

Approved with modified (compromise) plan.
See Planning Dept. Memo to Council 3-6-18.

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02 FEBRUARY 2018

City of La Crosse Common Council
400 La Crosse St, La Crosse, WI 54601

To whom it may concern:

I am writing on behalf of my business, Grounded Specialty Coffee, on 308 Main Street in Downtown La Crosse. Please consider this letter to be a formal petition for a reversal of the decision of the Heritage Preservation Commission to deny the *Certificate of Appropriateness* that was requested by Grounded Specialty Coffee on 18 January 2018.

I purchased the empty lot to the west of my current building in 2014 with the hope of developing that property into something beautiful and useful for patrons of downtown. Last fall, we built a concrete patio on this property to address the demand for outdoor seating. In order to make this patio accessible from inside the building and to bring it into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), we constructed a new doorway on the west side of my building. The most sensible business decision is to remove the front entrance and use the patio entrance as my primary entrance. This would allow my business to retain more usable table space in the interior and to create a more pleasing appearance facing Main Street. The Heritage Preservation Commission denied my request, citing the standard that "requires that storefront entries and display windows be retained" (excerpt from the official meeting notes). I strongly feel that an appeal of this decision is justified and have laid out such evidence below as to support my stance.

1. **The current store front as it exists is not "historic."** Contrary to what was recorded in the meeting notes, the standard actually states that "*historic* entries and storefront display windows shall be retained."¹ The original iron columns, original wooden door, and original windows have all been replaced with modern windows, a standard glass door, and updated aluminum framing. The existing appearance of the front entrance dates back no further than the 1980s. Therefore, to claim that this alteration would compromise the historical integrity of the building is fundamentally inaccurate. The standard goes on to specifically describe in detail how a true historic entrance would appear: "Original or historic features including columns, bulkheads, transoms, moldings and hardware shall be retained"² and "[w]ood panel doors with large glass panels were typical of historic commercial storefronts in the district."³ Given that none of these descriptions match the existing storefront, it is easily apparent that the entryway itself is not, in its current state, historically consistent. The sole request in this petition is to adjust an in-set storefront to a flush storefront – an adjustment not specifically prohibited in the standards.
2. **As mentioned above, the new entrance allows for my building to be handicap accessible.** This is very important for my customers. The large step one must climb before entering the former doorway posed a series of accessibility issues - primarily a tripping hazard. The new entrance

allows safe, convenient access to customers with all levels of mobility and brings my business into compliance with federal law.

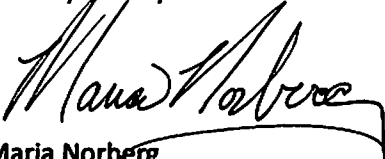
3. **We are updating our façade to enhance the historic appearance of the building.** Through the façade improvement program, we are in the process of returning our façade back to its original appearance by removing the paint to expose the original brick (a matter of *actual* historical relevance), tuck pointing in areas, and updating our outdoor signage. I respect and take pride in the historical significance of my building and feel that there are more appropriate ways to demonstrate this than maintaining an entryway from the 1980s. This constitutes a good faith effort on the part of my business to pay tribute to our city's history.
4. **The financial impact of increasing operational space is substantial.** Based on current sales data, the denial of this request and resultant loss of operational space constitutes a \$25,000 annual reduction in gross revenue.

The City of La Crosse's own stated goal on heritage preservation is "to support citizens in their efforts to preserve historic resources, and when necessary, to adapt them to new uses while maintaining and displaying their original character and quality.... It is not about freezing a property or district in time... Designation affords properties or districts a level of protection while they are being 'adaptively reused' to enable them to remain part of the city's living history."⁴

The Heritage Preservation Commission suggested that their interpretation of the standard could conceivably change if photographic evidence could be provided showing that the current storefront is not consistent with its historic appearance. While well-intentioned, this erroneously places the burden of proof of the property owner rather than on those who seek to prevent that individual from exercising free and appropriate use of the property she owns.

Grounded has proudly operated in downtown La Crosse for 15 years and we would like to continue to grow and thrive here. The ability to adapt our physical space to meet growing demand is a critical factor in continuing to do business in this community. As a business owner and taxpayer in La Crosse, I feel that it should be my prerogative to determine an appropriate use of my physical location given my obvious good faith effort to respect and maintain its historical character.

Thank you for your consideration.



Maria Norberg

References:

1. Municipal Code of Ordinances. City of La Crosse. Sec. 115-320(e)2.a.1.
2. Municipal Code of Ordinances. City of La Crosse. Sec. 115-320(e)2.a.3.
3. Municipal Code of Ordinances. City of La Crosse. Sec. 115-320(e)2.a.4.
4. *Heritage Preservation: Building the future, preserving the past.* City of La Crosse.
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