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June 29, 2023

HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL

RE: Request of Metro Signs, Inc. on behalf of WWA Parking LLC for PCA (Public Center Adjacent) Special District Review of a proposed super advertising sign at 160 East Congress Street. **(RECOMMEND DENIAL)**

REQUEST

The City Planning Commission (CPC) has received a request from Metro Signs, Inc. on behalf of WWA Parking LLC for PCA (Public Center Adjacent) Special District Review of a proposed super advertising sign to be located at 160 East Congress Street. This request is being made consistent with the provisions of Section 50-3-222 of the Detroit Zoning Ordinance.

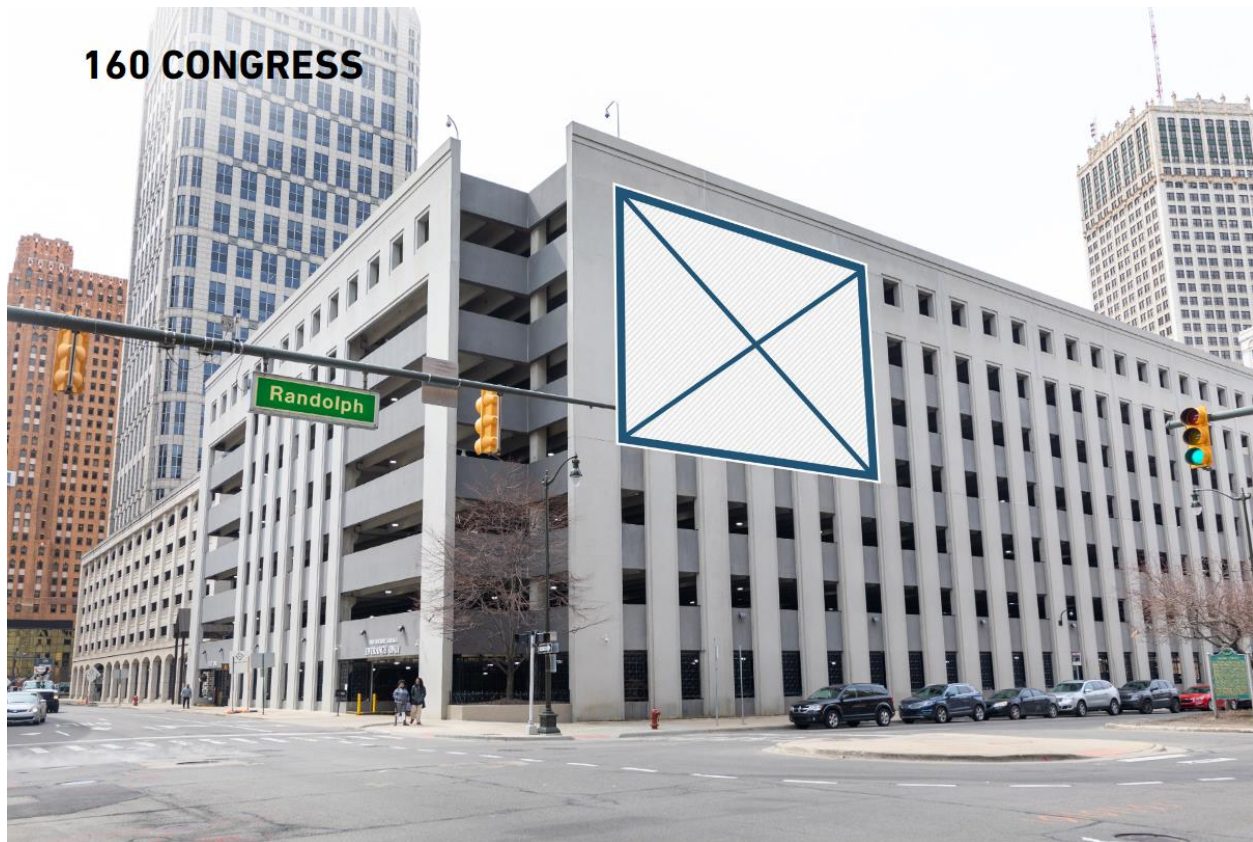


Subject premises – 160 East Congress Street from the corner of Larned & Randolph

PROPOSED PROJECT

The updated sign ordinance that was enacted in 2020 allows for new advertising signs in the Central Business District (CBD). The specific regulations governing these signs are located in Chapter 4, Article IV, Division 5 of the 2019 Detroit City Code. Because this site is zoned PCA, all exterior changes require review by Your Honorable Body per Chapter 50 of the City Code, Zoning.

The petitioner proposes to erect a 55' wide by 42' high (2,310 square feet) sign on the east side of the building facing Randolph Street.



Rendering of Proposed Sign

The proposed sign meets the regulations in the sign ordinance including:

- Must be constructed as a wall sign
- No more than one advertising sign per premises
- Area must be greater than 700 square feet and not exceed 80% of the area of the façade
- Height cannot exceed the height of the roof line
- Must be at least 10 feet from the ground
- May be externally illuminated but not internally illuminated
- May not be dynamic (electronic)
- May not be located within 200 feet of the Detroit River

As part of the review process for advertising signs in the CBD, findings by several City departments are required including:

- Department of Public Works – placement of the advertising sign on the premises will not impair the traffic safety of motorists and pedestrians
- Chief Financial Officer – neither the applicant nor the owner of the premises to which the sign is sought to be placed is in arrears to the City for any unpaid, outstanding, or delinquent property tax, income tax, personal tax, or special assessments
- Buildings, Safety Engineering, and Environmental Department – neither the applicant nor the owner of the premises to which the sign is sought to be placed is the subject of any outstanding violations of the Detroit City Code
- Fire Marshall – the premises are not in violation of Chapter 18, *Detroit Fire Prevention and Protection Code* and that the placement of the advertising sign on the premises will not cause any such violation
- Any other federal, state, or local governmental agency that may be necessary for construction, erection, or operation of the sign, including, but not limited to, approval by the Michigan Department of Transportation or the Detroit Historic District Commission

This review process has not concluded, but is being conducted concurrently with the PCA Review. However, all findings are required before a permit can be issued.

REVIEW & ANALYSIS – PCA District Review Criteria

The purpose of PCA District review is to ensure that proposed changes are consistent with the spirit, purpose, and intent of the district. To guide the review, eighteen PCA District Review Criteria are listed in Section 50-11-97 of the Zoning Ordinance. The relevant criteria follows with staff analysis in italics:

- (2) Scale, form, massing and density should be appropriate to the nature of the project and relate well to surrounding development.

The proposed sign would be located on a primary façade of the building. The previous advertising signs that were recommended for approval were proposed on blank side walls of buildings—elevations that were often originally covered by another building but were subsequently revealed when the neighboring building was demolished. This sign would be located on the side of the building facing the street and sidewalk which is more prominent and detracts from the appearance of the building.

- (11) Signage and graphics should be tastefully designed to be visually appealing and in character with surrounding development; they should provide needed information, direction and orientation in a clear and concise manner.

One of the character-defining features of the building is the strong vertical elements that reinforce the visual continuity of the overall building façade. The repetition of the vertical elements creates rhythm and pattern producing a pleasing composition. The proposed sign would cover those vertical elements, thereby interrupting the pattern and detracting from the symmetry of the façade.

- (15) Urban design elements of form and character should be carefully considered; such elements include, but are not limited to: richness/interest of public areas through the provision of storefronts, window displays, landscaping, and artwork; color, texture and quality of structural materials; enclosure of public spaces; variations in scale; squares, plazas and/or "vest pocket parks" where appropriate; continuity of experience, visual

activity and interest; articulation and highlighting of important visual features; preservation/enhancement of important views and vistas.

This proposed advertising sign would not add to the richness or interest of public areas. It would detract from important visual features.

Design

The Planning & Development Department has reviewed the proposed signage and supports denial. The full recommendation is attached.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

Consistent with the above, the City Planning Commission staff recommends denial of the proposed sign.

Respectfully submitted,

LAUREN HOOD, CHAIRPERSON



Marcell R. Todd, Jr., Director
Jamie J. Murphy, Staff

Attachments: PDD Recommendation
Resolution

cc: Antoine Bryant, Director, PDD
Katy Trudeau, Deputy Director, PDD
Greg Moots, PDD
David Bell, Director, BSEED
Eric Johnson, BSEED

**A RESOLUTION REGARDING ALTERATIONS IN A PCA ZONING DISTRICT
AT 160 E. CONGRESS ST.**

BY COUNCIL MEMBER _____:

WHEREAS, Metro Signs, Inc. on behalf of WWA Parking LLC proposes a new super advertising sign at 160 E. Congress Street; and

WHEREAS, 160 E. Congress Street is located within an established PCA (Public Center Adjacent) zoning district; and

WHEREAS, work to be performed within a PCA zoning district requires Special District Review and the purpose of the PCA zoning district classification is provided for in Section 50-11-81 of the Zoning Ordinance as follows:

This district includes property in close proximity to the Public Center (PC) District, and the controls specified in this division are designed to prevent any uses or structures within the district from having a deleterious effect upon the public center. Uses in this district shall include, to the maximum extent possible, ground-floor commercial space or other space oriented to pedestrian traffic, to enhance the public streetscape and street-level activity; and

WHEREAS, the Planning and Development Department has provided a review and does not support the installation of the sign; and

WHEREAS, the City Planning Commission staff has, on behalf of the City Planning Commission, reviewed the proposed alterations in accordance with Section 7.5 of the City Planning Commission bylaws; and

WHEREAS, the City Planning Commission staff has submitted its report and recommendation to City Council, noting that the proposed signage fails to satisfy the special district review criteria of Sec. 50-11-97 of the Detroit Zoning Ordinance;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Detroit City Council hereby accepts the recommendation of the City Planning Commission and denies the request of Metro Signs, Inc. on behalf of WWA Parking LLC to affix a 55' wide by 42' high (2,310 square feet) off-premises advertising sign on the eastern façade of 160 E. Congress Street on land zoned PCA in the City of Detroit.



**PLANNING AND
DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**

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Marcell R. Todd Jr., Director
Detroit City Planning Commission
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January 6, 2023

Dear Director Todd:

Following is the review by the Planning and Development Department (PDD) of an externally illuminated 55 foot by 42 foot (2,310 square foot) wall-mounted advertising sign proposed for the eastern wall of 160 E. Congress Street. (BSEED Permit numbers SGN2021-00121). As the property is zoned PCA (Public Center Adjacent), this review is required under Sec. 50-11-96.

The relevant PCA criteria from Sec. 50-11-97 of the Zoning Ordinance are followed by our analysis in italics:

Criterion 2: Scale, form, massing and density should be appropriate to the nature of the project and relate well to surrounding development; *The proposed sign is located on a portion of the wall containing and would cover the strong vertical elements that reinforce the visual continuity of the overall building facade. The vertical elements create a strong repeated precession along the façade.*

Criterion 11: Signage and Graphics should be tastefully designed to be visually appealing and in character with surrounding development, they should provide needed information, direction and orientation in a clear and concise manner; *Again, the advertising sign covers the strong vertical elements.*

The PDD cannot support the requested installation of an advertising sign on the building at 160 E Congress Street as proposed. We conclude that the proposed advertising sign will negatively impact the character of the building.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregory Moots
Lead Planner-Design and Developer Innovation
Planning and Development Department

CC: Karen Gage
Russell Baltimore