

STAFF REPORT
WEST ALLIS PLAN COMMISSION
WEDNESDAY, October 24, 2018
6:00 PM
ROOM 128 – CITY HALL – 7525 W. GREENFIELD AVE.

7. **Signage Plan Appeal for Ironworkers Local 8 Headquarters located at 12034 W. Adler Ln., submitted by Zach Wenger d/b/a Lemberg Electric. (Tax Key No. 413-9994-018)**

Overview

The Iron Workers sign is an existing non-conforming sign which currently exceeds the height, size/area and total allowance of changeable copy area. The existing sign as it stands was installed prior to our current sign ordinance and is located on a commercial property that abuts the south side of I-94 corridor right-of-way.

Given the location of the property abutting along the south side of I-94, the property is eligible for the Master Sign Program. The maximum sign area allowed, per the master sign program is 75sf in sign area and a maximum height of 10-ft. Furthermore, changeable electronic message signs (EMC) shall not exceed 35% of the sign face. Design characteristics are also required as part of the sign ordinance to ensure that freestanding signs are architecturally integrated or enhance the principal building on the property.

Appeal Criteria

The applicant has submitted a signage proposal for Plan Commission review and is seeking an appeal to the 10-ft height requirement of the sign ordinance. Sign appeals require Plan Commission consideration, using the following criteria from the West Allis Sign Ordinance section 13.21(9):

(a) The sign as proposed will not result in an undue concentration of signage, which renders it difficult or confusing to read existing signs.

(b) The proposed sign is unique and of exceptional design or style so as to enhance the area.

(c) Site difficulties: unusual site factors preclude the construction of a sign in accordance with this section, which would be visible to the roadway adjacent to the site frontage.

Past proposals

The Ironworkers have in the past proposed to alter the same sign. However, the Plan Commission denied such requests on the basis that the size, height, and design for the proposed alterations to the sign do not conform to the ordinance or qualify with the appeal criteria offered in 13.21(9) of the ordinance.

In previous Plan Commission reviews staff did not agree that the reasons provided by the applicant supported the grant of a sign variance. On the previous submittal, staff noted the following in regards to the proposed sign at the time not following the variance criteria:

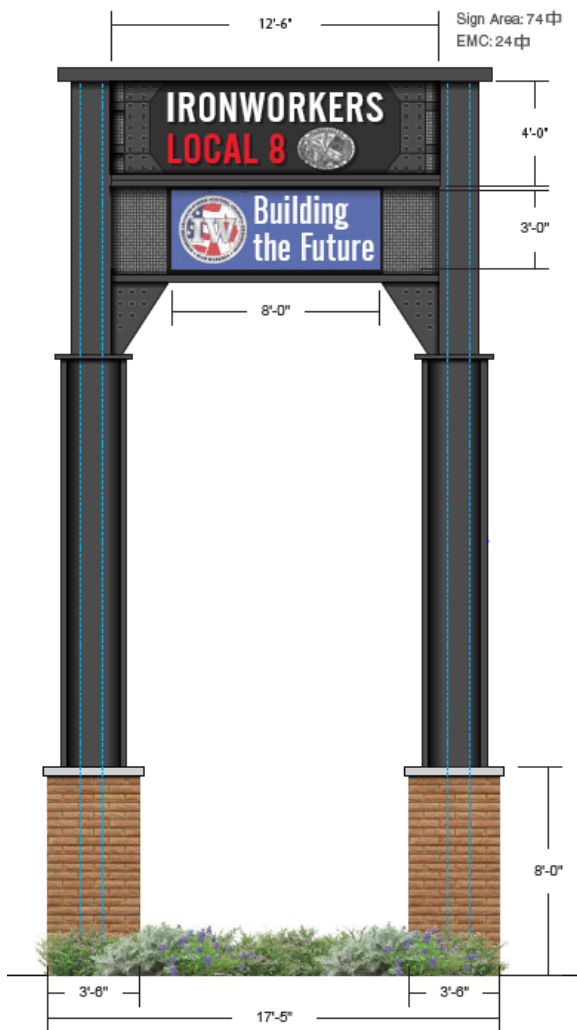
- This is currently a non-conforming 160sf sign being replaced by a non-conforming 160sf sign.
- The existing sign is useable and may remain in place until altered, removed or discontinued in accordance with 13.21(4).

- The existing non-conforming sign provides for the expression of both commercial and non-commercial speech and for the for the identification and advertising needs of businesses
- The proposed variance will not preserve the beauty and the unique character of the City by aesthetically complementing the development, which the sign identifies.
- Nor promote a healthy and properly designed business environment.

Precedent

Just like any decision before the Plan Commission, precedent of granting, or not granting, an ordinance variance should be taken into account. Several properties about the interstate corridor and currently have legal non-conforming signage.

The grant of this variance may spur other non-conforming sign applicants into action requests for altering their non-conforming signage. However, staff notes that this sign proposal does meet the sign code requirements for size, design and area. Under the criteria previously noted:



(a) The sign as proposed will not result in an undue concentration of signage, which renders it difficult or confusing to read existing signs.

This sign, as proposed meets the sign code requirement for area (75 sf), % of emc (35%) and number (1 freestanding sign allowed) on the site and thus will not add undue concentration of signage in the area.

Staff would like to be sure that the sign will not be too bright as to distract drivers and the applicant must be sure to follow the requirements in the code that state the message must hold for 3 seconds before changing. These 2 things will help alleviate concern about creating an unsafe or distracting situation for drivers in the I-94 corridor.

(b) The proposed sign is unique and of exceptional design or style so as to enhance the area.

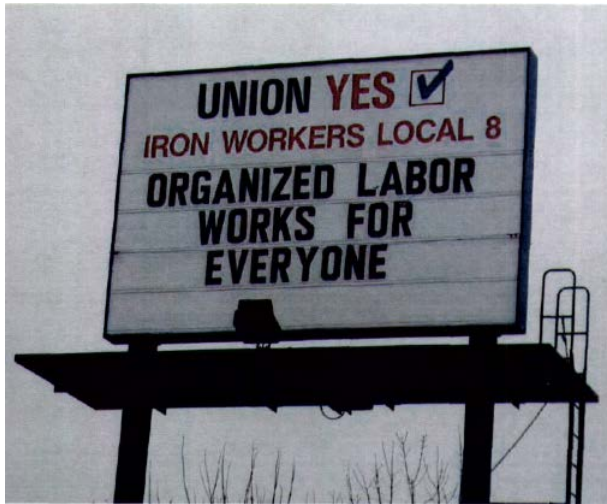
Staff believes the brick base and especially the decorative steel columns do provide exceptional design qualities which would enhance the standards for signage in the I-94 corridor.

(c) Site difficulties: unusual site factors preclude the construction of a sign in accordance with this section, which would be visible to the roadway adjacent to the site frontage.

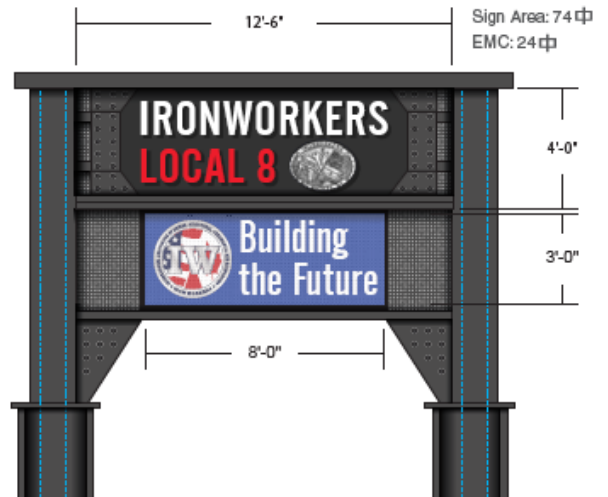
It appears that the applicant does have legitimate site difficulty concerns from I-94. If the sign were built at the 10' height maximum it would not be visible from the roadway on I-94. So long as the sign proposed is not being built any higher than what is necessary for visibility on the I-94 corridor, staff does consider this application worthy of consideration for approval.

Should other applicant's apply for a similar variance in the I-94 corridor they would also need to meet the size, design, and area requirements on the particular property which they would be located and the signs would not be allowed to be any higher than needed to be visible from the roadway on the I-94 corridor. Staff is only recommending approval of this sign proposal because all of those things are in place and if any applicant applied for a variance in this corridor they would need to meet the same criteria in order to be considered for approval.

Existing sign



Proposed sign



Below is a comparison of this proposal compared to the applicant's previous attempts:

Comparison of proposals:

2011 Proposal

1. EMC area is 70%
2. Size is same 16x10 (160 sf)
3. Height is same 35-ft above grade

2012 Proposal

- EMC area is 35%
- Size is same 16x10 (160 sf)
- Height is same 35-ft above grade

2018 Proposal

1. EMC area is 35%
2. Size reduced from 160-sf to 75-sf
3. Height is same 35-ft above grade
4. Design improved from, no design elements to a brick base with decorative steel columns.

Recommendation: Staff is recommending approval Signage Plan Appeal for Ironworkers Local 8 Headquarters located at 12034 W. Adler Ln., submitted by Zach Wenger d/b/a Lemberg Electric. (Tax Key No. 413-9994-018), subject to the following conditions:

1. The sign proposal being lowered 5-ft from 35-ft (current height) to 30-ft total height.
2. Details on the brightness/light levels to ensure that the sign is not a distraction to drivers in the I-94 corridor.
3. A note on the sign plan that the messages on the electronic message center will hold for a minimum of 3 seconds.

The basis for approval explained as follows:

1. The proposed sign has been designed by the applicant to meet all but the height requirements of the sign ordinance.
2. Quality architectural design elements at a scale that is appropriate to the proposal are being incorporated into the proposed design of the new sign.
3. Only one freestanding sign will exist on the property.
4. The subject property is a commercial or industrial uses which abuts 1-94 and/or 1-894 right-of-way.