

HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION
DECEMBER 15, 2014
APPLICATION FOR A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS
C14H-1990-0007
Nelson Davis Warehouse
117 W. 4th Street

PROPOSAL

Demolish the existing temporary rooftop storefront and construct a new storefront and canopy; signage.

PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS

Storefront and canopy:

The applicant received approval from the Commission last month to demolish the existing “temporary” storefront and construct a new storefront for the proposed restaurant use. The applicant also sought to extend the canopy; that request has been withdrawn. The canopy dimensions previously approved by the Commission in March, 2012 will be utilized by the current applicant, and there will be a metal roof placed on the previously-approved framing.

The applicant further proposes to install umbrellas and patio tables on the rooftop; the umbrellas will be red with integral lights and electric heaters. The applicant further proposes the installation of red globe light pendants from the roof of the canopy. The umbrellas will be set against the front guardrail; with the proposed extension of the canopy, the red globe lights will be approximately 7 feet back from the front parapet.

Signage:

The applicant had proposed several signs for the new rooftop restaurant. The only sign that the applicant is currently proposing is a sign for the railing of the rooftop deck that will be 85.5 square feet and will have halo lighting behind reverse channel letters. The applicant and the landlord for the building will be proposing a master sign program for any remaining signs; these will come in a new application at a later date.

STANDARDS FOR REVIEW

The Commission’s Standards for Review of applications for Certificates of Appropriateness include:

- Do not destroy the distinguishing original qualities or character of a building, structure, or site and its environment. Avoid the removal or alteration of any historic material or distinctive architectural features.
- Contemporary design for alterations and additions to existing properties are appropriate when such alterations and additions do not destroy significant historic, architectural, or cultural material and such design is compatible with the size, scale, color, material, and character of the property, neighborhood, or environment.
- Construct new additions or alterations to structures in such a manner that if such addition or alteration were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the structure will be unimpaired.

The Architectural Design Guidelines for historic districts and historic landmarks state:

- ♦ Minimize the visual impact of rooftop uses as seen from the street.

- ◆ Set activities back such that they are not visible from the sidewalk below. At a minimum, they should be set back the height of a one-story building. This includes trees, umbrellas, and tables.

The Downtown Austin Plan recognizes the significance of the Warehouse District, and proposes a minimum of a 10 foot setback and a preferred 15 foot setback for all rooftop additions in the Warehouse Building. The section of the Downtown Austin Plan that addresses rooftop uses in the Sixth Street National Register Historic District also confirms that the desired setback is 15 feet for all rooftop uses.

Sign standards:

I. SIGN TYPES

A. FLUSH-MOUNTED SIGNS

A flush-mounted wall sign is one that is mounted flat to the wall.

LOCATION

- Locate a flush-mounted wall sign just above the display window. Do not locate a flush-mounted wall sign above second-floor windows.
- When feasible, place a wall sign such that it aligns with others in the block.
- When planning a wall sign, determine if decorative moldings exist that could define a “sign panel.” If so, locate flush-mounted signs such that they fit within panels formed by moldings or transom panels on the façade. In no case should a sign obscure significant façade features.

SIZE

- In general, the maximum wall sign area on a building should not exceed 7% of the overall façade area; in some cases, however, the Commission may consider approving a maximum of 10%, if overall compatibility with the District is demonstrated.
- The maximum height of an individual flush-mounted sign shall be 2 feet.

NUMBER OF SIGNS

- Only one flush-mounted sign shall be allowed for each distinct façade module.

INAPPROPRIATE SIGN TYPES

- Signs that are out of character with those seen historically, and that would alter the historic character of the street.
- Free-standing signs, either pole-mounted or monument types.
- Animated signs.
- Sandwich (or menu) boards that stand on the sidewalk are generally discouraged.
- Any sign that visually overpowers the building or obscures significant architectural features.
- Roof signs.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Not reviewed.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Canopy and deck furnishings:

The Commission has approved the storefront modification but denied the extension of the canopy; the applicant has dropped the request to extend the canopy and seeks only to cover the previously-approved canopy framing to make the rooftop usable in all weather conditions. While the previous approval allowed a guardrail to be 2 feet back from the front parapet, the addition of umbrellas with integral lights and electric heaters and red globe light pendants will create too much of a draw away from the historic building. Recognizing that a rooftop use must have something to attract attention from the street, staff recommends reconsideration of the umbrellas and globe pendants too close to the parapet as to cause a visual intrusion on the building's historic character.

Staff recommends approval of the roofing for the previously-approved canopy framing and requests that the applicant reconsider the umbrellas in the 10-foot setback space on the roof deck.

Signage:

Approve the modified sign for the rooftop railing. The applicant had previously requested a sign on the actual roof – this modification is more in keeping with the sign standards for landmarks and historic districts. The applicant's business will be only on the roof – a sign at that level is conducive to business; the lighting for the sign has also been modified from internal illumination to halo-lit reverse-channel letters in conformance with the sign standards for historic landmarks and districts. While the sign is large, it is two stories up, and staff recommends approval of the sign despite its size.