more consistent with the intent of regulations for Group 1 properties, but the sign should be placed lower on the façade than proposed. **Staff recommends the UDC find the criteria for CDR review have been met for the alternative requested 20 sq. ft. per side projecting sign, with the condition that the sign placement be centered between second and third story.**

Notes:

- Any additional signage will require a CDR alteration, either by staff or the UDC.
- The final CDR documents shall state that all other signage not requiring permits shall comply with MGO 31.