

HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION
PERMITS IN NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICTS
AUGUST 7, 2024
2024-086522 SB; 2024-086516 SB
CONGRESS AVENUE HISTORIC DISTRICT
600 CONGRESS AVENUE

PROPOSAL

Install a tenant directory sign and an address sign.

PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS

- 1) Install directory signs totaling 19 square feet in area. The proposed directory panel is painted steel with cut-out tenant panels backed with white acrylic.
- 2) Install an awning sign totaling 34 square feet in area. The proposed sign, atop the main entrance canopy, is fabricated with painted aluminum and acrylic. The sign is internally lit with LED lighting; “600” is halo-lit while “Congress” is face-lit.

DESIGN STANDARDS

The City of Austin’s [Guidelines for Signs in National Register Districts](#) are used to evaluate projects in National Register 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 current project includes a directory sign and tenant signs that comply with the guidelines. The sign plan uploaded to backup indicates further planned signage and shows how the address and tenant signs fit into the larger proposed scheme for the building’s individual façade modules.

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) offpremise, (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 sign types are not prohibited.

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.

The proposed directory sign is 19 square feet in area and is minimally visible from the street. The proposed address sign is 34 square feet in area. Additional signage proposed may be viewed in the signage plan submitted by the applicant and presented in backup materials.

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.

Both proposed signs comply with the requirements for design, coloring, and materials.

Lettering: No more than two typefaces are allowed. Avoid lettering which appears too contemporary in the sign.

The proposed awning sign contains a single typeface. The proposed directory sign appears to use each tenant’s logo, but will be minimally visible from the street.

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.

Though design documents show internally lit signs at the awning, the overall vision plan for the building’s signage specifies reverse or “halo” lighting for all signage. Only halo-lit signs comply with the guidelines.

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. NOTE: 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 by the City of Austin.

Proposed signage complies with the guidelines.

Summary

The project meets some of the applicable standards.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Require reverse (“halo”) illumination for all lit signage. Recommend removal of the duplicate unlit address sign that currently exists above the main doors prior to installation of the larger lit address sign.