

HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION
APPLICATION FOR A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS
JANUARY 11, 2023
SB-2022-173982; C14H-1981-0011-A
SWIFT BUILDING
315 CONGRESS AVENUE

PROPOSAL

Replace an existing sign at the Swift Building.

PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS

Install a new internally illuminated cabinet sign in place of an existing non-illuminated sign.

DESIGN STANDARDS

The Historic Landmark Commission and City Historic Preservation Office consider the following guidelines in reviewing sign applications.

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. A single directory sign is appropriate for a large building with multiple tenants.*

The existing projecting sign is accompanied by two existing non-compliant window signs at the first floor.

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.* Sign Size: *The maximum size for signs depends on the sign type:*

1. *Projecting (blade) signs: 6 ft.²*
2. *Flush-mounted signs: 7% of the overall façade area, with a maximum height of 2 ft. and a maximum size of 20 ft.²*
3. *Window signs: The lesser of 20% of the window or 8 ft.²*

The proposed projecting sign is 18 ft²; however, it replaces an existing sign of the same dimensions.

Design, Coloring and Materials: *Use simple shapes. The Commission recommends matte finishes for all signs; plastic, reflective materials, and unfinished surfaces are not allowed. Limit colors to no more than three. For sites with multiple signs, all should have corresponding designs, coloring, and materials. Signs should complement the existing color scheme of the building to the maximum extent feasible.* Lettering: *No more than two typefaces are allowed. Avoid lettering which appears too contemporary.*

The proposed sign is identical in design to the existing sign.

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 historic districts.*

The proposed sign is an internally lit cabinet sign. The existing sign is unlit.

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 sign removes existing mounting apparatus and replaces with a simpler mount.

Exceptions: The Historic Landmark Commission may consider exceptions to the foregoing provisions when not prohibited by city ordinance. Existing signs do not always meet these Guidelines or City of Austin ordinance requirements, and either predate the ordinance or are illegal. Illegal signs are subject to enforcement action.

Summary

The project meets some of the applicable standards.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Approve the sign design but require indirect illumination or halo lighting instead of the proposed internally lit cabinet. Alternatively, provide an exception to allow the illuminated sign as-is with removal of non-compliant window signage.

PROPERTY INFORMATION*Photos**Google Street View, 2022*