

HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION
PERMITS IN NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICTS
AUGUST 28, 2017
NRD-2017-0061
401 Congress Avenue
Congress Avenue Historic District

PROPOSAL

Install internally-lit signage.

PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS

The applicant proposes the installation of three (3) signs for Modern Market Farm Fresh Eatery at the Frost Bank Tower. The first proposed sign is a wall sign of 55.38 square feet. IT will be three feet tall by 18.46 feet wide, and will be installed on the top spandrels of the windows of the business on the ground floor of the Frost Bank Tower. The sign will feature the name of the business and will be constructed of reverse pan channel letters and will have clear acrylic push-through letters with a vinyl overlay. The sign will be internally illuminated.

The second proposed sign is a projecting sign that will be 6.25 square feet, projecting from the building over the Congress Avenue sidewalk. The sign will be constructed of aluminum and will depict a fork, spoon, and knife, crafted of push-through acrylic with a vinyl overlay; the sign will be internally-illuminated.

The third proposed sign is a wall sign that will be 12.25 square feet and will be suspended in the recessed entryway to the new restaurant. The sign will have the same composition as the projecting sign described above, with an aluminum construction, depicting the fork, spoon, and knife, all crafted of push-through acrylic with a vinyl overlay, and internal illumination. This sign will not face onto Congress Avenue.

STANDARDS FOR REVIEW

The Commission's standards for review of signs within the downtown historic districts include:

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.

B. PROJECTING SIGNS**LOCATION**

- A projecting sign should be located near the business entrance, just above the door or to the side of it, near eye level. The bottom of the projecting sign, however, shall be a minimum of 9 feet above the sidewalk.

SIZE

- The maximum size of an individual projecting sign (one face) shall be 6 square feet. It may not extend from the building façade for a greater distance than 6 feet or a distance equal to 2/3 the width of the abutting sidewalk, whichever distance is less.

NUMBER OF SIGNS

- In general, only one projecting sign per building façade is allowed. However, where the Commission determines that the result would be compatible with the District, one projecting sign shall be allowed for each distinct facade module of a building.

C. WINDOW SIGNS**LOCATION**

- A window sign may be painted on or hung just inside a window.

SIZE

- The maximum area of a window sign may not exceed 20% of the window or 8 square feet, whichever is the lesser amount.

II. SIGN MATERIALS

- Use materials that are compatible with the materials of the building façade.
- Painted wood and metal are appropriate materials for signs. Do not use unfinished materials, including unpainted wood.
- Use plastic only in limited amounts. Plastic may not be the predominant materials on any sign.
- Do not use highly reflective materials.

III. SIGN CONTENT AND DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

- Use symbol signs when appropriate for the business.
- Use colors for the sign that are compatible with those of the building front. Limit the number of colors on the sign to no more than three (3).
- Use a simple sign design and typeface, and a style and size of lettering that will be compatible with the building front. Avoid sign types that appear too contemporary.
- Limit the height of letters to 10 inches.

IV. SIGN LIGHTING

- Use an external, shielded lamp to direct light at the sign. Signs may have “halo” lighting or recessed can lighting in awnings.

DO NOT USE:

1. Internal illumination
2. Fluorescent lights
3. Sodium vapor lights.

STAFF COMMENTS

This proposal does not conform to the Commission's sign standards in several ways. First and foremost, for all three signs, internal illumination not permitted for signs within the historic district; even though this is not a historic building, the standard for illumination should remain in force. Both the wall sign and the suspended sign in the recessed entry of the business are too large; staff is willing to forego the size standard for the wall sign given the size of the façade, but the other signs should conform. Finally, the use of acrylic push-through letters in the internally-lit illuminated aluminum cabinet do not conform to the use of plastic in signs in the historic district.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Deny the proposal for all of the signs. Each of these signs has at least one departure from the sign standards for the historic district.