

Department of Community Planning and Economic Development – Planning Division
Conditional Use Permit
BZZ – 4316

Date: March 2, 2009

Applicant: Children's Hospitals & Clinics

Address of Property: Properties east of Chicago Avenue: 2501-2525 Chicago Avenue, 2501-2525 Elliot Avenue, 2502-2516 10th Avenue South, and 915 25th Street East and properties west of Chicago Avenue: 2508-2550 Chicago Avenue, 2515-2543 Columbus Avenue and 720-724 26th Street East

Project Name: Children's Hospitals & Clinics of Minnesota Master Signage Plan

Contact Person and Phone: Francis Hickey, (651) 209-6254

Planning Staff and Phone: Janelle Widmeier, (612) 673-3156

Date Application Deemed Complete: February 5, 2009

End of 60-Day Decision Period: April 6, 2009

Ward: 6 and 9 **Neighborhood Organization:** Phillips West and Midtown Phillips

Existing Zoning: OR3 Institutional Office Residence District

Proposed Zoning: Not applicable for this application

Zoning Plate Number: 20

Legal Description: Not applicable for this application

Proposed Use: Planned unit development master sign plan for a hospital.

Concurrent Review: Conditional use permit amendment for a planned unit development master sign plan.

Applicable zoning code provisions: Chapter 525, Article VII, Conditional Use Permits and Chapter 527, Planned Unit Development.

Background: In 2007, Children's Hospitals and Clinics received approvals to expand their facilities. The Planning Commission granted conditional use permits, various variances, site plan review, platting, and vacations of right-of-way for the proposal. The City Council also approved a rezoning. A copy of these approvals with associated conditions is attached for reference.

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The original campus is located on the super-block bound by Chicago Avenue, 25th Street, 10th Avenue and 26th Street. Expansions on this part of the campus include an eight-floor bed tower addition with a new emergency room and ambulance entrance on the first floor, a 3- and 4-level addition with a Mother and Baby hospital, and a 4-level addition with a new hospital lobby. The hospital campus has expanded to the block bound by Chicago Avenue, 26th Street, Columbus Avenue and 25th Street where a new ambulatory care center (ACC) and a new parking ramp with 778 spaces and a loading dock are located. A skyway and tunnel will link the two sides of the campus across Chicago Avenue. The ramp, ACC, skyway and tunnel are nearing completion.

A master sign plan is required for a planned unit development. The original proposal included a very basic master sign plan including seven freestanding signs that met the zoning district requirements for size and height. The Planning Commission authorized an exception to allow more than one freestanding sign on a zoning lot in the OR3 district with the condition that no new signs are back-lighted. After construction commenced, a more elaborate sign plan was developed by the applicant. The proposed changes to the signs require additional exceptions to the zoning regulations. The revised master sign plan is the only change requested for this amendment. A planned unit development requires a conditional use permit (CUP) in the OR3 district. The changes proposed to the master sign plan review an amendment to the CUP. If the amendment to the conditional use permit is approved, the action must be recorded with Hennepin County as required by state law. If the sign plan is approved, all signage will require Zoning Office review, approval, and permits.

The revised sign plan includes eight on-site freestanding signs, two wall signs, and one projecting sign. The applicant has provided a site plan showing the locations of all proposed signs that is attached to this report. Please note, several of the freestanding signs were proposed in the public right-of-way as shown on the site plan (Page C). Public Works has stated they will not allow any freestanding signs in the right-of-way. The applicant has provided supplementary drawings showing on-site placement for most of the signs.

Below is a summary of each sign description and what exceptions, if any, are being requested for each type of sign (page numbers in the sign packet are noted for reference). Please note that the star patterns are included in the sign area calculations. In addition to the type and size regulations, the illumination of signs is also regulated. All types of lighting are allowed in the OR3 district with one exception. Lighted signs facing and on property adjacent to or across a street from a residence district are not allowed to be back-lighted. Back-lighted is a light source contained within the sign element or sign cabinet that illuminates by shining through a translucent surface or sign face, except where only the letters of the sign copy are illuminated. Most of the signs proposed would be internally illuminated. Internal lighting is defined as a light source contained within the sign cabinet that illuminates by directing light onto the sign surface, or that illuminates only the letter of the sign copy, and which is not back-lighting. As previously mentioned, the Planning Commission conditioned as part of the original approval that no signage be back-lighted. The applicant is requesting some exceptions to this condition.

FREESTANDING SIGNS

For public and institutional uses in the OR3 district, one freestanding sign per street frontage is allowed. The site has frontage on six streets. Three of the street frontages have more than one freestanding sign proposed. An exception of this regulation is requested. The height of freestanding signs is limited to eight feet above grade. The maximum allowed area is 32 square feet. Exceptions are being requested

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for size and height as noted below. Landscaping designed to screen the base of freestanding signs and any light fixtures are required. The landscape materials are required to be capable of screening the base of the sign all year. Most of the signs would not have a landscaped base that would meet these requirements (see the details provided on the supplementary drawings showing sign placement—plant references are taken from the approved landscape plan). The applicant is requesting an exception to this requirement as well.

- Sign #1 (Page 1 of 8) would be located adjacent to the northwest corner of 26th Street and Chicago Avenue. It is a three-sided sign. Each side of the sign is approximately 107 square feet. Because more than one side is visible at any one time, two of the three sides count towards the total sign area allowed. The proposed height is 18 feet 4 inches. The sign would be illuminated both internally and back-lit. The back-lit portion of the sign is the area identified by the applicant as the “Watermark graphic panel made of tempered custom glass...Internal illumination to provide a subtle, colorful effect.” The sign is not across the street from any residential zoning districts. Exceptions are needed for height and area. The applicant is also requesting that the Planning Commission make an exception to the previous condition of approval and allow the back-lighting.
- Sign #2 and Sign #4 (Page 8 of 8) would be the same size. Sign #2 would be located at the loading dock entrance adjacent to 26th Street. Sign #4 would be located at the northeast corner of 26th Street and Columbus Avenue. The proposed sign area is approximately 20 square feet. The proposed height is 6 feet 8 inches. They would not be illuminated. No exceptions are requested for these signs.
- Sign #3 (Page 4 of 8) would be located between the parking ramp entrance and exit adjacent to 26th Street. The proposed sign area is 68 square feet. The proposed height is 8 feet. It would be internally illuminated. An exception is needed for sign area.
- Sign #5, Sign #6, and Sign #10 (Page 7 of 8) would all be the same size. Sign #5 would be located adjacent to the drop-off area entrance on the east side of Chicago Avenue. Similarly, Sign #6 would be located adjacent to the drop-off area entrance on the west side of Chicago Avenue. Sign #10 would be located adjacent to the southwest corner of 25th Street and 10th Avenue. The proposed sign area is 32 square feet. The height is 9 feet 6 inches. They would not be illuminated. An exception is needed for height.
- Sign #7 (Page 2 of 8) would be located adjacent to the southeast corner of 25th Street and Chicago Avenue. The proposed sign area is approximately 59 square feet. The height is 14 feet. The sign would be illuminated both internally and back-lit. The back-lit portion of the sign is the area identified by the applicant as the “Watermark graphic panel made of tempered custom glass...Internal illumination to provide a subtle, colorful effect.” The north face of the sign is across the street from a residential zoning district. Exceptions to the allowed height, area, and type of illumination are requested. The applicant is also requesting that the Planning Commission make an exception to the previous condition of approval and allow the back-lighting.
- Sign #9 would be located in the 25th Street right-of-way. As previously mentioned, this will not be allowed by Public Works. The building wall adjacent to the 25th Street right-of-way has a 0 foot

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setback so there is not an opportunity to locate the sign on-site. There is no authorized exception to allow placement in the right-of-way. This sign cannot be approved.

SIGNS ATTACHED TO BUILDINGS

In addition to the freestanding signs, several signs attached to the buildings are also proposed. There is not a limit to the number of building signs allowed as long as the total sign area does not exceed the sign area allotted for the building.

- Sign #8 (Page 5 of 8) is a wall sign. It would be located on the wall facing 25th Street above the ambulance entrance. Wall signs are allowed to be up to 180 square feet in area. The top of the sign cannot be located more than 24 feet above grade. The proposed sign would be approximately 48 square feet in area and would not be placed above 24 feet on the wall. The illumination of the sign would include some back-lighting. A residential zoning district is located across the street. An exception is needed for illumination.
- Sign #9a (Page 6 of 8) is a projecting sign. It would be located on the wall facing 25th Street above the emergency department vehicle entrance. Projecting signs are allowed to be not more than 12 square feet in area. The top of the sign cannot be located more than 24 feet above grade. The proposed sign would be 13 square feet in area. It would be placed approximately 14 feet above grade. The illumination of the sign would include some back-lighting, but the sign faces do not face the residential district across the street. An exception is needed for sign area. The applicant is requesting that the Planning Commission make an exception to the previous condition of approval and allow the back-lighting.
- Sign #11 would only be visible from inside the parking ramp and is therefore not regulated by the zoning code.
- Sign #12 and Sign #13 (Page D continued) are wall signs. They would be located on the canopies above the drop-off areas on the east and west sides of Chicago Avenue. No exceptions are requested for these signs.

As of the writing of this report, staff has not received any correspondence from the neighborhood groups. Staff will forward additional comments, if any are received, at the City Planning Commission meeting.

CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT: Amendment for a planned unit development master sign plan.

Findings as required by the Minneapolis Zoning Code for the conditional use permit:

The Community Planning and Economic Development Planning Division has analyzed the application and from the findings below concludes that the establishment, maintenance, or operation of the proposed conditional use:

- 1. Will not be detrimental to or endanger the public health, safety, comfort or general welfare.**

The on-site signage would not block right-of-way sightlines. The signs would be constructed of durable materials, including aluminum, acrylic, and glass, typically used for signs. They should not prove detrimental to public health, safety, comfort or general welfare provided the signs are constructed in compliance with all applicable building codes.

- 2. Will not be injurious to the use and enjoyment of other property in the vicinity and will not impede the normal or orderly development and improvement of surrounding property for uses permitted in the district.**

The applicant has indicated that the proposed placement and number of signs is intended to clearly identify destination arrival and provide direction to those not familiar with the campus at those key arrival locations without creating sign clutter. The sign plan includes limited use of back-lighting. Where proposed, back-lighting is used on only a portion of the signs at key locations. The lighting should have little effect on nearby residences.

- 3. Adequate utilities, access roads, drainage, necessary facilities or other measures, have been or will be provided.**

The site is served by existing infrastructure. Vehicle access and drainage and stormwater management have been approved by Public Works.

- 4. Adequate measures have been or will be provided to minimize traffic congestion in the public streets.**

The parking requirement for a hospital is based on a traffic study conducted by the applicant. A travel demand management plan (TDMP) was reviewed and approved for the planned unit development. It was determined that a total of 1,794 vehicle parking spaces would meet the demand of the development. The plan also included measures the applicant would take to encourage use of alternative forms of transportation, such as multimodal transit and transit use discounts and rewards, secure bicycle parking and locker rooms for bikers and free parking for motorcycles. The site is also near two bus transit routes.

The applicant has indicated that the proposed location of the signs is intended to clearly identify destination arrival and provide direction to those not familiar with the campus at those key

arrival locations. The proposed size and height affect the amount of information that can be provided to those arriving by vehicle. Clear directional signage should help prevent traffic congestion in the public streets.

5. Is consistent with the applicable policies of the comprehensive plan.

The Minneapolis Plan identifies the area around the site as a growth center. A growth center accommodates different scales and intensity of employment generating uses, which can coexist alongside housing and a mix of other activities. The employment generating uses in this growth center include the Wells Fargo Home Mortgage campus, commercial uses on Lake Street, Allina and Children's Hospitals, and the Midtown Exchange. Chicago Avenue is designated as a community corridor. The plan states that "[community corridors] support limited commercial uses, which are measured against their impacts on residential character, such as the production of fumes or noise or negative aesthetics. Design and development along these streets is oriented towards the pedestrian experience." In the update of the comprehensive plan, *The Minneapolis Plan for Sustainable Growth*, the area will remain designated as a growth center and Chicago Avenue will remain a community corridor. The majority of sign exceptions requested by the applicant are for the signs located at key destination points where higher visibility should result in clearer directional guidance without creating sign clutter. Children's Hospital is adjacent to several blocks of residential properties. The sign plan includes limited use of back-lighting. Where proposed, back-lighting is used on only a portion of the signs at key locations. The lighting should have little effect on nearby residences. The master sign plan is consistent with the applicable policies of the comprehensive plan.

6. And, does in all other respects conform to the applicable regulations of the district in which it is located, with the approval of this conditional use permit.

With the approval of the amendment to the conditional use permit, the project will be in conformance with the zoning code.

Through the planned unit development, the applicant is requesting exceptions to the following standards of the zoning code:

For the conditional use permit amendment, the applicant is requesting exceptions to the allowed area, height, and illumination regulations for several signs in the master sign plan. Section 527.170 requires that all signs in a planned unit development comply with a master sign plan that is considered and approved with the development plan. It also authorizes the Planning Commission to grant exceptions to Chapter 543, On-Premise Signs. Exceptions to these zoning regulations may be authorized only upon the Planning Commission finding that the PUD includes adequate site amenities to address any adverse effects of the exception.

Signage for nonresidential uses in the OR3 district is governed by Table 543-2 of the zoning code. The master sign plan is described in the background section of this report. The following exceptions are requested for the master sign plan:

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- *Number of freestanding signs allowed:* For public and institutional uses in the OR3 district, one freestanding sign per street frontage is allowed. The site has frontage on six streets. Three of the street frontages, 26th Street and the east and west sides of Chicago Avenue, have more than one freestanding sign proposed. A total of 8 on-site freestanding signs are proposed. The freestanding signs are mainly concentrated at key arrival points, such as the intersection of 26th Street Chicago Avenue. Although much more signage could be allowed, the applicant has limited the amount of signs that are attached to buildings to prevent sign clutter. The signs would all be constructed of similar materials and design style.
- *Maximum area of freestanding signs:* The maximum allowed area is 32 square feet per sign. Three signs would be larger than 32 square feet in area:
 - 1) Sign #1 (Page 1 of 8) would be located adjacent to the northwest corner of 26th Street and Chicago Avenue. It is a three-sided sign. Each side of the sign is approximately 107 square feet. Because more than one side is visible at any one time, two of the three sides count towards the total sign area allowed.
 - 2) Sign #3 (Page 4 of 8) would be located next to the entrance of the new parking ramp. It has a proposed sign area of 68 square feet.
 - 3) Sign #7 (Page 2 of 8) would be located adjacent to the southeast corner of 25th Street and Chicago Avenue. It has a proposed sign area of approximately 59 square feet.

These signs would be located next to main intersections and the parking ramp entrance where most people going to the hospital would arrive. Because of this, these signs would need to contain the most directional information. The applicant has indicated that the size will also give drivers time to make appropriate lane changes to enter the hospital campus. Locating larger signs at key arrival points is typical for other hospitals in Minneapolis, including the Hennepin County Medical Center and the University of Minnesota Medical Center Fairview.

- *Maximum height of freestanding signs:* The height of freestanding signs is limited to eight feet above grade. Five signs would be taller than eight feet:
 - 1) Sign #1 would be 18 feet 4 inches in height.
 - 2) Sign #5, Sign #6, and Sign #10 (Page 7 of 8) would all be 9 feet 6 inches tall. Sign #5 would be located adjacent to the drop-off area entrance on the east side of Chicago Avenue. Similarly, Sign #6 would be located adjacent to the drop-off area entrance on the west side of Chicago Avenue. Sign #10 would be located adjacent to the southwest corner of 25th Street and 10th Avenue.
 - 3) Sign #7 would be 14 feet in height.

The reasons for increasing the height of Sign #1 and Sign #7 are the same as those mentioned for increasing the area. For Signs #5, #6, and #10, part of the increased height is due to the vertical support member that extends above the copy face of the sign to add a more decorative element. The height also allows sufficient room for directional information pertinent to a hospital.

- *Landscaping for freestanding signs:* Landscaping designed to screen the base of freestanding signs and any light fixtures are required. The landscape materials are required to be capable of screening the base of the signs all year. Most of the signs would not have a landscaped base that would meet

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these requirements (see the details provided on the supplementary drawings showing sign placement—plant references are taken from the approved landscape plan). The purpose of the screening requirement is to improve unattractive areas around the base of freestanding signs. Wiring would be housed on the inside of the signs, therefore the base of the signs do not have any light fixtures or mechanical equipment that need to be screened. The proposed materials are higher quality materials used for signs. The unified landscape plan that has been approved for the development would provide a mix of perennials around the signs with the exception of Sign #10. An evergreen tree and turf is currently located at the proposed location for Sign #10. A perennial planting bed should also be provided around the base of this sign.

- *Maximum area of a projecting sign:* Projecting signs are allowed to be not more than 12 square feet in area. Sign #9a (Page 6 of 8) is a projecting sign that would be located on the wall facing 25th Street above the emergency department vehicle entrance. The proposed sign would be 13 square feet in area. Because the sign is odd shaped, an imaginary rectangle is drawn around the entire face of the sign to calculate the area. If the negative space were not included in the calculation, the sign area would be less than 12 square feet.

- *Back-lighting of signs:* All types of lighting are allowed in the OR3 district with one exception. Lighted signs facing and on property adjacent to or across a street from a residence district are not allowed to be back-lighted. Back-lighting is a light source contained within the sign element or sign cabinet that illuminates by shining through a translucent surface or sign face, except where only the letters of the sign copy are illuminated. Most of the proposed illuminated signs would be internally lit. Internal lighting is defined as a light source contained within the sign cabinet that illuminates by directing light onto the sign surface, or that illuminates only the letter of the sign copy, and which is not back-lighting. As previously mentioned, the Planning Commission conditioned as part of the original approval that no signage be back-lighted. That condition was included because most back-lighted signs are commercial in character and could have a negative impact on the surrounding residential properties. Four of the signs would include back-lighted elements:
 - 1) Sign #1 would be illuminated both internally and back-lit. The back-lit portion of the sign is the area identified by the applicant as the “Watermark graphic panel made of tempered custom glass...Internal illumination to provide a subtle, colorful effect.” The sign is not across the street from any residential zoning districts, but a residential use is located on the south side of 26th Street.
 - 2) Sign #7 would be illuminated the same way as Sign #1. The north side of the sign would be located across the street from a residential district with established residential uses.
 - 3) Sign #8 (Page 5 of 8) is a wall sign. It would be located on the wall facing 25th Street above the ambulance entrance. The illumination of the sign would include some back-lighting. A residential zoning district with established residential uses is located across the street.
 - 4) Sign #9a is a projecting sign. The illumination of the sign would include some back-lighting, but the sign faces do not face the residential district across the street.

The applicant has limited the use of back-lighting in the proposed signs to decorative enhancements and high-lighting emergency entrance signs. The amount of lighting proposed should not have a

negative impact on nearby residential uses and should not project a large commercial presence that is not characteristic of the surrounding neighborhoods.

Staff is recommending that the master sign plan including the requested exceptions be granted for the reasons identified above.

Additional Findings Required For Planned Unit Developments:

In addition to the conditional use permit standards contained in Chapter 525, Administration and Enforcement, before approval of a planned unit development the city planning commission also shall find:

- 1. That the planned unit development complies with all of the requirements and the intent and purpose of this chapter. In making such determination, the following shall be given primary consideration:**
 - a. The character of the uses in the proposed planned unit development, including in the case of a planned residential development the variety of housing types and their relationship to other site elements and to surrounding development.**

The purpose of the PUD master sign plan requirement is to have a unified sign proposal that enhances a development. The signs would all be constructed of similar materials and design style. The materials would meet or exceed standard quality of signs. The number and size of the signs are appropriate for a hospital. Although the use is allowed to install large wall signs, the applicant has limited the amount of wall signage in exchange for the ability to install more freestanding signs which better meet the directional needs of the hospital. The signage should also provide sufficient direction without creating sign clutter.

- b. The traffic generation characteristics of the proposed planned unit development in relation to street capacity, provision of vehicle access, parking and loading areas, pedestrian access and availability of transit alternatives.**

The parking requirement for a hospital is based on a traffic study conducted by the applicant. A travel demand management plan (TDMP) was reviewed and approved for the planned unit development. It was determined that a total of 1,794 vehicle parking spaces would meet the demand of the development. The plan also included measures the applicant would take to encourage use of alternative forms of transportation, such as multimodal transit and transit use discounts and rewards, secure bicycle parking and locker rooms for bikers and free parking for motorcycles. The site is also near two bus transit routes.

The applicant has indicated that the proposed location of the signs is intended to clearly identify destination arrival and provide direction to those not familiar with the campus at those key arrival locations. The proposed size and height affect the amount of information that can be provided to those arriving by vehicle. Clear directional signage

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should help prevent traffic congestion in the public streets. The signage would also provide guidance to pedestrians.

- c. **The site amenities of the proposed planned unit development, including the location and functions of open space and the preservation or restoration of the natural environment or historic features.**

Amenities approved as part of the original proposal included relocating the loading facilities which currently has access from and requires maneuvering in a primarily residential street to the new parking ramp where all maneuvering will occur internally, providing secure off-street bicycle parking for employees and visitors, providing more trees and shrubs than required by the site plan review section of the zoning code, and providing a public green space south of the ACC with benches and public art. Sculptures in the drop-off areas have since been proposed. The signs themselves would be constructed of durable, quality materials and in a unified design.

- d. **The appearance and compatibility of individual buildings and parking areas in the proposed planned unit development to other site elements and to surrounding development, including but not limited to building scale and massing, microclimate effects of the development, and protection of views and corridors.**

The design and materials of the signs is compatible with those of the existing and proposed buildings. The sign materials would include aluminum, acrylic, and glass. The existing and proposed building materials primarily include brick, concrete, and glass. Of the signs proposed to be illuminated, internal and back lighting would be used. The use of back-lighting would be limited and should have little affect on nearby residences.

- e. **The relation of the proposed planned unit development to existing and proposed public facilities, including but not limited to provision for stormwater runoff and storage, and temporary and permanent erosion control.**

The Public Works Department has approved a stormwater management plan and erosion control plan for the project.

- 2. **That the planned unit development complies with all of the applicable requirements contained in Chapter 598, Land Subdivision Regulations.**

The final plat was previously approved by the Planning Commission. To staffs knowledge, the plat has not been recorded with the County. This must be done before this amendment can be recorded.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation of the Community Planning and Economic Development Department – Planning Division for the Conditional Use Permit:

The Community Planning and Economic Development Department – Planning Division recommends that the City Planning Commission adopt the above findings and **approve** the application for an amendment to a conditional use permit for a planned unit development master sign plan for the properties located at 2501-2525 Chicago Avenue, 2501-2525 Elliot Avenue, 2502-2516 10th Avenue South, and 915 25th Street East, 2508-2550 Chicago Avenue, 2515-2543 Columbus Avenue and 720-724 26th Street East, subject to the following conditions:

- 1) The conditional use permit amendment shall be recorded with Hennepin County as required by Minn. Stat. 462.3595, subd. 4 before building permits may be issued or before the use or activity requiring a conditional use permit may commence. Unless extended by the zoning administrator, the conditional use permit shall expire if it is not recorded within one year of approval.
- 2) The applicant shall obtain sign permits from the Zoning Office before installing any signage.
- 3) All freestanding signs shall be located on-site.
- 4) A perennial planting bed shall be established around sign #10.
- 5) New signs approved as part of the master sign plan shall not be backlit, except as authorized by the Planning Commission for Sign #1, Sign #7, Sign #8, and Sign #9a.

Attachments:

1. 2007 Planning Commission and City Council actions for Children’s Hospital expansion
2. Zoning map
3. Statement of proposed use and plans
4. Site photos