

HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION
PERMITS IN NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICTS
JULY 26, 2021
SB 21 054392, 055812, 055829
CONGRESS AVENUE NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICT
600 CONGRESS AVENUE

PROPOSAL

Amend a previous sign installation application on a noncontributing building to include a blade sign and to change color scheme in order to enhance business visibility.

PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS

- 1) Install a blade sign at the Congress Avenue elevation.
- 2) Rework existing signs to revert to originally proposed color scheme.

STANDARDS FOR REVIEW

The City of Austin's Guidelines for Signs in National Register Historic Districts or at a City Historic Landmark are used to evaluate projects in National Register Historic Districts. The following standards apply to the proposed project:

Number of Signs: The Commission allows one sign per building, unless the building has multiple tenants; in this case, the Commission may allow one sign per façade module, if the façade modules correspond to tenant spaces. The Commission may also allow one sign for each street frontage if the building is at an intersection. A single directory sign is appropriate for a large building with multiple tenants.

The proposed project adds a blade sign to the Congress Avenue façade, which also contains a flush-mounted sign above the business entrance for this tenant. A small flush-mounted sign is located above the pickup window at the building's secondary façade. This exceeds the number of allowable signs per the guidelines.

Sign Types: The Commission may allow window signs, awning signs, projecting signs, and flush mounted signs for most commercial buildings. Freestanding signs are allowed for office and retail uses in historic residential buildings. City codes prohibit the Commission from approving the following sign types: (1) rotating, (2) off-premise, (3) roof signs, (4) portable, or (5) signs which flash or blink at intervals. City code also prohibits handbills, posters, or placards on a structure except inside a window or on a bulletin board.

The proposed project includes only projecting and flush-mounted signs.

Sign Size: The maximum size for signs depends on the sign type: 1. Projecting (blade) signs: 6 square feet 2. Flush-mounted signs: 7% of the overall façade area, with a maximum height of 2 feet and a maximum size of 20 square feet 3. Window signs: The lesser of 20% of the window or 8 square feet 4. Awning signs: The lesser of 20% of the awning panel or 8 square feet. Large commercial buildings (over 3 stories): Cumulative signage may not exceed 40 square feet per façade and must comply with a signage plan for the building. A license agreement may be required for any signs or awnings which project over city right-of-way.

The proposed new blade sign is less than 6 square feet in area, with only the edge of the sign visible from the street.

Sign Design, Coloring and Materials: Use simple shapes, such as rectangular or oval signs. The Commission recommends painted wood or metal signs with matte finishes for all signs; plastic, reflective materials, and unfinished surfaces are not allowed. Limit the colors used in a sign to no more than three. For sites with multiple signs, all signs should have corresponding or matching designs, coloring and materials. Signs should match or complement the existing color scheme of the building to the maximum extent feasible.

The proposed new blade sign is simple in shape, and is composed of aluminum and acrylic. It is red and white to match the other signs on the building, which will be recolored to match the business branding and increase visibility.

Lettering: No more than two typefaces are allowed. Avoid lettering which appears too contemporary in the sign. The proposed new blade sign has a single typeface.

Lighting: Lighting must be indirect, and may be accomplished through shielded incandescent lights attached to the top of the sign, "halo" lighting, or recessed can lighting in awnings. Internally-lit cabinet signs are not allowed for signs on historic buildings or within the historic districts. Neon signs are prohibited on pre-1950 building facades; an exception may be made for existing pre-1950 neon signage, or with photographic proof of a historic (pre-1950) neon sign on the building,

but only if the neon sign does not detract from the historic character of the building or area. The Commission may consider limited neon on a post-1950 façade, but encourages backlit neon over exposed neon.

The proposed signage is not lit.

Sign Placement: *Flush-mounted and projecting (blade) signs should be positioned near the business entrance immediately above the principal entry to the business. Single-tenant signs are not allowed over doorways serving multiple tenants. As required by the city land development code, the bottom of the sign shall be a minimum of nine (9) feet above the sidewalk. When feasible, place signs to align with others in the block. Signs should not obscure or cover architectural elements, such as windows, decorative banding, or other ornamentation.*

The proposed new blade sign is located on a noncontributing building. It is located above a bay of windows.

Sign Mounting: *New signs should utilize existing mounting apparatus whenever possible. If new bolt holes or brackets are necessary for sign installation, care should be taken to ensure that installation does not damage historic building materials in any way. Bolting through mortar joints avoids damage to historic stone or brick.*

The proposed new blade sign is located on a noncontributing building, and mounting will not affect any historic materials.

Exceptions: *The City Historic Landmark Commission may consider exceptions to the foregoing provisions when warranted, and not prohibited by city ordinance.*

The project meets most of the applicable standards.

STAFF COMMENTS

The application was approved at the May 2021 Historic Landmark Commission hearing, with the condition that the signage be a neutral color. Following consultation with staff to meet this condition, white signage was installed. The applicant is dissatisfied with the visibility of their business and requests modest revisions, in keeping with other signs within the National Register district.

COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

Revise previous Commission action to allow red signs and a blade sign.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Approve the application, per Committee feedback.

PROPERTY INFORMATION*Photos*

Image from applicant showing limited visibility of installed signage.