



CPED STAFF REPORT
Prepared for the Board of Adjustment

BOA Agenda Item #2
December 11, 2014
BZZ-6889

LAND USE APPLICATION SUMMARY

Property Location: 2401 Chicago Avenue
Project Name: The Minneapolis Grand Apartments
Prepared By: [Janelle Widmeier](#), Senior City Planner, (612) 673-3156
Applicant: Capreit
Project Contact: Myrna Orensten, Imaginality Designs
Request: To increase the maximum height of 3 signs.
Required Applications:

Variance	To increase the maximum height of wall sign (#1) from 14 feet to 31 feet.
Variance	To increase the maximum height of wall sign (#2) from 14 feet to 23 feet.
Variance	To increase the maximum height of projecting sign (#3) from 14 feet to 22 feet.

SITE DATA

Existing Zoning	OR2 District
Lot Area	60,509 square feet / 1.4 acres
Ward(s)	9; adjacent to 6
Neighborhood(s)	Midtown Phillips; adjacent to Phillips West and Ventura Village
Designated Future Land Use	Urban Neighborhood
Land Use Features	Community Corridor (Chicago Avenue)
Small Area Plan(s)	Not applicable

Date Application Deemed Complete	October 31, 2014	Date Extension Letter Sent	Not applicable
End of 60-Day Decision Period	December 30, 2014	End of 120-Day Decision Period	Not applicable

BACKGROUND

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PRESENT USE. Two 4-story buildings with a total of 122 dwelling units are located on the subject site. The site has frontage on 3 streets: Chicago Avenue, 24th Street East and Elliot Avenue.

SURROUNDING PROPERTIES AND NEIGHBORHOOD. There is a mix of uses in the immediate area, including a shopping center, a grade school, a place of assembly, a hospital, a counseling center and low density residential.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION. The applicant is proposing to install three signs on the building. All other signage on the building has been or will be removed. The following is a description of each proposed sign:

Sign #1 (the corner sign)

- Location: the corner of Chicago Avenue and 24th Street
- Type: wall sign (wraps the building corner, but does not project from the wall more than 24 inches)
- Area: 135 square feet total (67.5 square feet of sign area applied to each wall elevation)
- Height above grade: 31 feet
- Illumination: internal

Sign #2 (the metal arch wall sign)

- Location: the north side of the building in the metal structure extending over the driveway that is located between the two buildings
- Type: wall sign
- Area: 56 square feet
- Height above grade: 23 feet
- Illumination: none

Sign #3 (the projecting sign)

- Location: the south end of the building on the Chicago Avenue elevation
- Type: projecting sign
- Area: 12 square feet
- Height above grade: 22 feet
- Illumination: none

The maximum height allowed for wall and projecting signs in the OR2 district is 14 feet. As noted above, the proposed heights will be 22, 23 and 31 feet above grade. A variance is required to increase the maximum allowed height of a sign.

Sign permits were issued by the City for signs #2 and #3 to the applicant before the error was discovered that the proposed heights did not comply with the district requirements. Sign #3 was originally proposed at a lower height that met the maximum, but did not have the sufficient 8 foot clearance over the public right-of-way. Both of these signs have been fabricated and installed. Because sign #3 is too low and the applicant is concerned about vandalism, this height of this sign is proposed to be increased.

RELATED APPROVALS. The land use approvals (BZZ-1753) to allow the subject development were approved in 2004. At the time, the proposal was for a mixed use development with ground floor retail and offices. This year and under different ownership, the building was converted to an all residential building.

PUBLIC COMMENTS. As of writing this report, no correspondence from the neighborhood groups has been received. Any correspondence received prior to the public meeting will be forwarded on to the Board of Adjustment for consideration.

ANALYSIS

VARIANCE

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development has analyzed the application for variances to increase the maximum height of 3 signs based on the following [findings](#):

1. *Practical difficulties exist in complying with the ordinance because of circumstances unique to the property. The unique circumstances were not created by persons presently having an interest in the property and are not based on economic considerations alone.*

All variances: In the OR2 district, the maximum allowed height of wall and projecting signs is 14 feet for residential buildings. Practical difficulties exist in complying with the ordinance due to circumstances unique to the property. The site has unique identification needs. The size of the property is nearly one-half a City block with frontage on three streets. There are two 4-story residential buildings on the site. The buildings are under the same ownership, but the current owner is not the original developer. Chicago Avenue is a primary corridor. Visibility of a sign placed at 14 feet at the corner of Chicago Avenue and 24th Street would be somewhat obscured by the traffic lights. The only vehicle entrance is accessed from 24th Street and is located between the two buildings. There is an existing metal structure that is located above the driveway. The bottom of the structure is 15 feet above grade to ensure adequate clearance for vehicles, including trucks. The proposed signs comply with all other applicable requirements. Further, the proposed amount of signage is far less than what could be installed on each wall facing a street. For example, up to 375 square feet of signage is allowed on the wall facing Chicago Avenue. Only 80 square feet of signage is proposed on that wall. Allowing the increase in height will create more effective identification with less sign area.

2. *The property owner or authorized applicant proposes to use the property in a reasonable manner that will be in keeping with the spirit and intent of the ordinance and the comprehensive plan.*

All variances: Regulations governing on-premise signs are established to allow effective signage appropriate to the planned character of each zoning district, to promote an attractive environment by minimizing visual clutter and confusion, to minimize adverse effects on nearby property, and to protect the public health, safety and welfare. The OR2 High Density Office Residence District is established to provide a mixed use environment of moderate to high density dwellings and large office uses, with additional small scale retail sales and services uses designed to serve the immediate surroundings. This district may serve as a transition between downtown and surrounding moderate to low density residential neighborhoods. Although an increase of allowed height is requested, the total amount of signage proposed is well below what is allowed to ensure the proposal is in keeping with the character of the area. Also, the proposed signage is oriented to where traffic volumes are highest and away from the surrounding residential properties. Allowing the increase in height will

create more effective identification with less sign area. The request is reasonable and in keeping with the spirit and intent of the ordinance and comprehensive plan.

3. *The proposed variance will not alter the essential character of the locality or be injurious to the use or enjoyment of other property in the vicinity. If granted, the proposed variance will not be detrimental to the health, safety, or welfare of the general public or of those utilizing the property or nearby properties.*

All variances: Granting the variances would have little effect on the surrounding area and would not be detrimental to the health, safety, or welfare of the general public or of those utilizing the property or nearby properties. In addition to the subject site, there is a large place of assembly, a surface parking lot and a low density residential use at the intersection of 24th Street and Chicago Avenue. This intersection also has high traffic volumes. There is a counseling center adjacent to the south end of the building. Signs #1 and #3 would be compatible with window locations and not block them. Sign #2 would be located in an existing metal structure over the driveway located between the two buildings. The place of assembly is located across from this sign. The total amount of signage proposed is well below what is allowed. Only the corner sign would be illuminated.

In addition to the variance standards contained in Chapter 525 and this article, the Board of Adjustment shall consider, but not be limited to, the following factors when determining sign variances or conditional use permits:

1. *The sign adjustment will not significantly increase or lead to sign clutter in the area or result in a sign that is inconsistent with the purpose of the zoning district in which the property is located.*

All variances: The OR2 High Density Office Residence District is established to provide a mixed use environment of moderate to high density dwellings and large office uses, with additional small scale retail sales and services uses designed to serve the immediate surroundings. This district may serve as a transition between downtown and surrounding moderate to low density residential neighborhoods. The total amount of signage proposed is well below what is allowed. Allowing the increase in height will create more effective identification with less sign area. In relation to the placement of the proposed signs, the majority of the adjacent uses are nonresidential. Granting the variance would not lead to sign clutter in the area or result in a sign that is inconsistent with the OR2 district.

2. *The sign adjustment will allow a sign that relates in size, shape, materials, color, illumination and character to the function and architectural character of the building or property on which the sign will be located.*

All variances: The signs will relate in size, shape, material, color, illumination and character of the buildings and the property. Each sign would be made of aluminum. Only the corner sign (#1) would be illuminated with LED. The primary exterior materials of the 4-story buildings are brick, fiber cement board or stucco, and glass.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation of the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development for the Variance:

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development recommends that the Board of Adjustment adopt the above findings and **approve** the application for a variance to increase the maximum height of a wall sign (#1) from 14 feet to 31 feet for the property located at 2401 Chicago Avenue, subject to the following conditions:

- I. Approval of the sign permit by the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development.

Recommendation of the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development for the Variance:

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development recommends that the Board of Adjustment adopt the above findings and **approve** the application for a variance to increase the maximum height of a wall sign (#2) from 14 feet to 23 feet for the property located at 2401 Chicago Avenue, subject to the following conditions:

- I. Approval of the sign permit by the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development.

Recommendation of the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development for the Variance:

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development recommends that the Board of Adjustment adopt the above findings and **approve** the application for a variance to increase the maximum height of a projecting sign (#3) from 14 feet to 22 feet for the property located at 2401 Chicago Avenue, subject to the following conditions:

- I. Approval of the sign permit by the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Written description and findings submitted by applicant
2. Zoning map
3. Site plan
4. Sign details and photos

Property: The Minneapolis Grand Apartments
New Owner: CAPREIT
Address: 2401 Chicago Avenue South, Minneapolis
Applicant: Myrna Orensten
Imaginality Designs

October 7, 2014

Sign Variance

To allow height of new sign to be ~ 31'

Currently the sign code in Zone OR2 states that the height allowance is 14'.

The Minneapolis Grand Apartments is located at the intersection of Chicago Avenue and 24th Street West. It is comprised of two buildings and an inner parking and courtyard which has an entrance drive off 24th... above is an overhead steel arch or bridge on which we have installed a sign, approved by the city.

Originally built in 2005, this development was built as a mixed use residential with retail storefronts on the first level. During the economic downfall this property fell into financial trouble and was purchased by CAPREIT in December of 2013. The empty first level retail has been converted to additional apartment units (now at a total of 112 units) and they have added amenities of fitness, business and community spaces. Both the exterior and interior has been refinished. The existing building entrances and property layout was inherited by the new owners.

The signage on the property was minimal and ineffective. A worn series of multi colored awnings over the retail areas have been removed. CAPREIT has invested greatly in this project to create quality living space along the Chicago Avenue Corridor.

The code allows for a significant amount of signage, given the stretch of walls on Chicago, 24th and Elliot Avenue, however the maximum height limitations of 14' for sign placement along with the provision of 8' minimum clearance above grade and the space availability presents a few difficulties in appropriate sign placement in an area that does not block apartment windows.

Two of our three proposed signage locations have been approved by the city and installed. One sign is located flat on the center of the 'bridge' structure joining the two buildings - which defines the main entrance to the buildings. This structure is approximately 15' above grade and spans almost 8' in height. Although this sign was approved, and installed - we have been asked to include it in the official documentation to allow the 'requested height variance' to apply each of the three exterior building signs. The sign is located on this bridge and classified as a wall sign and fits within the size allowance. The height of this structure allows for vehicles and truck clearances below and denoting the entrance, this is the only available surface to hang the sign. Therefore, the request for this height variance is at 23' verses 14' allowance.

The secondary building identification sign, approved and installed at the 14' max height projecting sign is located on Chicago Avenue at the far south end of the building and has visibility for northbound traffic. Ideally, it would have been done as a flat wall sign on the south face wall, however that was not considered a 'primary wall' and therefore not allowed. As a projecting sign with the same 14' height limitation - the bottom of the sign may still be vulnerable to vandalism and with a height variance it could be moved up and better aligned with architectural features. The city staff has requested this sign also be included in the height variance request. Our height variance request on this sign is 24' to align with second floor windows.

Now for the main Building ID sign... which we have located on the corner of Chicago & 24th. This is an active corner for vehicles as well as pedestrians, especially considering there is a bus shelter at the bus stop.

The primary practical difficulty in locating the main identification sign on this level is the interference and distraction it would create in the sight line of the essential traffic control lights. The first floor, which was originally designed for retail in a mixed used development, is tall with large arched windows recessed in brick arches extending up over 10' while the second floor window sills begin at ~14'6" leaving a short horizontal band in line with the traffic lights. Our

request would allow us to rise above the clutter and locate the ID sign on the brick wall surface centered between the second and third floor windows; which is on the same level as the existing building letters. The main ID sign is directed at vehicular traffic, optimizing visibility as well as being in an appropriate relationship to the scale of this 4 story building. The sculptural architectural elements that enhance the sign add a special positive character to the identity and introduces the property as being an exceptional housing choice.

We propose to use the property in a reasonable manner that will keep with the spirit and intent of the ordinance and the comprehensive plan. Similar properties in this and comparable zoning allow building wall signs at this height.

The proposed variance will not alter the essential character of the locality or be injurious to the use or enjoyment of other property in the vicinity. If granted, the proposed variance will not be detrimental to the health, safety or welfare of the general public or of those utilizing the property or nearby properties. By being above and out of the site line of 'traffic control' should be a positive influence. The corner location will also be better for readability, as the west face wall (where the current sign is located) is difficult to read - parallel to traffic and in the reflection of the sunset. The north face wall is predominately in the shadow and corner wrap is more facing traffic for effectiveness and allowing advance cue to the turn before too late.

The sign adjustment will reduce the visual clutter in the area by moving above the pedestrian level and the traffic control devices. This proposed sign location is consistent with the purpose of the zoning district, the community corridor and it is the natural and logical choice.

The sign adjustment will allow a sign that relates in size, shape, materials, color, and illumination to the building, and enhance the architectural character of the property.

ARTICLE III. - OR2 HIGH DENSITY OFFICE RESIDENCE DISTRICT 547.280. -

Purpose. The OR2 High Density Office Residence District is established to provide a mixed use environment of moderate to high density dwellings and large office uses, with additional small scale retail sales and services uses designed to serve the immediate surroundings. This district may serve as a transition between downtown and surrounding moderate to low density residential neighborhoods.

Chicago Avenue Corridor - Vision Statement

Participants in the planning process developed a vision statement to serve as the overarching goal for the plan. A vision statement describes the area 20 years in the future, once the plan has been achieved.

“Chicago Avenue is a vibrant corridor characterized by a commitment to diversity, history, health and wellness, housing equity, and economic and environmental sustainability. The corridor is home to high-quality hospitals, housing, neighborhood retail, open spaces, and jobs serving the neighborhood and the region. People travel to and around the corridor on foot, bicycles, wheelchairs, buses, cars, taxis, and streetcars. The street is welcoming, attractive, active, safe, and comfortable for residents, workers, and visitors.”



MINNEAPOLIS GRAND KEY CORNER STREET PRESENCE

24th and Chicago



existing signage to be removed

1 CORNER WALL SIGN

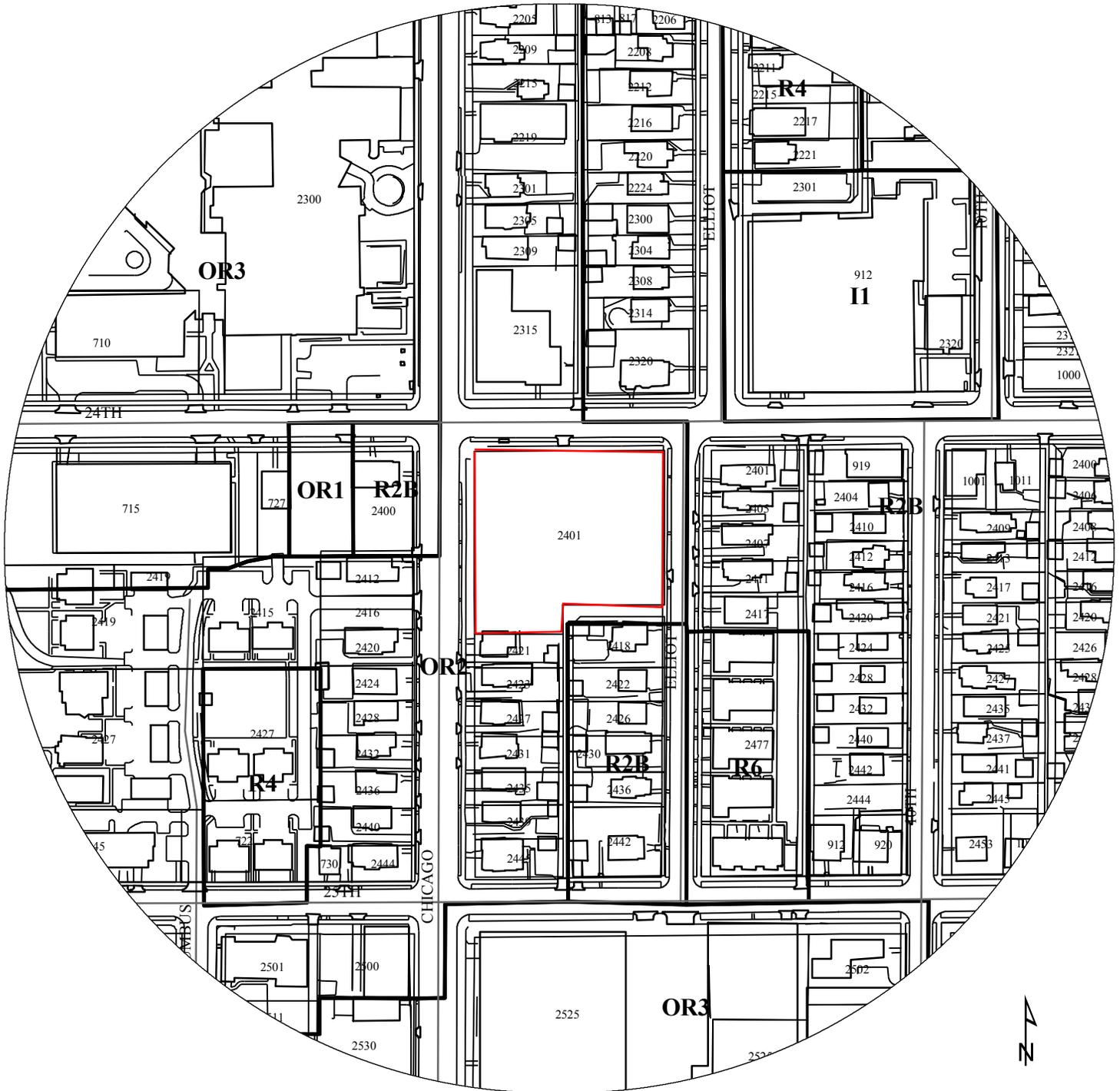
2 WEST ELEVATION AT CHICAGO AVE. -



Sign will essentially wrap the corner - this illustration was from preliminary designs and not for actual building detail

NAME OF APPLICANT

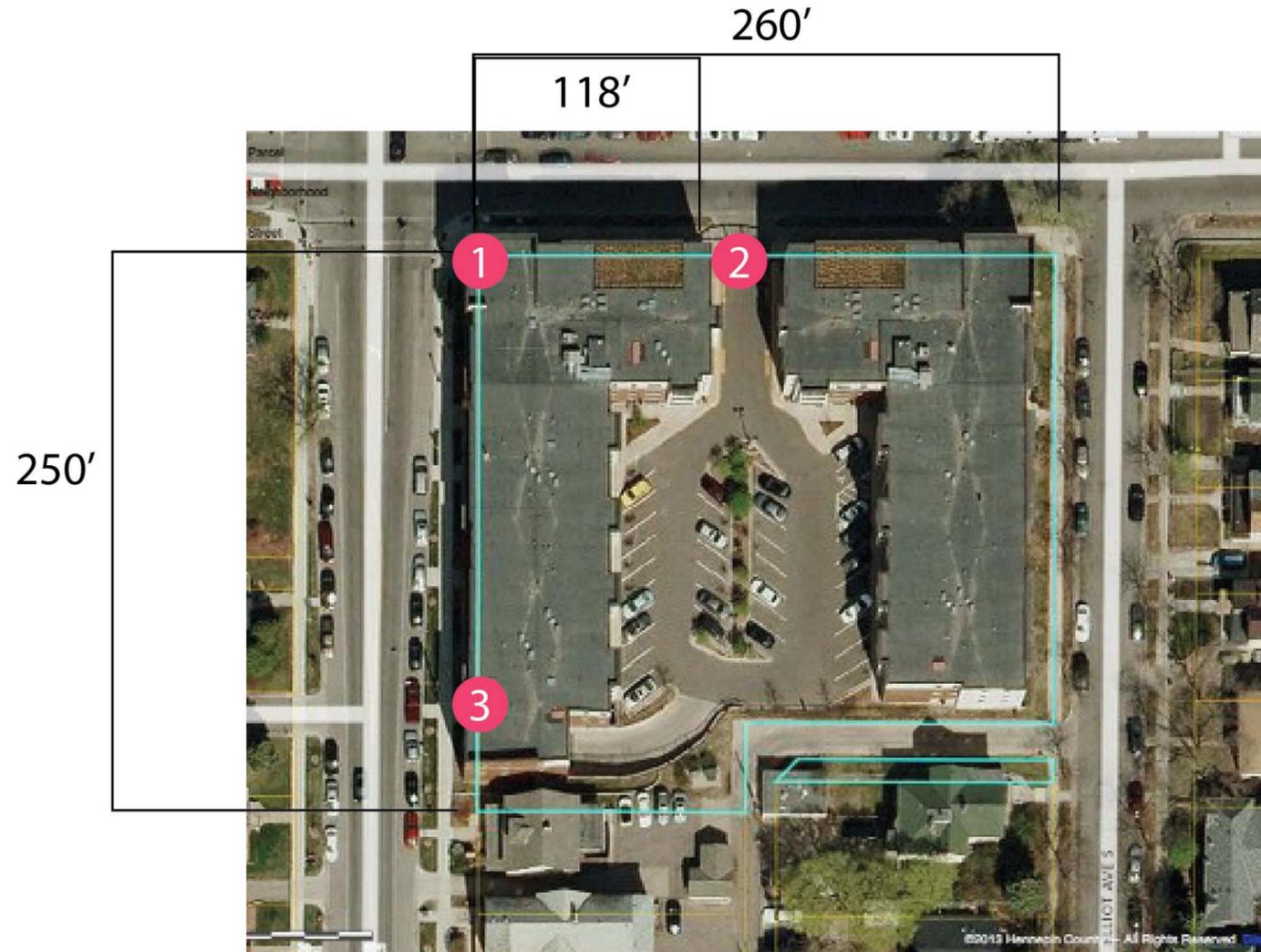
WARD



PROPERTY ADDRESS
2401 Chicago Ave

FILE NUMBER
BZZ-6889

SIGN PLAN OVERVIEW



SIGN PLAN OVERVIEW

- 1 CORNER WALL SIGN
- 2 WALL SIGN
- 3 PROJECTING WALL SIGN

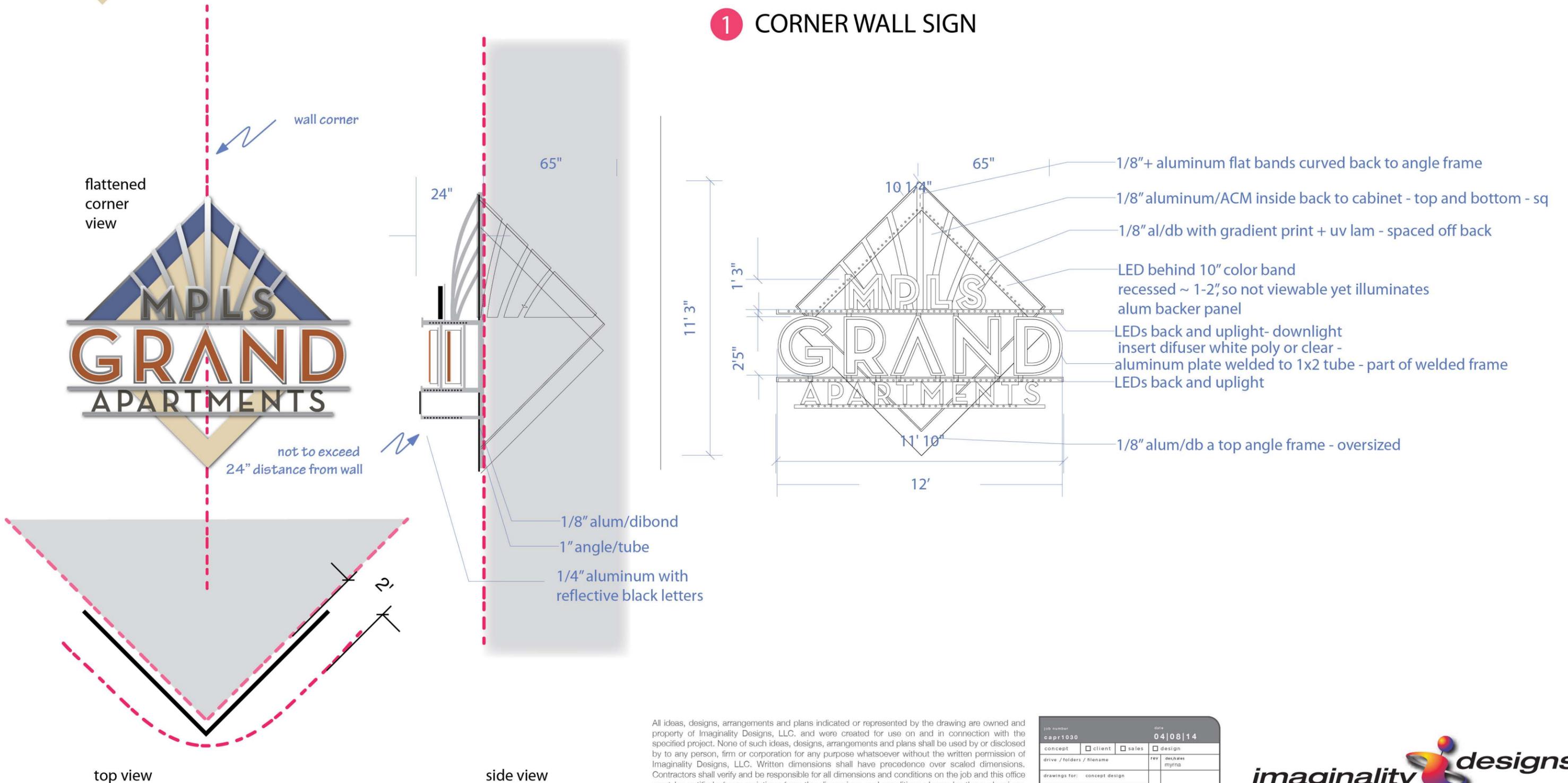
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1 CORNER WALL SIGN

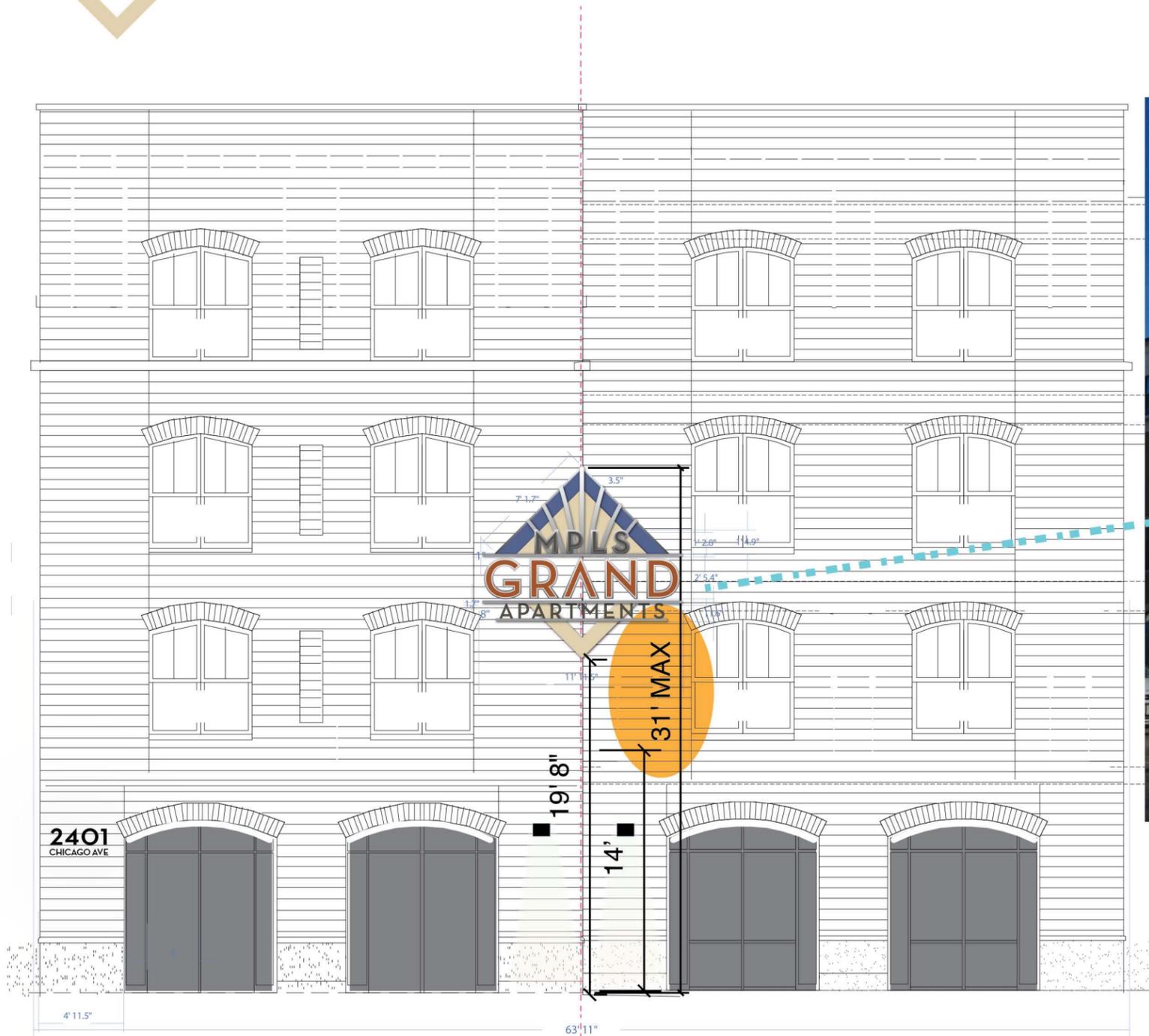


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2 WEST ELEVATION AT CHICAGO AVE. -
1/4"=1' 0"

1 CORNER WALL SIGN



REQUESTED HEIGHT ADJUSTMENT
FROM 14' TO 31'



existing signage to be removed

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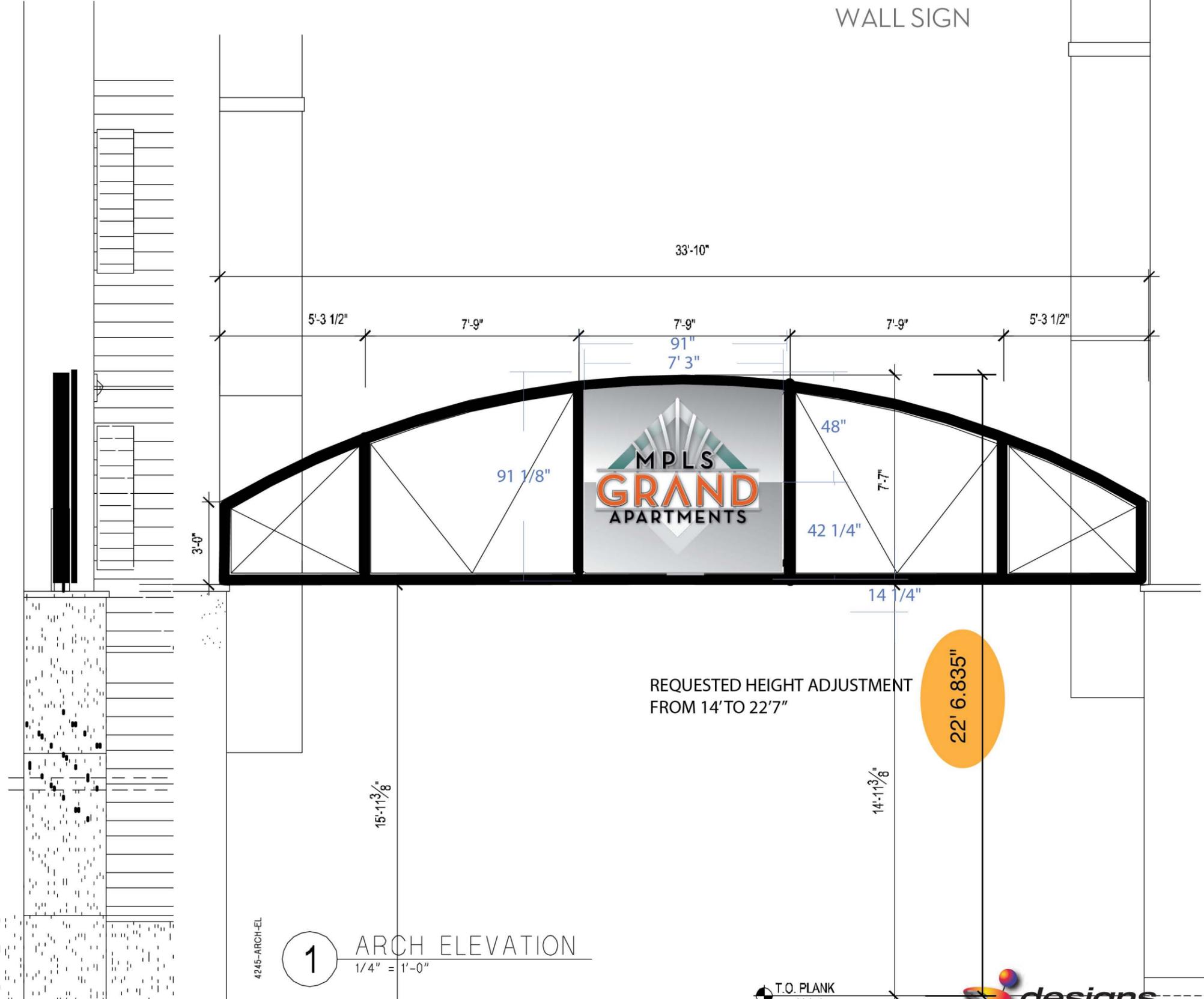


MINNEAPOLIS GRAND ENTRANCE WALL ON 24TH STREET

WALL SIGN

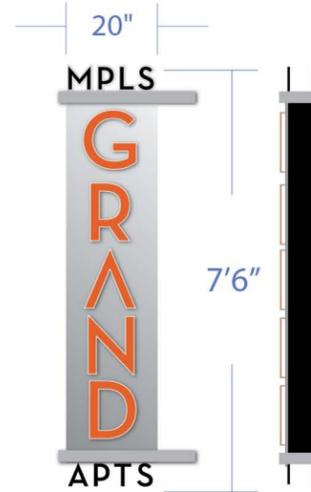
2 WALL SIGN

METAL ARCH OVER ENTRY
 Flat sign - considered wall sign
 sq ft allowance 1.5 sq ft per lineal foot
 of wall up to 180 sq ft per sign





3 PROJECTING WALL SIGN



7'6" x 20" sign body + letters
background natural finish aluminum
aluminum backer to 1" sintra and DiBond
dimensional GRAND logo letters.

MPLS & APTS:
aluminum backer with 1" dimensional black sintra letters

sign projection mounted to brick - <3' out from building
inline with second floor windows
no illumination

REQUESTED HEIGHT ADJUSTMENT
FROM 14' TO 22'

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