

HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION REPORT
Certificate of Appropriateness- Downtown Commercial Historic District.
Section 115-320(d)(2)

TO: Heritage Preservation Commission
FROM: Planning Staff
MEETING DATE: November 21, 2024

PROPOSAL: The applicant is proposing to install a wall sign over the storefront on 118 3rd Street S.

PROPERTY/BUSINESS OWNER:

Eric Mora/ Taco Bros
118 3rd St S. (Tenant)
La Crosse, WI 54601

APPLICANT:

La Crosse Sign Group
Theresa Besse

BACKGROUND: The Downtown Commercial Historic District was established by Ordinance in April 2016 along with design standards that are specific to the styles of architecture found within. The local district designation of the Downtown Commercial Historic District was created to encourage preservation of the historic resources of the district, which was named to the National Register of Historic Places in 1994. The design standards and review procedures are used to guide preservation, rehabilitation, new construction, relocation and demolitions. Plans or requests must be approved by the Heritage Preservation Commission prior to any building/demolition permit being issued. In determining whether to issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for Demolition, the HPC shall:

1. Consider factors such as whether the structure is of historical significance, the state of repair of the building, and whether denial of a permit would create a significant economic hardship for the owner.
2. Issue the certificate only if the owner can demonstrate that the building is structurally unsound and/or that denial of a demolition permit would create a significant economic hardship for the owner.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The applicant is proposing to install a wall sign over the two transom windows openings on the storefront located at 118 3rd Street S. The wall sign will be 4ft (48”) in height and 11.7ft (140”) in width. (46.5sq ft) It is flat, vinyl, non-lit sign with fabricated letters. It will be attached to the building with aluminum tieback clips and mounting fasteners. The plan indicates that the sign letters will be halo-lit but the sign company has indicated to me that the business owner is no longer requesting them to be lit.

Existing Façade



Proposed Sign



SEE ATTACHED PLANS FOR MORE INFORMATION

ANALYSIS:

Design standards for signs are:

Signs. In historic commercial buildings, signs were typically mounted above storefronts flush with the façade, or projected perpendicularly from the façade. Signs were also placed in windows and appeared on awnings. All of these sign types are appropriate if designed with suitable materials and dimensions. Signs shall be placed where they would have historically been placed, and shall not cover significant architectural features or ornamentation.

- a. Sign installation shall be reversible - that is, it should leave no trace on the building after the sign is removed.
- b. Sign colors shall be compatible with those of the building; a limited palette of no more than four colors should be used.
- c. Traditional materials (wood and metal) are appropriate, while plastic is not. Neon signs may be used with the approval of the HPC. Other composite material may be approved by the Heritage Preservation Commission.
- d. Modern back-lit fluorescent signs, animated signs, awnings, or electronic billboards and signs with changeable letters are prohibited.
- e. Small free-standing or wall-mounted signs may be used to identify rear entrances or parking areas.
- f. Wayfinding, directional, or upcoming event signs that maintain the historic character of the Downtown may be approved by the Heritage Preservation Commission.
- g. All proposed signs must receive a sign permit from the Fire Department - Division of Fire Protection and Building Safety in accordance with [section 111-36](#) of the Municipal Code

There is no evidence to demonstrate that a sign has previously been installed at this location in this fashion. It is covering the two transom windows over the storefront which are considered significant architectural features of the building. The proposed sign is reversable and can be easily removed with little to no trace left on the building. The bright read lettering on the sign may not be considered compatible with the exiting building colors. The contact with the sign company has stated that the sign will not be back-lit.

FINDING: Even though the transom windows are filled in they are still considered significant architectural features of the storefront and should not be covered. Staff recommends that the sign be broken up and placed within the transom window openings. This was stated to the applicant who discussed it with the business owner, but they were not interested pursuing that design. Due to this design aspect the proposed sign is not in conformance with the Downtown Historic District Design Standards.

RECOMMENDED ACTION BY STAFF: This Certificate of Appropriateness is recommended for denial.