HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION
Permits in National Register Historic Districts
December 2, 2026
SB-2026-136009
Rainey Street Historic District
96 Rainey Street

Proposal

Construct a rooftop sign consisting of individual illuminated channel letters.

Project Specifications

1) Install signage at the top of the front wall of a newly-constructed building in the Rainey Street National Register district.
2) Signage will be installed into the wall and parapet of the building, with the letting located above the wall and appearing to be sitting at the roof level. Letters will be illuminated with LEDs mimicking neon tube lighting.

Design Standards

The City of Austin Signage Guidelines are used to evaluate projects within the historic district. The following standards apply to the proposed project:

1. Number of signs
The proposed sign is the only one proposed on the broad façade of the new building. Another, smaller sign has already been approved at the side, which is limited to a logo (no lettering) and meets the historic sign standards.

2. Sign types
While the sign is to be installed at the top of an exterior wall, the lettering will be entirely placed above the roofline, which causes the assembly to read as a roof sign. Per the historic sign standards, city code prohibits the Commission from approving roof signage.

3. Sign size
Proposed signage is 72 square feet in size. If this sign is to be considered a wall sign (as it is to be attached to a wall but with the lettering located above the roofline), the maximum size permitted by the historic sign standards is 20 square feet.

4. Sign design, coloring and materials
Sign standards recommend matte finish and non-reflective finishes. The proposed sign is to be aluminum lettering and finished with a red color. This will likely have some reflectivity, but still remains within the standards.

5. Lettering
Only one typeface is used for the lettering, and does not appear too contemporary in its design.

6. Lighting
Lighting is described in the application as being faux-neon in character; each letter will be outlined in LED within the aluminum sidewalls. While halo lighting is an approvable illumination strategy, this proposal does not fit that description. Neon signage may be considered on a post-1950 façade, but the standards make no specific recommendation for this lighting proposal.

7. Neon signs
While not neon in material, the lighting is proposed to give the appearance of neon. This is not specifically prohibited by the historic sign standards, but it does raise concerns about how similar to neon this proposal may appear from a distance.

8. Sign placement
The sign location is towards the middle of the north elevations, centered on the four main windows. This generally meets the sign standards, in that it appears above the main entry or way in which the building is interacted with.

9. Sign mounting
Being that this sign will be located on new construction, there are no existing mounting apparatus or bolt holes to reuse. Bolts may be located in brick, but this is of little concern for this case.

Summary
The project does not meet the applicable standards.

Property Evaluation

The property does not contribute to the Rainey Street National Register district.

Staff Recommendation

Consider postponement of the public hearing to January 6, 2026 and invite the applicant to the December 9, 2026 meeting of the Architectural Review Committee to discuss compliance with the historic sign standards. Otherwise, consider denial of the signage application.