



Project Name & Address: 312 Wisconsin Avenue

Application Type(s): Certificate of Appropriateness for exterior alterations in the Mansion Hill historic district

Legistar File ID # [71553](#)

Prepared By: Heather Bailey, Preservation Planner, Planning Division

Date Prepared: May 31, 2022

Summary

Project Applicant/Contact: Mary Beth Growney Selene, Ryan Signs

Requested Action: The Applicant is requesting that the Landmarks Commission approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for the installation of signage.

Background Information

Parcel Location/Information: The subject site is located in the Mansion Hill historic district.

Relevant State Statute Section:

Wisc SS 62.23(7)(em)2m. In the repair or replacement of a property that is designated as a historic landmark or included within a historic district or neighborhood conservation district under this paragraph, a city shall allow an owner to use materials that are similar in design, color, scale, architectural appearance, and other visual qualities.

Relevant Ordinance Sections:

- 41.18 STANDARDS FOR GRANTING A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS.** A certificate of appropriateness shall be granted only if the proposed project complies with this chapter, including all of the following standards that apply.
- (1) New construction or exterior alteration. The Landmarks Commission shall approve a certificate of appropriateness for exterior alteration or construction only if:
 - (a) In the case of exterior alteration to a designated landmark, the proposed work would meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.
 - (b) In the case of exterior alteration or construction of a structure on a landmark site, the proposed work would meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.
 - (c) In the case of exterior alteration or construction on any property located in a historic district, the proposed exterior alteration or construction meets the adopted standards and guidelines for that district.
 - (d) In the case of any exterior alteration or construction for which a certificate of appropriateness is required, the proposed work will not frustrate the public interest expressed in this ordinance for protecting, promoting, conserving, and using the City’s historic resources.
 - (3) Signs. The commission shall approve a certificate of appropriateness for signs unless it finds that any of the following are true:

- (a) The size or design of the sign(s) would adversely affect the historic fabric of the structure or the district;
- (b) The sign(s) fails to comply with [Chapter 31](#), MGO;
- (c) The sign(s) fails to comply with specific standards and guidelines for signs adopted in each historic district under this ordinance.

41.22 MANSION HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT.

- (4) Standards for Review of Development in the Mansion Hill Historic District.
 - (a) Any new structure located within two hundred (200) feet of other historic resources shall be visually compatible with those historic resources in the following ways:
 1. Height.
 2. Gross Volume.
 3. In the street elevation(s) of a structure, the proportion of width to height in the facade(s).
 4. The proportions and relationships of width to height of the doors and windows in street facade(s).
 5. The proportion and rhythm of solids to voids created by openings in the façade.
 - (b) All street facades shall blend with other structures via directional expression. When adjacent structures have a dominant vertical or horizontal expression, this expression should be carried over and reflected.

Analysis and Conclusion

The applicant is requesting a Certificate of Appropriateness for the installation of two illuminated wall signs, four internally illuminated ground signs on the property, and removal of the existing metal wall signage on 1963 wing. Bethel Lutheran Church is in the NeoGothic Revival style, designed by architect Hugo Haeuser, and originally constructed in 1930 with additions in 1940 and 1963.

Of the ground signage, two would be new monument signs and two would be a change of copy of signage that was approved per a Certificate of Appropriateness in 1995. On the two existing monument signs, they are each encased in a stone feature that replicates the architectural vocabulary of the building. The change of copy within those features is proposed to be entirely internally illuminated with translucent acrylic.

Of the two additional ground signs, one would remove a small guard house at the northwest entrance to the parking lot and replace an existing metal site sign that specifies private parking. The proposed new sign would have a masonry base topped with a translucent acrylic sign that specifies that the parking lot is for church use only. The demolition of the guard house will need a Certificate of Appropriateness, but the structure is not historic and not in character with the other structures onsite. There will still be two metal signs at the two gated entrances specifying that the parking lot is private parking.

The final sign is at the southern corner of the site. It would have a masonry base and is topped by a translucent acrylic sign identifying the property as Bethel Lutheran Church.

The building signs are proposed to be installed above the center entry for the porticos on the north and south sides of the principal structure. The individual letters and a symbol would be backlit. There is no precedent for introducing commercial style signage on a building of this type in the historic districts. Precedent has been to approve a separate ground sign that compliments the style of the building and not the introduction of a design element onto a historic building. A portico, by its very nature is an architectural feature to denote where a main entrance to a building is located and serves the function of guiding users to doorways. This site also has decorative pavement to lead pedestrians from the parking lot to the southern entrance and the portico on the

northern entrance extends past the rest of the building to denote that it is also an entrance. Aside from the precedent and the architecture of the building already serving the purpose that the proposed signage would allegedly address, staff has concerns about punching so many holes into the masonry in order to attach each element for the signage.

The metal lettering on the 1963 wing is installed in the stone blocks of the façade. Their removal will leave voids in the stone and it will need to be patched by a mason to ensure structural integrity of the stone and to minimize the appearance of those holes.

The Landmarks Commission recently approved a new acrylic monument sign at 315 Wisconsin, but only the letters and Masonic symbol were translucent, so that the entire sign did not glow. That property has metal directional and privacy signage at its parking lot. The other recent sign approval on a similarly styled building was the new signage at Luther Memorial, 1021 University Ave. That was a single monument sign, constructed in a style to compliment the building, with recessed lighting to provide downcast illumination on the sign. That property has metal directional and privacy signage on the rear of the structure just as the subject property currently does.

This signage request will also need to secure approval from Zoning and the Urban Design Commission as it does not currently meet signage standards. The proposed building signage is larger than the allowable signable area on the building and only two ground signs are allowed. It is also possible that the south monument sign is within a visibility triangle and Traffic Engineering is reviewing the proposal. The Landmarks Commission needs to review the project according to its standards and the other agencies will provide their comments when the Urban Design Commission considers the project.

While staff does not believe that the proposed wall signage meets the Mansion Hill standards or the Historic Preservation Ordinance signage standards, and that the two additional ground signs do not meet the Historic Preservation Ordinance signage standards, the change of copy in the existing two ground signs could be approvable if the colored acrylic is changed to opaque so that only the white lettering and details is translucent and illuminated.

A discussion of the relevant ordinance sections follows:

41.18 STANDARDS FOR GRANTING A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS. A certificate of appropriateness shall be granted only if the proposed project complies with this chapter, including all of the following standards that apply.

- (3) Signs. The commission shall approve a certificate of appropriateness for signs unless it finds that any of the following are true:
- (a) The size or design of the sign(s) would adversely affect the historic fabric of the structure or the district;
 - (b) The current proposed signage does not comply with [Chapter 31](#), MGO, and the applicant is seeking a Comprehensive Sign Review by the Urban Design Commission and Zoning.
 - (c) The sign(s) fails to comply with specific standards and guidelines for signs adopted in each historic district under this ordinance.

41.22 MANSION HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT.

- (4) Standards for Review of Development in the Mansion Hill Historic District.
- (a) Any new structure located within two hundred (200) feet of other historic resources shall be visually compatible with those historic resources in the following ways:
 - 1. N/A
 - 2. N/A

3. No proposed changes to the width and height of the façades.
 4. The introduction of a new architectural feature above the portico that also has backlighting creates an interruption to the rhythm of the façade and alters the form and character of this entrance feature.
 5. The backlight wall signage will create a new sense of solids to voids above the north and south entrances of the building.
- (b) The introduction of the wall signage creates a horizontal design element on what is otherwise a feature with vertical expression, which is a characteristic of the NeoGothic Revival style.

Recommendation

Staff believes that the standards for granting a Certificate of Appropriateness could be met and recommends the Landmarks Commission approve the project with the following conditions:

1. Approval of change of copy in two existing ground signs with the new acrylic to be opaque and only the white lettering and detailing to be translucent and internally illuminated.
2. Updated site plan showing removal of the proposed 2 new wall signs and the 2 new ground signs.
3. Specifications from a mason on repair of the stone on the 1963 wing where the metal lettering is proposed to be removed.
4. Application to demolish the guard structure in the parking lot.