STAFF REPORT
WEST ALLIS PLAN COMMISSION
Wednesday, July 23, 2025
6:00 PM

8. Sign Plan Appeal for Fairview Partners, LLC, at 12221 W. Fairview Ave. (Tax Key No. 413-9996-009)

Overview

Blau Plumbing owns properties at 12221 W. Fairview Ave. 413-9996-009 (0.4-acre site with an approximate 10,000-sf building) and 12239 W. Fairview Ave. 413-9996-008 (0.3-acre site with an approximate 2,000-sf building). The subject is located on the north side of interstate I-94, and west of S. Curtis Rd. The properties within this area are zoned I-1, light industrial. The City of Wauwatosa is located to the north and developed for residential use. Blau has applied for a variance to the master sign program sec. 13.21(13) of the signage ordinance.

Proposed Sign

Blau has submitted an application, rendered plan views, lighting plan, and scope of work (included with this report) describing their intent to build a freestanding sign along the west property line of the 12221 W. Fairview site. Here's a summary:

- The new sign will measure 14-ft x 48-ft long and feature two full digital faces (double sided V-shape @ 14-ft x 48-ft = 672-sf each).
- The height above the ground Level is proposed to be about 60 feet above the parking lot surface to the top of the sign. The sign is proposed to be setback about 20-30ft from the south property line along the frontage with I-94 right-of-way. The interstate is approximately 20-ft above the adjacent grade of the Blau parking lot. Therefore, the top of the sign is 40-ft above interstate I-94 and about 60-ft above the Blau parking lot.

Master sign program 13.21(13) - The signage review is being considered under the master signage program.

- The purpose of the Master Sign Program is to advertise a center and its individual tenants and to allow qualified buildings and/or centers greater flexibility and increased signage area.

- The Plan Commission, in its discretion, will consider the type and location of the building site, the proposed tenant mix, the size of the development and such other factors as it deems appropriate in evaluating a Master Sign Program.
- The following entities may make application for the Master Sign Program:
    - Multi-tenant commercial buildings (MTCBs) or centers of three (3) or more individual tenants or buildings of at least twenty-five thousand (25,000) square feet of building area.
    - Commercial or industrial uses which abut 1-94 and 1-894 right-of-way.

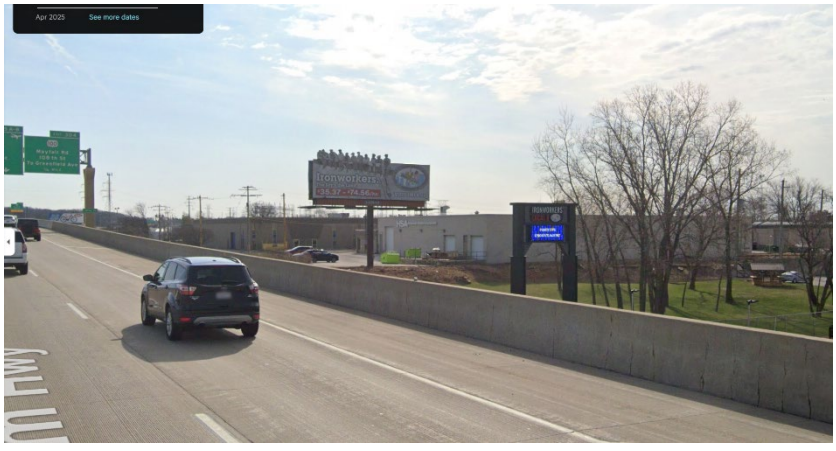
Planning cannot administratively approve this signage permit proposal, as the property and sign proposal qualify for the master sign program, and the freestanding sign area exceeds the sign ordinance allowance. The sign appeal to the requirements within sec 13.21(13) will come before our City Plan Commission.

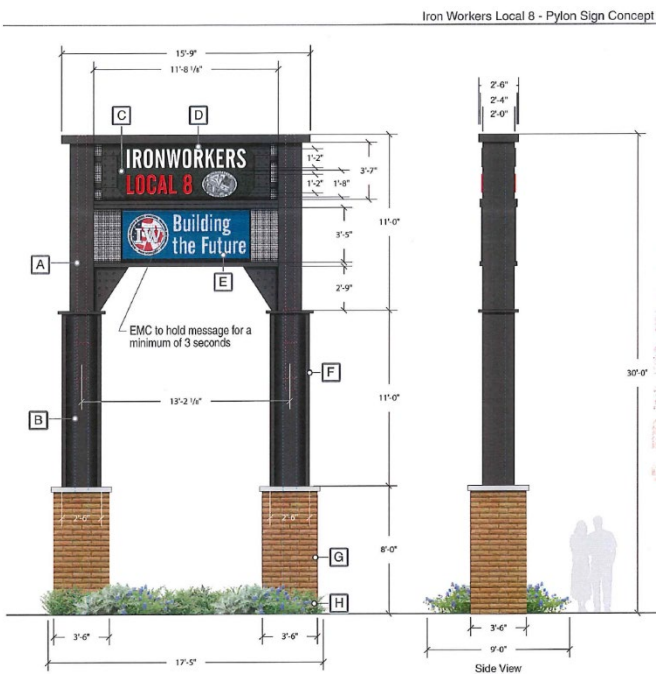
The sign ordinance allows a property owner to display a message or advertising as long as the sign structure meets the area and design requirements of the sign ordinance. In this case, what's proposed is a large digital sign (14-ft tall x 48-ft wide and 60-ft tall) at the Blau Plumbing property. Our signage ordinance allows both commercial and non-commercial speech, on-or off-premises signage messages, as long as a sign meets the ordinance requirements (size/ area, height, digital display limits, design, and landscaping requirements).

The sign ordinance 13.21(13)(g) will allow the following for this property along I-94:

- One (1) freestanding sign per property of no more than seventy-five (75) square feet in area, ten (10) feet in height, and subject to Plan Commission approval. Section 13.21(13)(g)
- The area of the changeable copy sign must be included in the total computation of allowable signage. The changeable copy portion of the sign must occupy a secondary position to the name of tenant. The area of changeable copy and electronic message centers shall not exceed thirty-five percent (35%) of the sign face. See 13.21(19).
- The sign would need to be located on the Blau property and not encroach into WisDOT right-of-way.

Of note, in 2018 the Plan Commission approved a sign appeal for the Iron Workers property located at 12032-34 W. Adler Lane. This location is directly south of the Blau property on the opposite side of the interstate south of I-94. While the Ironworkers sign exceeds the height limit due to the grade difference between their site and the interstate, their sign meets all the other aspects of the sign ordinance (75-sf area/size requirement, limits EMC area to 35% of sign area, features good design elements/articulation). Ironworkers applied for a signage appeal to the Plan Commission and their design was approved.





Recommendation: Recommend denial of the Sign Plan Appeal for Fairview Partners, LLC, at 12221 W. Fairview Ave. (Tax Key No. 413-9996-009). The basis for rejecting the proposal as follows:

1. The proposed sign significantly exceeds the area, height, digital display allowances and doesn't meet the design or landscaping requirements within sec 13.21(13)(g)(i)(v)(vii)(ix)(xii) more specifically referenced below.
2. The proposed features fully digital sign faces (100% of each sign face) and sign exceeds the 35% limit described in sec. 13.21(19*): The changeable copy portion of the sign must occupy a secondary position to the name of tenant. The area of changeable copy and electronic message centers shall not exceed thirty-five percent (35%) of the sign face.*
3. Approval of the proposal would set an exceptional precedent to allow other properties along the interstate corridors of the city to construct similar signs.
4. Adhering to the existing sign ordinance is reasonable and has the purpose as listed in sec. 13.21(1)(c)(d)(i) regulation of signs within the City is necessary and in the public interest: (c) to promote a healthy and properly designed business environment, (d) to provide for the expression of both commercial and noncommercial speech, and (i) does not regulation sign content.

Freestanding signage 13.21(13)(g) Master Sign Program.

i. ***Multi-tenant commercial buildings, or buildings/centers greater than twenty-five thousand (25,000) and less than fifty thousand (50,000) square feet of building area may be permitted one (1) freestanding sign of no more than seventy-five (75) square feet in area, ten (10) feet in height****, and subject to Plan Commission approval.*

ii. Buildings/centers greater than fifty thousand (50,000) and less than one hundred thousand (100,000) square feet of building area may be permitted one (1) sign per building/center of one hundred fifty (150) square feet in area, not to exceed twelve (12) feet in height, subject to Plan Commission approval.

iii. Buildings/centers greater than one hundred thousand (100,000) and less than three hundred thousand (300,000) square feet of building area may be permitted one (1) freestanding sign per arterial street of one hundred fifty (150) square feet in area each, or one (1) sign per building/center of two hundred twenty-five (225) square feet in area, neither to exceed fifteen (15) feet in height, subject to Plan Commission approval.

iv. *Determination of signage area for buildings or centers greater than three hundred thousand (300,000) square feet of building area shall be determined by the Plan Commission.*

v. ***Where changeable copy or electronic message center signage is permitted pursuant to Section 13.21(19), the area of the changeable copy sign must be included in the total computation of allowable signage and subject to Plan Commission review***.

vi. *The Planning and Zoning Program Staff and the Plan Commission shall not approve any Master Sign Plan greater than fifteen (15) feet in height, except for centers over three hundred thousand (300,000) square feet in building area, which height shall be subject to Plan Commission discretion.*

vii. ***Freestanding signs must be architecturally integrated with the principal building on the property. The base, sides, and top of the sign shall be constructed of masonry or other approved durable materials. The tone and texture of the base, sides, and top shall reflect the principal building construction as close as possible or shall enhance the exterior architecture of the principal building***. *The base of the sign shall be a minimum of two (2) feet in height.*

viii. *The color scheme of the sign shall complement the color scheme of the principal building.*

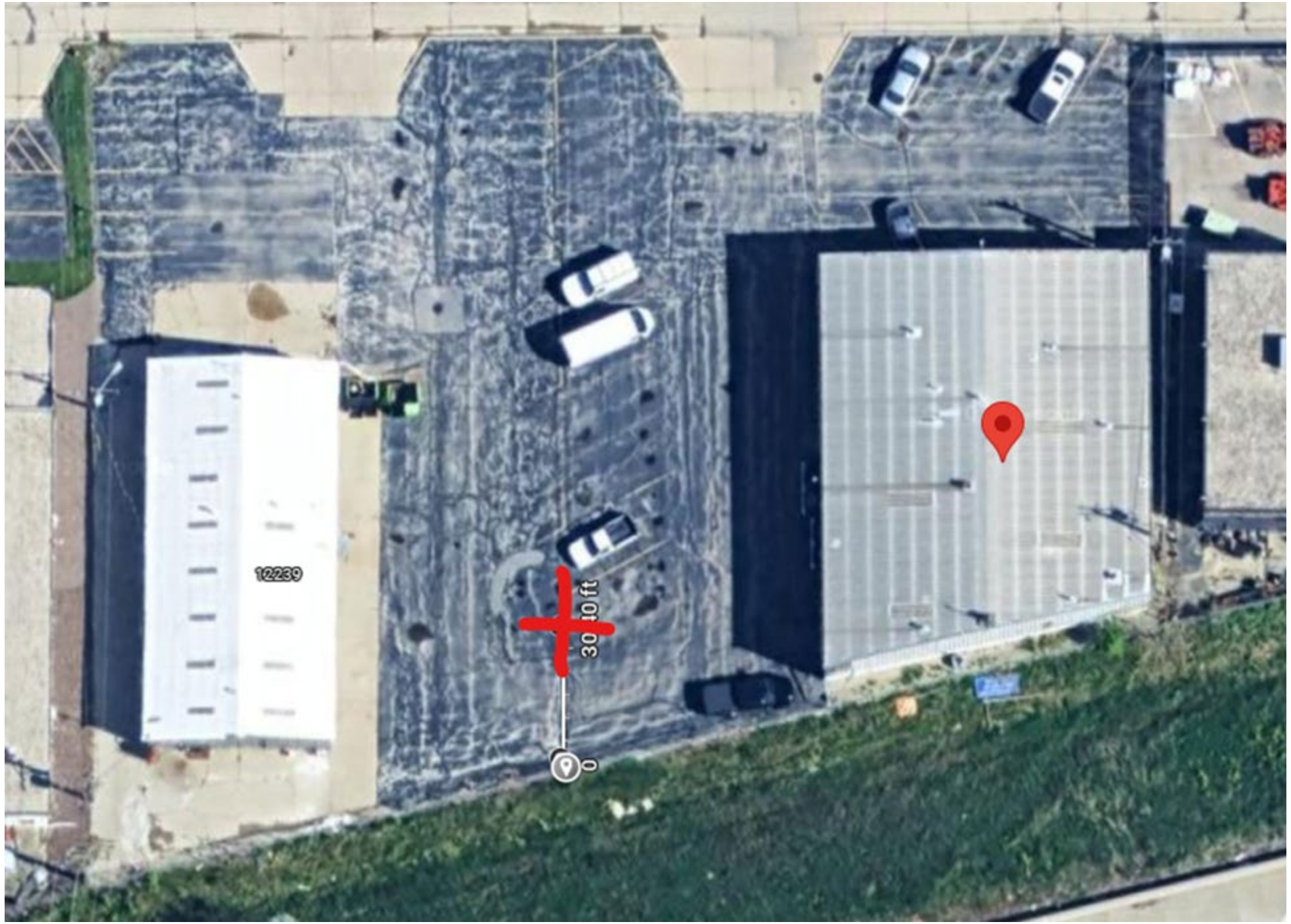
ix. ***Architectural features (such as sills, piers, reveals, capstones, medallions, etc.) which are part of the architectural makeup of the principal building shall be incorporated into the sign***.

x. *The sign face shall be constructed of aluminum, masonry, or similar product or polycarbonate with an opaque background or other approved durable materials. If internally illuminated, the sign face must be constructed of an opaque background.*

xi. *The sign structure or post of a freestanding sign must be wrapped in or constructed of a material compatible with the materials utilized in the construction of the building to which the sign refers. The width of the base of the sign must be equal to or greater than the width of the sign face.*

xii. ***Landscaping requirements. Landscaping shall be provided at the base of the supporting structure equal to twice the area of one face of the sign***. *For example, twenty (20) square feet of sign area equals forty (40) square feet of landscaped area. The Plan Commission may reduce or waive this requirement if it is determined the additional landscaping would not contribute significantly to the overall aesthetic character of the project.*


W Fairview Ave
W Fairview Ave
W Fairview Ave
W Fairview Ave
S Curtis Rd
123** W FAIRVIEW AVE
12323 W FAIRVIEW AVE
12247 W FAIRVIEW AVE
12239 W FAIRVIEW AVE
12221 W FAIRVIEW AVE
12211 W FAIRVIEW AVE
1** S CURTIS RD
W Fairview Ave
S Curtis Rd
94
Underwood Creek


12239
30 10 ft
0

Robert Blau owns both properties at 12221 and 12239 W. Fairview Ave. The new freestanding sign would be erected on a single pylon pole at the west lot line of 12221 W. Fairview.

Mr. Blau's plan is to convert the property from commercial single occupancy to commercial office multiple occupancy. This will provide leasable office space for tenants with minimal remodeling.

The existing parking lot can accommodate 30 plus vehicles. I have a working name FAIRVIEW COMMONS for the new business.

The location along I 94 will provide my tenants a great opportunity to advertise their businesses to a large audience. Having a large 14 x 48 digital sign will provide readable ad space for fast moving cars on I 94. Digital signs provide the best image quality vs. static signs.

In addition to my tenants advertising on the sign, I would like to offer the City of West Allis an in- kind donation of permanent free advertising on the sign.

The location is near the city limits and provides a unique opportunity for the City. I think "Gateway" type advertising would be appropriate for this location such as "Welcome to the City of West Allis" , or "Thank you for visiting the City of West Allis" . The messages could be changeable and alternating for events like 4th of July Fireworks, Holiday Parade, etc.

The larger sign would be necessary in order to provide readable City of West Allis messages to the fast-moving traffic. The sign would be a high quality 16mm display, and a light study is being prepared.

Robert Blau
Owner
Fairview Partners, LLC
and
President
Blau Plumbing, Inc.
p 414.881.8501

ABOVE ALL Outdoor Advertising, INC.

CLIENT:

FAIRVIEW PARTNERS LLC.
17145J W BLUEMOUND RD. STE. 234
BROOKFIELD, WI 53005

PROJECT SCOPE:

DIGITAL BILLBOARD STRUCTURE
W/ 14 X 48 LED DISPLAYS
(672 SQ. FT. PER FACE OR 1,344 TOTAL SQ. FT)

LOCATION:

WEST ALLIS, WI
12221 W. FAIRVIEW AVE.
COLUMN LOCATED AT
PARKING LOT WEST OF BUILDING

STRUCTURE SPECS:

14 X 48, FULL FLAG
20' V
60' OAH

DIGITAL SPECS:

PIXEL PITCH:
TRUE 19MM
LEDS PER PIXEL:
THREE
PIXEL/LED DENSITY:
256/768 PER SQUARE FOOT
BRIGHTNESS:
7,500 NITS; 5,000 NITS AT YEAR 10

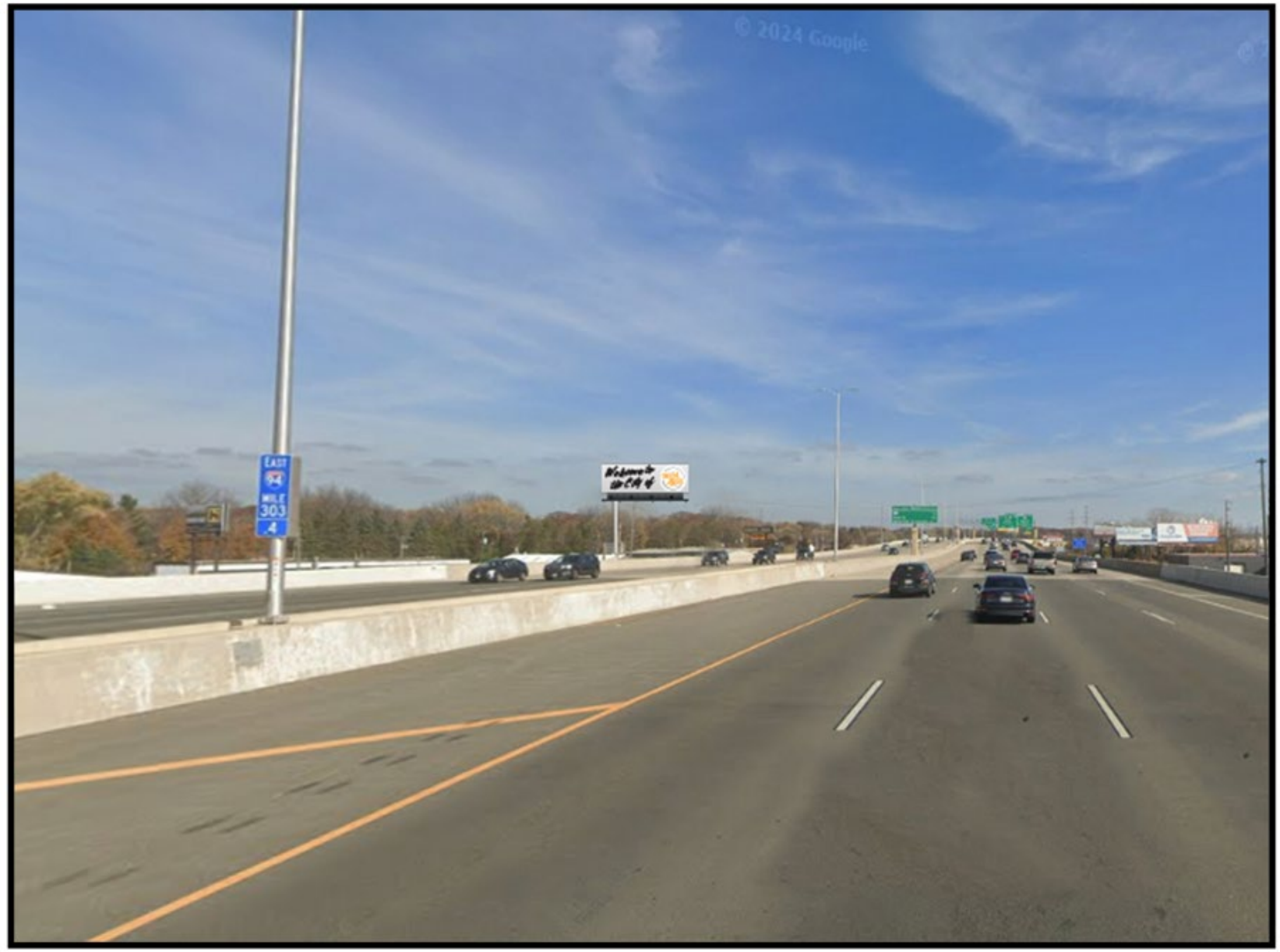
ABOVE ALL OUTDOOR ADVERTISING, INC.
N66W28196 FOREST RIDGE CIRCLE
SUSSEX, WI 53089
262-528-2087

ABOVEALLOUTDOOR.COM

SITE PLAN — EASTBOUND CLOSEUP

Sign height above ground level is about 60 feet (parking lot surface to the top of the sign).
I-94 is approximately 20 feet above adjacent Blau parking lot - the top of the sign is about 40-feet above I-94.

SITE PLAN EASTBOUND APPROACH



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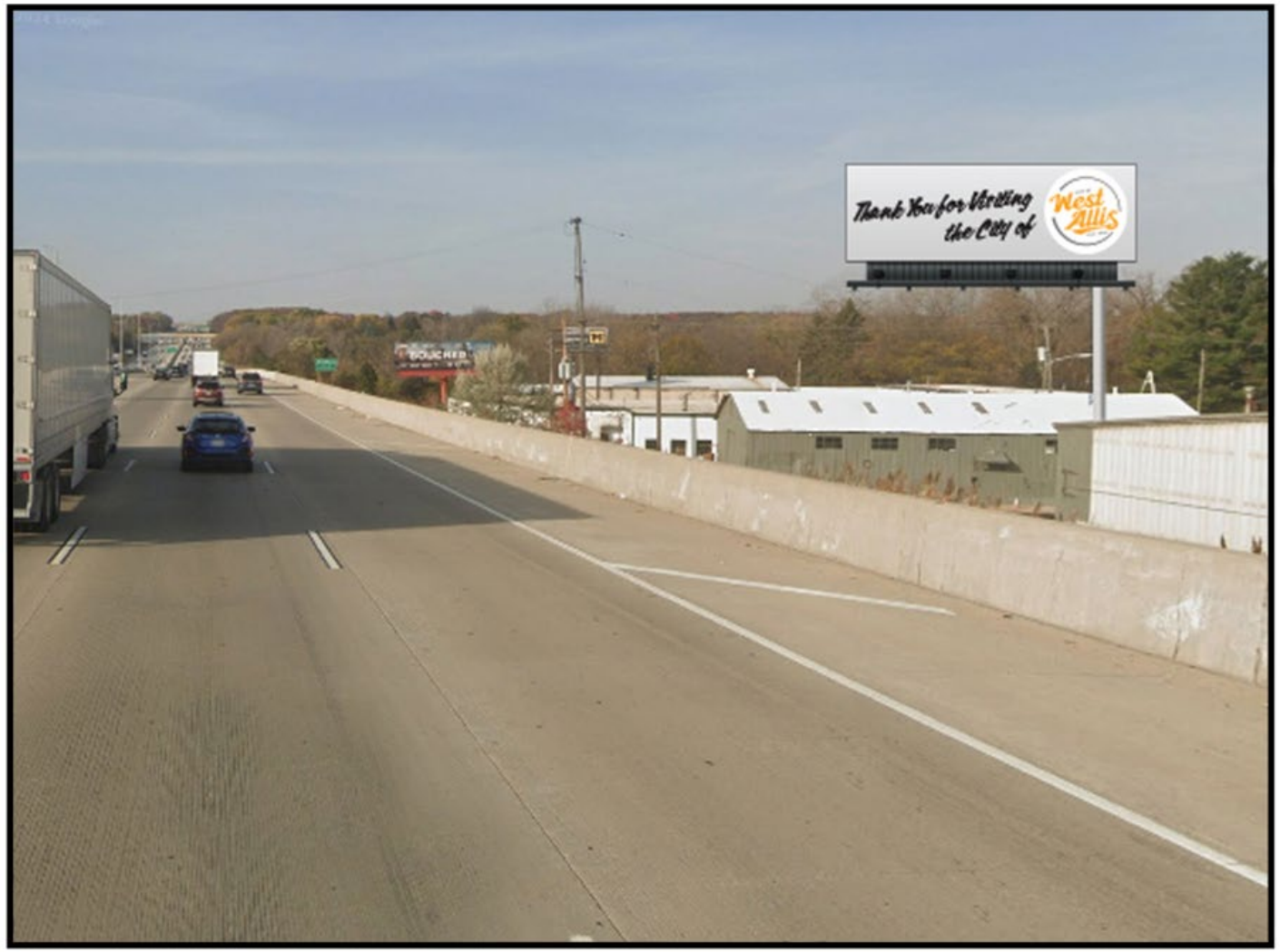
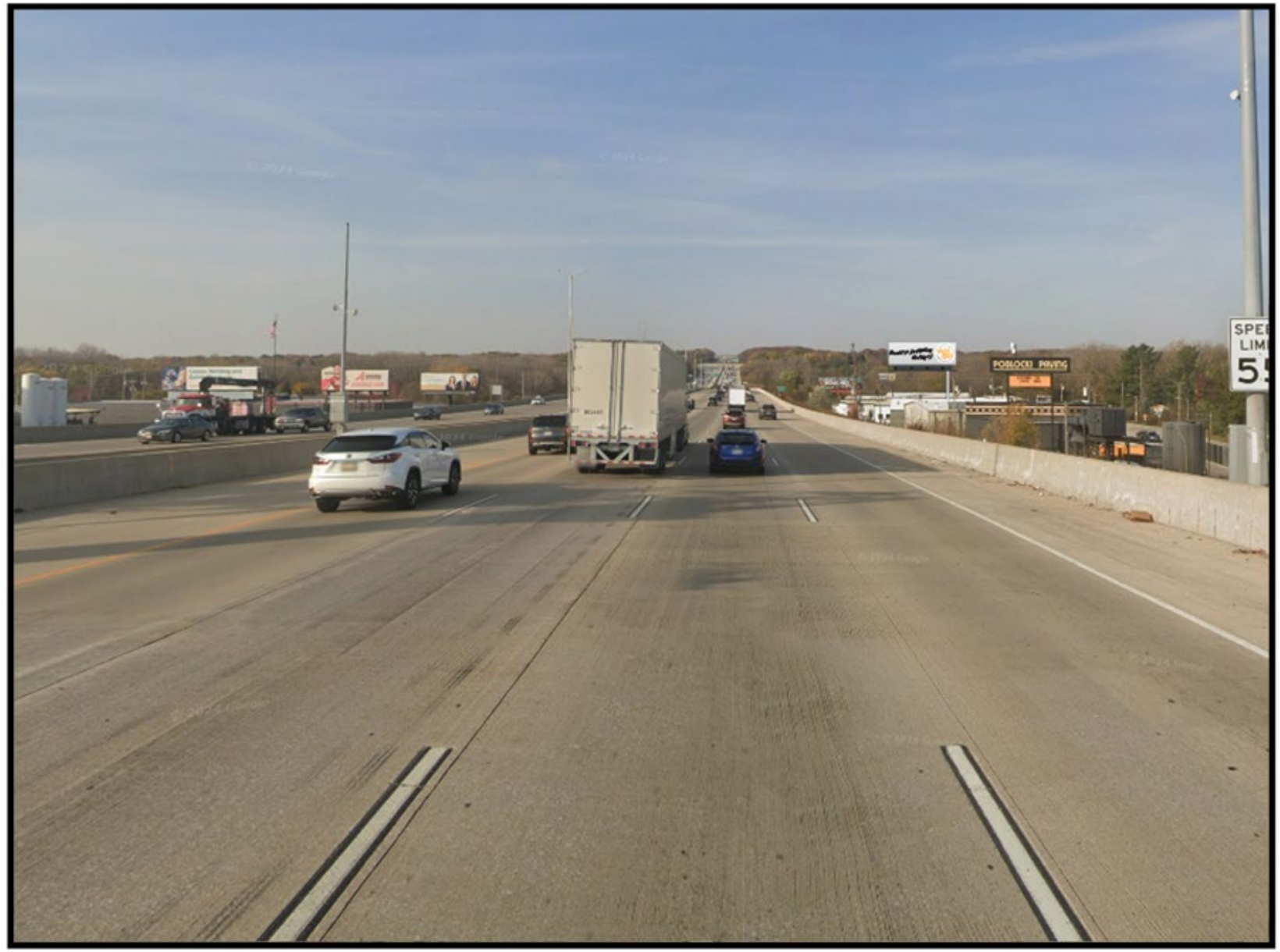
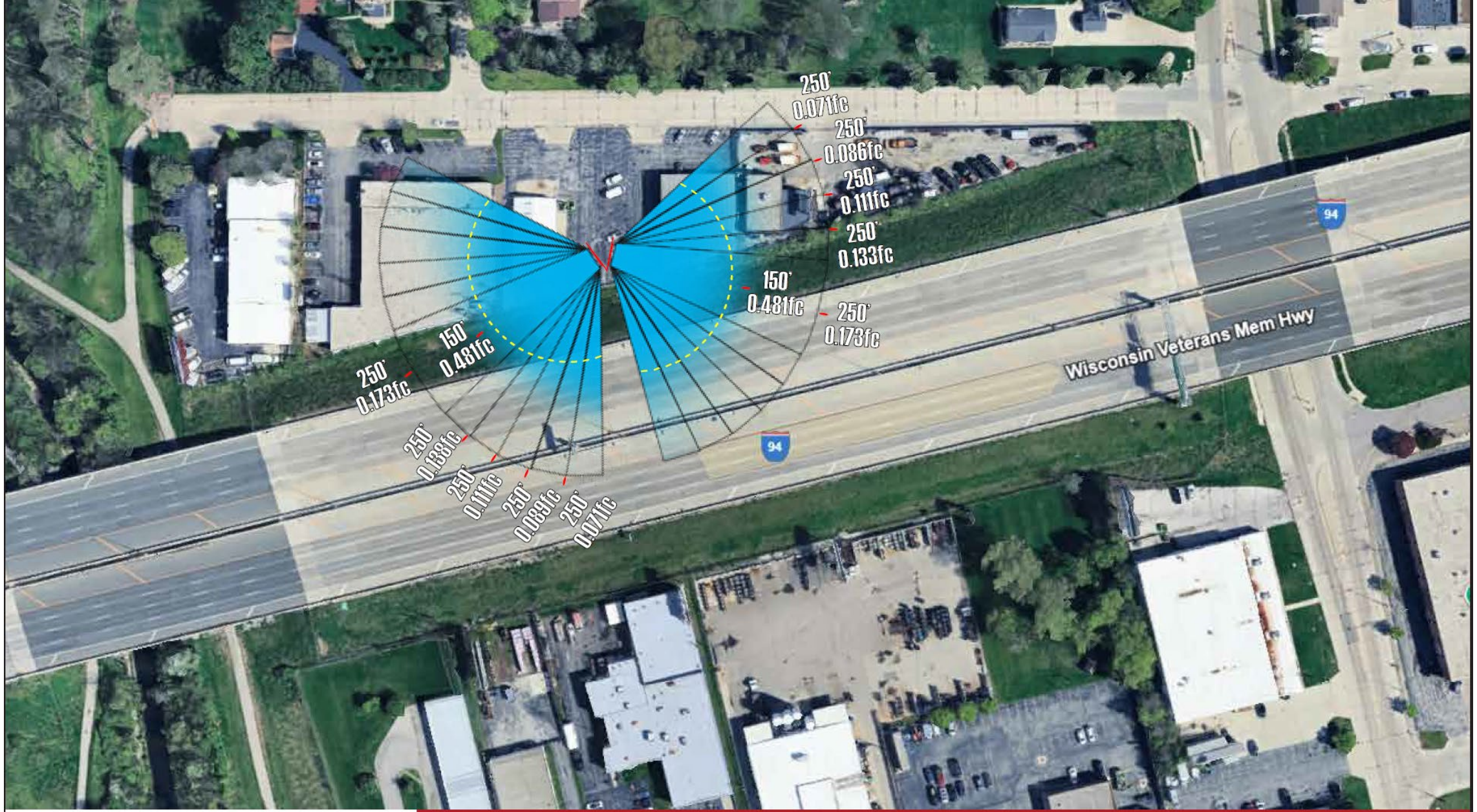
SITE PLAN

WESTBOUND CLOSEUP



SITE PLAN WESTBOUND CLOSEUP





Blau Plumbing Inc

12221 W fairview Ave Milwaukee, WI 53226

fc =Foot Candles | Calculations based on 200 nit, 100% white at night

Foot Candle - the illumination produced by a source of one candle at a distance of one foot and equal to one lumen incident per square foot

FORMETCO

Jim Shimmin
GM Digital Products Group
jims@formetco.com

EXPLANATION OF OAAA RECOMMENDED BRIGHTNESS GUIDELINES

There are at least two ways to evaluate the brightness of a LED digital display. A preferred method uses a footcandle meter to determine the amount of light that reaches various points in front of the digital display. A second method uses a luminance meter (frequently called a nit gun) to determine the amount of light emitted by a light source.

Explanation of Footcandles vs. Nits

A brightness standard measured in nits (candelas/square meter) typically contains a maximum value for daytime and nighttime. The footcandle standard has only one value but is measured from different distances based on display size.

An LED sign generates luminance at the source (measured in nits), but this raw source is not what the human eye sees from a distance. The human eye sees illuminance (measured in foot candles) from a point at a certain distance from the LED sign. Illuminance is greatly affected by ambient light and surrounding conditions. As such, it is usually preferred by regulators.

Q: What is the definition of Luminance[1]?

lu·mi·nance/ˈlumənəns/ [loo-muh-nuhns]–noun
1. The state or quality of being luminous.
2. Also called luminosity, the quality or condition of radiating or reflecting light: the blinding luminance of the sun.
3. Optics - The quantitative measure of brightness of a light source or an illuminated surface, equal to luminous flux per unit solid angle emitted per unit projected area of the source or surface.

Q: What is the definition of Illuminance?

/iˈlumənəns/ Compare irradiance E v, Sometimes called: illumination the luminous flux incident on unit area of a surface. It is measured in lux[2]

Q: What is a foot candle?

n. (*Abbr.* fc or ft-c)

[foot-kan-dl]
noun Optics.

A unit of illuminance or illumination, equivalent to the illumination produced by a source of one candle at a distance of one foot and equal to one lumen incident per square foot. Abbreviation: FC[3]

Also:

A unit of illuminance on a surface that is everywhere one foot from a point source of one candle[4]

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[1] Dictionary.com http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/luminance?s=t
[2] Dictionary.com http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/illuminance?s=ts
[3] Dictionary.com http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/foot+candle?s=t

[4] TheFreeDictionary.com http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Footcandle

Q: What is a nit?

A:

noun Physics.
a unit of luminous intensity equal to one candela per square meter. Abbreviation: nt[5]
-A unit of illuminative brightness equal to one candle per square meter, measured perpendicular to the rays of the source.[6]

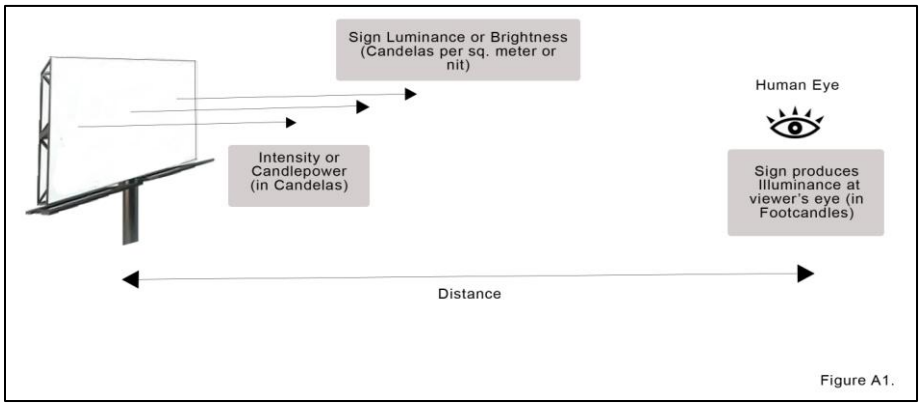

Figure A1.

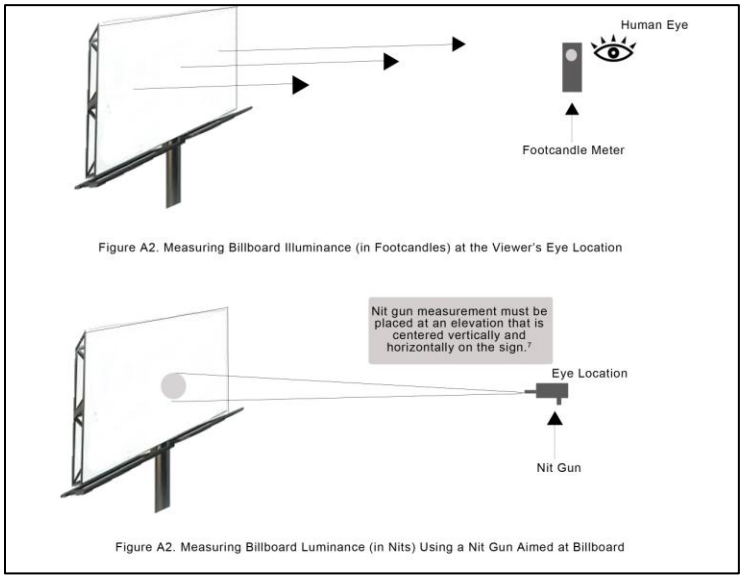

Figure A2. Measuring Billboard Illuminance (in Footcandles) at the Viewer's Eye Location

Figure A2. Measuring Billboard Luminance (in Nits) Using a Nit Gun Aimed at Billboard

-Source: Dr. Ian Lewin, Ph.D. Lighting Sciences, Inc. Digital Billboard Recommendations and Comparisons to Conventional Billboards.

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[5] Dictionary.com http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/nits?s=t

[6] TheFreeDictionary.com http://www.thefreedictionary.com/nit

[7] Nit gun readings are most accurate when the readings are taken directly perpendicular from the light source. As a result, the best place to take Nit gun readings is from a elevated height perpendicular to the digital display. If this is not possible, moving back from the digital display 350' to 500' on the center line will minimize the loss of accuracy. However, the distance away from the digital display cannot cause the nit gun measurement circle to fall outside the lighted digital billboard face.

Why use Foot candles over Nits as a unit of measurement?

- Foot candles measure the variance from ambient light. This assures a government that the sign will not be too bright for conditions. At different parts of a day the ambient lighting can be significantly different with clouds or fog. Conversely, the same can be true about nighttime conditions when an adjacent commercial lot turns on or off their parking lot lighting. Regulation using Nits merely sets a maximum and minimum level for day and night time conditions. Using the foot candle standard will not allow the sign to be too bright under a variety of conditions. (See Figure A2)

- Nits measure the brightness of the light at its source, without regard to ambient light. Establishing a lighting standard that ignores the brightness of the area (ambient light) allows the digital billboard to be too bright in dark environments and too dim in highly illuminated areas. In other words, fixed nit standards can allow the digital to operate at significantly higher luminance than is needed over the course of a 24 hour period.

- Nits: To measure nits you need to be directly perpendicular to the sign to measure, and get an accurate measurement. This is factored horizontally and vertically. There is a little bit of leeway on angle. Nits are directional in nature and billboard signs are usually aimed directly at the middle of the roadway. This in many cases puts the person performing the measurement in the travel lanes. In addition, due to the height of the average digital billboard a truck with a man-lift may be required. There is no specified distance you must be away from the sign to measure. (See Figure A2)

- Footcandles: With the footcandle standard you should be as perpendicular to the face as you can, but you do not have to be, to get a valid, accurate measurement. Footcandles can be measured multi directionally. You can take measurements at an angle to the sign face and receive valid measurements. The distance from which to measure is set at 250 ft away from the sign face for 14 x 48 size. This gives a regulator more options on places to stand.
- This makes the footcandle standard superior in ease of implementation. But even if we assumed they are both different, but similar in this regard, other more important factors tip the scales.

    - The footcandle standard is more restrictive in terms of lighting allowed, in a variety of conditions. As such, is usually preferred by regulators once they are educated on the differences.
    - The industry footcandle standard is tied to a required light sensor and dimming software.
    - Footcandles measure what the driver sees through their windshield in terms of light, where his car is.
    - Nits measure the light emanating from the sign face, typically a few hundred feet away. Not necessarily what the driver is seeing.

- It also can benefit a government to use foot-candles instead of Nits as Nit guns are very expensive (estimated cost $3,000.00). Light meters can cost as little as $250.00.

There are 3 necessary components to insure a digital billboard will never be too bright for conditions.

1. Maximum brightness limits incorporating a footcandle standard
2. An ambient light sensor installed on the sign structure
3. Dimming software

The ambient light level of a digital billboard will not vary significantly from that of a traditional billboard display and, in many cases it will be less. The light output levels will be set to be appropriate for the surroundings.

OAAA recognized/member companies utilize a photocell on digital billboards so that the display will easily be seen by motorists under changing light conditions. Sophisticated dimming software

constantly changes the brightness of the display in response to changing ambient lighting conditions. This insures a digital billboard will never be too bright for conditions.

The range of brightness varies greatly between daytime and nighttime conditions. In bright daylight, the unit must have higher intensity in order to be seen. During darkness conditions, the brightness can be set low and still be easily seen by motorists.

Why was 0.3 Footcandles chosen as the limit?

The 0.3 footcandle maximum illuminance level was carefully derived from a report completed by a former president of the IESNA.[8] The recommended technique is based on accepted IESNA practice for "light trespass."

The Outdoor Advertising Association of America (OAAA) commissioned Dr. Ian Lewin, in 2008 a principal at Lighting Sciences, Inc., Scottsdale, AZ, to recommend criteria for brightness levels on digital billboards[9]. The standards are designed to minimize the risk of glare or unreasonable driver distraction.

Footcandle measurements are commonly used throughout the United States. Footcandle measures are widely used in the lighting industry, photography, film, television, conservation lighting, and construction related engineering and building code regulations[10]. In addition, footcandles are frequently cited in OSHA regulations. The OAAA believes that these lighting standards reflect the best practices of the Out of Home Industry.

[8] IESNA – Illuminating Engineering Society of North America

[9] Digital Billboard Recommendations and Comparisons to Conventional Billboards, by Dr. Ian Lewin Ph.D., FIES, L.C. Lighting Sciences, Inc., 7826 East Evans Road, Scottsdale, Arizona 85260

[10] wikipedia.org/wiki/Footcandles

Appendix

OAAA Recommended Brightness Guidelines

Criteria #1 - Lighting Standards – Measurements:

The industry recommended criteria follows the lighting standards established by the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America (IESNA). The OAAA and member companies voluntarily adhere to the following guidance.

Recommended regulatory criteria:
Lighting levels should not exceed 0.3 foot candles (over ambient levels) as measured using a foot candle meter at a pre-set distance.

Pre-set distances to measure the foot candles impact vary with the expected viewing distances of each size sign. Measurements should be taken as close to perpendicular to the face as practical.

Measurement distance criteria:

Nominal Face Size	Distance to Measure From
12’ x 24’	150’
10’6 x 36’	200’
14’ x 48’	250’
20’ x 60’	350’

Each display must have a light sensing device that will adjust the brightness as ambient light conditions change.

Criteria #2 - Alternate Regulatory Criteria

The brightness of light emitted from a changeable message sign should not exceed 0.3 foot candles over ambient light levels measured at a distance of one hundred fifty feet (150') feet for those sign faces less than or equal to three hundred square feet (300 sq. ft.), measured at a distance of two hundred feet (200 ft.), for those sign faces greater than three hundred square feet (300 sq. ft.) but less than or equal to three hundred eighty-five square feet (385 sq. ft.), measured at a distance of two hundred fifty feet (250 ft.), for those sign faces greater than three hundred eighty-five square feet (385 sq. ft.) and less than or equal to six hundred eighty square feet (680 sq. ft.), measured at a distance of three hundred fifty feet (350 ft.) for those sign faces greater than six hundred eighty square feet (680 sq. ft.)

Or use Alternate Table:

Sign Face Size	Distance of Measurement
681-1200 square feet	350 feet
385-680 square feet	250 feet
300-385 square feet	200 feet
200-300 square feet	150 feet

Each display must have a light sensing device that will adjust the brightness as ambient light conditions change.

Criteria #3 - Optional Regulatory Addendum - (If standardized distances cannot be achieved in compliance with MUTCD roadside work, or if the site conditions will not allow measurements from the previous distances.)

In the event it is found not to be practical to measure a digital billboard at the set distances prescribed above, a measurer may opt to measure the sign at any of the alternative measuring distances described in the applicable table set forth below. In the event the sign measurer chooses to measure the sign using an alternative measuring distance, the prescribed footcandle level above ambient light shall not exceed the prescribed level, to be determined based on the alternative measuring distances set forth in the following tables (A), (B), (C), and (D), as applicable:

(A) For changeable message signs less than or equal to 300 square feet:

Alternative Measuring Distance	Prescribed Foot Candle Level
100	0.68
125	0.43
150	0.3
200	0.17
250	0.11
275	0.09
300	0.08
325	0.06
350	0.06
400	0.04

(B) For changeable message signs greater than 300 square feet but less than or equal to 385 square feet:

Alternative Measuring Distance	Prescribed Foot Candle Level
100	1.2
125	0.77
150	0.53
200	0.3
250	0.19
275	0.16
300	0.13
325	0.11
350	0.1
400	0.08

(C) For changeable message signs greater than 385 square feet but less than or equal to 680 square feet:

Alternative Measuring Distance	Prescribed Foot Candle Level
100	1.88
125	1.2
150	0.83
200	0.47
250	0.3
275	0.25
300	0.21
325	0.18
350	0.15
400	0.12

(D) For changeable Message Sign greater than 680 square feet: Alternative Measuring Distance: Prescribed Foot Candle Level:

Alternative Measuring Distance	Prescribed Foot Candle Level
100	3.675
125	2.35
150	1.63
200	0.92
250	0.59
275	0.49
300	0.41
325	0.35
350	0.3
400	0.23
425	0.2
450	0.18
500	0.15