

AGENDA # 3

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: LANDMARKS COMMISSION

PRESENTED: 1/31/22

TITLE: 924 Williamson St - Exterior Alteration
in the Third Lake Ridge Hist.
Dist. - Installation of signage; 6th
Ald. Dist.

REFERRED:

REREFERRED:

REPORTED BACK:

AUTHOR: Heather Bailey, Preservation Planner

ADOPTED:

POF:

DATED: 2/7/22

ID NUMBER: 69436

Members present were: Anna Andrzejewski, Richard Arnesen, Katie Kaliszewski, Ald. Arvina Martin, David McLean, and Maurice Taylor.

SUMMARY:

Mitchell Turino, registering in support and available to answer questions
Mary Beth Growney Selene, registering in support and wishing to speak

Bailey discussed the proposal to install signage using internally illuminated channel letters in the signage band area above the front window bays on the storefront. She discussed the applicable standards and made the argument that the proposed signage is not in keeping with the character of historic signage within the historic district. Regarding the Third Lake Ridge standards and retaining historic materials, she said that the individual channel letters would require more penetrations into the masonry on the front of the building, which was a concern. She pointed out that this structure is outside of the period of significance of the historic district and showed a recent example of a nearby signage project on a building also outside the period of significance, which included a wall sign with exterior illumination from gooseneck lights placed above. For that project at 944 Williamson, the commission had included a condition of approval that the new signage not be internally illuminated. She said that there is a potential project here, but not as the applicants are currently proposing.

Kaliszewski asked about signage at the business's previous location in Third Lake Ridge.

Taylor asked if there were other internally illuminated signs nearby. Bailey said that some new structures have internally illuminated signs that were approved by Zoning without Landmarks Commission approval, so that signage did not go through the appropriate City approval processes. She said that one must consider the standards for granting a Certificate of Appropriateness and the historic district standards for any signage requests.

Taylor requested confirmation that the building is outside the period of significance for the historic district. Bailey confirmed that it is and asked the commission to consider whether the signage should be in keeping with signage that might have been on the building in the 1960s when it was constructed or with signage in the historic district. She explained that they have tended to say that signage should be in keeping with the character of signage one sees in the historic district, so it will read as new signage but maintain a continuous character with what one sees in the district. Andrzejewski said that while this is not a historic building in terms of the period of significance of the historic district, it is part of the historic district, and we are considering the character-defining features of the historic district as a whole.

Turino, business owner and building tenant, said they didn't have signage at their previous location, only window stickers. Kaliszewski asked why they chose individual letters as opposed to a sign band. Turino said that it is more noticeable, looks cleaner, and is also more detailed and high quality, which reflects the inside of the building. They explained that as an arcade, there are a lot of neon signs and everything is internally illuminated, so using those letters on the exterior fits the aesthetic of the business. They said that it would be incongruent to have a wooden sign with gooseneck lighting and then when one walks inside, they are surrounded by arcade games, which are built on modern technology from the 1980s-90s.

Growney Selene agreed that the vintage look of gooseneck lighting is appropriate for some building types in the historic district but did not think it was an architectural complement to this building. They said that internal illumination would be more suitable to the building design, as well as the business itself, which is a tech-driven entertainment destination. They argued that it would also add to the varied landscape of the neighborhood and diverse nature of the historic district.

McLean asked about the construction of the signage and if the letters have a border or if each is illuminated from edge to edge. Growney Selene said they are illuminated from edge to edge, the sign faces are plastic, and the sides and back are aluminum. They added that over time, neon has evolved to LED, which is a more environmentally friendly lighting source. Arnesen asked how deep the letters are; Growney Selene said they have a 3" profile. McLean asked if the sides are totally enclosed and only the face is lighted; Growney Selene confirmed this was true.

McLean asked if the applicants had studied different sizes for the signage. Growney Selene said this size is allowed by code because they are allowed to use 40% of the signable area. McLean said that it looks out of scale and is a little too large given the proportions from the window heads to the parapet above. He said that given the building's style and age, perhaps the sign could be justified closer to the door and not so symmetrical because the façade itself isn't quite symmetrical. Growney Selene said they had only considered a symmetrical alignment. They suggested that if the commission considered an internally illuminated sign, the applicants could consider a smaller size, but the internal illumination was really important. McLean said that he understood given the building and the business within, and he might agree. He said he was okay with the sign type, but it is a bit large for the proportion of the façade.

Andrzejewski referenced the staff report, which discussed precedence and looking at the historic district as a whole to see how the project fits within Third Lake Ridge. McLean said that some buildings were meant to look traditional, so traditional signage and lighting would be appropriate; however, this building was not built to look like it belongs in Third Lake Ridge. He pointed out that if the original building signage were still there, it would be appropriate to the building when it was built. He said that he was also considering the owner's request for a sign style that fits the business.

Arnesen agreed with McLean that the proposed sign is too big, but he could see them getting toward approval of an internally illuminated sign. He said that he understood the reasoning for using the proposed font, but he didn't think it worked well and wasn't appropriate for the historic district. He suggested they use something less pixelated in a smaller overall design.

Turino said they considered doing the "I/O" pixelated and "Arcade Bar" in a more modern font to keep the arcade vibe but not have everything pixelated. Arnesen referenced the logo sticker on the window and suggested they play around with fonts. Turino said it was a hand-drawn square logo, and they want something to fill up the space above the windows and door. They said they heard the commission's concerns that the sign is too large, so they will look at options to tone it down. Andrzejewski said that in looking at the historic district as a whole, signs tend not to fill the whole space on the front of a building.

Kaliszewski said that while Bailey provided an example of wall signage externally illuminated with gooseneck lighting, she didn't think staff was specifically recommending gooseneck lighting for this building but instead had issues with the individual letters and internal illumination. She agreed that gooseneck lighting was not necessarily the correct thing for this building, but it was the wrong thing to focus on. She said that this is a

masonry façade rather than a true masonry building, but she had concerns about this amount of materials being put into the brick to install the individual letters, which is a lot of wear and tear on the brick and mortar. She said that her primary concerns are about the preservation of the façade itself, and she wasn't sure about the current proposal.

Bailey agreed that external illumination doesn't have to be gooseneck, and there are some modern options that would be more in keeping with the character of the structure. She also suggested signage that was more in keeping with the 1960s period of the building, which would have had neon channel lettering. She said that if the commission decides they can approve internal illumination by saying the signage on the building should be in keeping with its c. 1960s construction, that is a possibility. Kaliszewski clarified that the sign should be LED, not neon; Bailey agreed.

McLean said the commission has agreed they could look at something beyond what is traditionally seen in the neighborhood, but it should be a smaller size than proposed, a different font more appropriate to the vintage of the building, and use fewer building penetrations to help preserve the building façade. He asked why there is hesitation to approve internally illuminated signs. Bailey said it was the style of sign because during the period of significance for the historic district, interior illumination didn't exist. Kaliszewski said that in the 1960s, there were illuminated signs, but sometimes only part of the sign was lighted, not all of it. She said that she would not recommend using modern, bright white light. She said that she was hesitant about interior illumination, but she could be convinced to have a portion of the sign lighted. She understood the applicant's request based on the aesthetic of the building and business, but it would not be in keeping with the surrounding area.

Andrzejewski said that she was okay with internal lighting given the period of the building as long as it could be brought more in keeping with the historic district in terms of size and font. McLean agreed with Kaliszewski's comment on color because lighting from the era of this building wouldn't have been super bright, and he knew LED offered options. Bailey agreed they should use something in the warm Kelvin range to be in keeping with 1960s-style lighting.

Andrzejewski asked for feedback on how the sign is affixed to the building, and McLean said there should be fewer penetrations.

Martin said that she understood the proposed font and how it makes sense for the business but agreed with other commissioners that the design would need to be reworked.

Turino said he understood the feedback and would come back with something smaller and more nuanced. Kaliszewski suggested they look at 1960s exterior commercial signs for ideas. She said that with the 1980s-90s arcade game craze and idealization of the 1950s-60s during that era, it would be a good connection where they can find something inspired by the 1960s with some illumination that connects the two time periods. Martin reiterated that the commission is supportive of the project and looks forward to making this work within the standards they must abide by.

ACTION:

A motion was made by Kaliszewski, seconded by Arnesen, to refer the item to a future Landmarks Commission meeting. The motion passed by voice vote/other.