

PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

May 19, 2025

PREPARED FOR THE LANDMARKS COMMISSION



Project Name & Address: 427 E Gorham Street

Application Type(s): Certificate of Appropriateness for signage

Legistar File ID # [88294](#)

Prepared By: Heather Bailey, Preservation Planner, Planning Division

Date Prepared: May 13, 2025

Summary

Project Applicant/Contact: McKenzie Burton, Wisconsin Management Company

Requested Action: The Applicant is requesting that the Landmarks Commission approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for directional signage on the property

Background Information

Parcel Location/Information: The subject property is a designated landmark

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 if it finds that the following are true:
 - (a) Signs are located within the façade areas set aside for signs as part of the façade design or are integrated and compatible with the structure where the façade areas have not been set aside for signs;
 - (b) New signs shall be consistent with the traditional signage pattern locations on a structure or a property, and shall feature materials and style of illumination typical of the period of significance for the property or district;
 - (c) Signs shall comply with [Chapter 31](#), MGO;
 - (d) Signs shall comply with specific standards and guidelines adopted for historic districts under this ordinance.

Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.
2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.
4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.
8. Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

Analysis and Conclusion

The proposed project is to install directional signage to assist visitors in finding the main entrance to the structure, which faces an interior lot line of this corner lot property. This structure was originally the Madison Water Works, constructed in 1917 and designated a Madison Landmark in 1993. The structure was designed by noted Madison architectural firm Balch and Lippert. The Prairie-style decorative elements on this building became a hallmark of Madison Water Utility structures for the next 30 years.

The new signage meets sign code and will be installed in the ground, so it can be removed in the future. It is simple in design and will assist visitors in accessing this historic resource.

A discussion of relevant standards follows:

41.18 STANDARDS FOR GRANTING A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS.

- (3) Signs. The Commission shall approve a certificate of appropriateness for signs if it finds that the following are true:
 - (a) This directional signage will be located on the landscape to direct people to the main entrance. No work is proposed on the historic structure itself.
 - (b) The locations are what would traditionally be the siting for directional signage on a property. There is no proposed illumination.
 - (c) Signs shall comply with [Chapter 31](#), MGO;
 - (d) N/A

Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

1. There is no proposed change to the use of the property. The signage will assist with the ongoing use of the site.
2. N/A
3. The simple signage will read as a product of its time and not create a false sense of history or read as a conjectural detail.
4. N/A
5. N/A
6. N/A
7. N/A
8. N/A
9. No historic materials will be impacted for this project. The new signs will read as a product of their time and are compatible with the historic character of the site.
10. The signage can be removed in the future and will not impact the historic resource on the site.

Recommendation

Staff believes that the standards for granting a Certificate of Appropriateness are met and recommends the Landmarks Commission approve the project as proposed.