

## AGENDA

STAFF REPORT 5-8-2019 MEETING  
APPLICATION NUMBER 18-6170  
ADDRESS: 3980 SECOND ST. (499 ALEXANDRINE)  
HISTORIC DISTRICT: WILLIS-SELDEN  
APPLICANT: NICOLE RITTENOUR  
DATE OF STAFF VISIT: 05-02-2019

PREPARED BY: B. CAGNEY

## PROPOSAL

The building located at 3980 Second Street (499 Alexandrine) is a Queen Anne Style, brick townhouse home built in 1880. The home features an irregular hipped roof with front facing gable, dormers, and a chimney. One of the most notable roof features is the northwestern facing tower with a dormer window that is surrounded by articulated ornamentation. The front entrance facing the corner of Second and Alexandrine is found inside a two-story veranda. This building features several character-defining features of a Queen Anne home, including patterned masonry, ornamental moldings and brackets, bay windows with limestone sills and ornamental iron roof 'crests'.

The home today is divided into several small businesses, including a cocktail bar and the applicant's businesses, 'Detroit Clothing Circle,' a retail clothing shop. The proposed location for the neon signage is at the entrance to the Detroit Clothing Circle, underneath the front porch.

With the current proposal, the applicant is seeking the Commission's approval to complete the following work associated with the overall rehabilitation of the building **as per the attached drawings:**

- **Install neon signage on the exterior wall outside of Detroit Clothing Circle business**
  - The sign dimensions are 121" x 14" (10.08' x 1.16')
  - The proposed "skeleton neon sign" will be field-installed within the covered porch
  - The proposed sign will read 'Detroit Clothing Circle' in 12mm 'Hot Pink' neon tubing,
    - The sign will be covered with a clear acrylic cover
  - The transformer will be installed in a inconspicuous location outside, near the neon sign and painted to match the brick wall.
  - Two conduit runs will power the sign and be painted to match the bricks
- **Installation: The sign will be mounted into the masonry using plastic anchors and corresponding zinc plated steel screws.**
  - The sign will be installed as (6) neon units
  - It is estimated that there will be a total between (58) and (68) plastic masonry anchors
    - (36) anchors for neon tubes
    - (12-16) anchors for acrylic cover
    - (4) for the transformer
    - (6-12) for the conduit
  - The applicant has noted "when possible" the sign will be located into mortar joints to preserve the historic brick
    - The applicant has also noted "although it will not be possible to do this in 100% of the cases"

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### STAFF OBSERVATIONS

The current Sign and Awning Guidelines provided by the City of Detroit Historic District Commission does not provide specific guidance on the installation of neon signs, although does offer the following guidance that should be taken into consideration:

Size: Signage must fit within the building design and its storefront and be historically compatible with the site and context; must be compatible with building; and must not obscure architectural elements.

Shape: Shape of sign must be consistent with the character of the historic district in which the signage is located.

#### Materials:

- Material inlaid or carved into the buildings façade should be retained
- Sign materials should be compatible with the design theme and use of materials on the building where the sign is to be placed.
- Painted wood and metal are preferred materials for the signs.
- Metal signs, wood signs, glass signs, and signs painted on masonry are permitted.

#### Position:

- Locate signage above the storefront opening so that it does not conceal architectural details and features
- Signs should be located where architectural features or details suggest a location, size, or shape for the sign
- Signs should be placed on buildings consistent with sign location on adjacent buildings
- Limit the number of projecting signs
- In pedestrian areas, orient signs to sidewalk instead of motorists.

#### Illumination:

- Consider if the sign needs to be lighted
- Use external or halo lighting to illuminate building and/or storefront signage
- Lighting should fit within the building design and its storefront and be architecturally compatible with the site and context
- With internally illuminated channel letters, limit raceways depth behind letter to five (5) inches (2 inches when using LED light source)

#### Color:

- Sign colors should complement the colors used on the structures and the project as a whole
- Sign colors should reflect the color system appropriate to the period of the building
- Limit the total number of colors used in any one sign

#### Typeface/Legibility:

- Use cast or fabricated metal dimensional graphics
  - letters and logos – in lieu of plastic or vinyl dimensional graphics
- Use a minimum of ½ deep metal dimensional graphics – letters and logos.

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- Selected materials should contribute to the legibility of the sign
- Avoid faddish or bizarre typefaces
- Avoid hard to read typefaces and symbols
- Limit the number of lettering styles

Common elements of historic signage include:

- Painted facades and fascia signs
- Material inlaid into the buildings façade
- Hanging signs and older neon signs
- Gold leaf or gilded lettering in storefront windows

3. Create attractive commercial signs that promote business, both pedestrian and vehicular, but are free of visual clutter

4. Require that new signage compliment the historic integrity of the building and community. Signs must relate to the building(s) they serve

7. Signage should make an attempt to recognize the stylistic features and characteristics of the historical districts in their materials and graphics

8. Signage should recognize the scale, massing, style, materials and colors of the building and the district

## ELEMENTS OF DESIGN – Willis-Selden Local Historic District

- (6) *Rhythm of Entrances and/or Porch Projections.* Porches on smaller residential buildings typically project while those on other types of buildings usually do not. On residential buildings only, entrances are often located several steps above grade to accommodate high basements. Doorways on smaller residential buildings are often set beneath gable-roofed or arched openings, while doorways on other buildings are typically centered on their façades. A regular rhythm of entrances is created by a row of similar commercial buildings along Woodward Avenue.
- (7) *Relationship of Materials.* A majority of buildings are faced with brick and feature stone or cast stone trim. Single-family residential buildings are generally faced with brick and feature wooden brackets, bay windows, vergeboards, timbering, porch supports, dentils, entablature, or other classically inspired elements, and other details depending on style. A small number of single-family residential buildings feature wood clapboard siding. Stone or stone facing defines the foundations of buildings at 643-647 and 748 West Alexandrine Avenue, 481 Brainard Avenue, 3957 and 4107 Cass Avenue, and 500 West Willis Avenue, the lower levels of buildings at 4120 Cass Avenue, 3761 Second Avenue, 495-497 West Willis Avenue, and the entire primary façade of buildings at 624 and 627 West Alexandrine Avenue and 3977 Cass Avenue. The buildings at 3901 Cass Avenue, commonly known as Cass Avenue Methodist Church, 3900 and 3977 Second Avenue, and 4100 Third Avenue are composed primarily of stone. Sash windows are historically wood but have, in many cases, been replaced with windows of more modern materials. Stone is used for window sills on a majority of buildings within the district. While roofs within the district are generally flat and not visible, pitched roofs typically feature visible slate or asphalt shingles. Buildings at 686 Selden and 711 West Alexandrine Avenue feature clay tile roofs. The building at 3901 Cass Avenue, commonly known as Cass Avenue Methodist Church, features a copper roof on its tower.
- (8) *Relationship of Textures.* On a majority of buildings within the district, the major textural effect is that of brick with mortar joints juxtaposed with cast stone or limestone trim. Patterned brickwork is used to create subtle detail on commercial and apartment buildings, such as spandrels and rectangular panels, and more pronounced textural interest where it exists on the upper stories of buildings, such as at 461 West Alexandrine Avenue, and in an

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arcaded cornice on the building at 711 West Alexandrine Avenue. Where they exist, detailed wooden vergeboards, gables, brackets, and dormers create considerable textural interest on all single-family residential buildings in the district. Rough-cut stone with thick mortar joints creates considerable textural interest on buildings where it exists, while other buildings feature smooth stone with thin mortar joints. In general, asphalt shingle roofs do not contribute to textural interest.

- (9) *Relationship of Colors.* Natural brick colors in shades of brown, red, and buff predominate on wall surfaces, while natural stone colors in shades of gray, red, and brown also exist. Although most roofs are flat and therefore not visible, sloped roofs typically feature gray asphalt, while some feature red or green clay tile or slate in contrasting colors of gray, red, or green. Wooden architectural details are frequently painted in bold colors, appropriate to the architectural style of the buildings, which contrast markedly with brick facing. Brick apartment buildings are generally unpainted, with gray stone trim contrasting with brown or buff brickwork. Brick on commercial buildings is frequently painted in shades of yellow or orange. The original colors of any building, as determined by professional analysis, are always acceptable for that building and may provide guidance for similar buildings.
- (10) *Relationship of Architectural Details.* Buildings in the district exemplify a broad range of architectural styles, and their architectural details relate to their style. Pre-1880 residential buildings, as well as commercial buildings on Woodward Avenue, are Italianate in style. Single-family residential buildings are often Queen Anne or Stick/Eastlake in style. Romanesque Revival structures include the building at 3977 Second Avenue, commonly known as the Campbell-Symington House, and the building at 3901 Cass Avenue, commonly known as the Cass Avenue Methodist Church. Larger apartment buildings include the Spanish Medieval building at 624 West Alexandrine Avenue, commonly known as the El Moore Flats, and several buildings in Beaux Arts and Colonial Revival styles. Also represented are the Jacobethan Revival, Craftsman, Spanish Colonial, Late Gothic, and Neo-Georgian styles. Buildings range from vernacular to high style in appearance, with the level of architectural detail varying greatly from one building to the next.
- (22) *General Environmental Character.* The general character of the district is that of a medium-density, mixed-use, urban neighborhood of small to large apartment buildings interspersed with other building types. The district maintains a sense of vitality as a result of its mixture of uses and the correspondingly diverse physical appearance of its buildings.

## RECOMMENDATION

Staff considered several factors in developing a recommendation. The proposed placement of the sign, inside the porch, is located in an area of the building that will not detract from any existing character defining features. It will be positioned 13” from the roof of the porch, under the band of decorative trim. Based on the guidelines, the size, scale and location of the signage seem appropriate for installation. However, staff has several concerns about the sign as proposed:

1. Neon: While there is precedent for neon signage in the Willis-Selden HD (e.g., 4156 3rd Ave), that signage is original to the Art Deco building, where the neon technology and art deco style are appropriate for that building. The guidelines also state with regard to illumination that “lighting should fit within the building design.”
2. Font / Typeface / Legibility: The font style and legibility for the proposed signage is much more “informal” than traditional. The proposed signage does not appear to complement the historic character of this particular building.
3. Installation: Per the applicant. Several dozen masonry anchors will be required to mount the sign. While the applicant has noted that “when possible” the anchors will be located into mortar

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joints to preserve the historic brick, the applicant has also noted “although it will not be possible to do this in 100% of the cases.” While the sign is technically removable in the future, staff is concerned about the irreversible damage to the brick façade from the masonry anchors.

After considering several factors from the HDC Sign Guidelines, staff recommends denial for the proposed signage as presented before the Commission today.

## Motion DRAFT

- I move that the Commission deny a Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed work items proposed in application number 19-6170 because the work as described does meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation Number 10) *New additions and adjacent or related construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.*

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View from Alexandrine – North- Applicant Photo



View from Second – West- Applicant Photo

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East- Applicant Photo



South - Applicant Photo

**REPORT**



Second & Alexandrine - Staff Photo

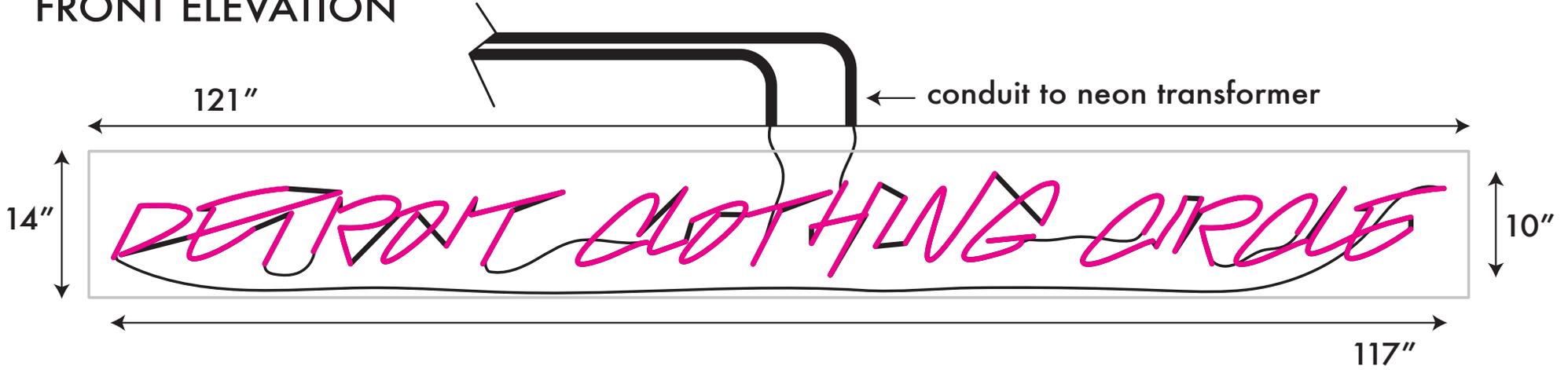


Second & Alexandrine - Staff Photo

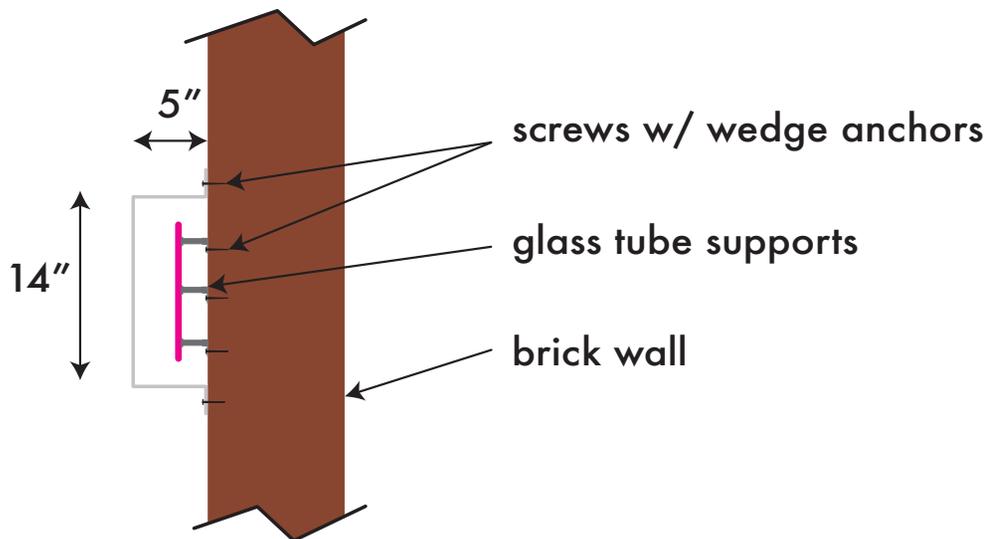
# EXTERIOR NEON AT DETROIT CLOTHING CIRCLE

## dimensioned drawings

### FRONT ELEVATION



### CROSS SECTION



### KEY

- 12mm Hot Pink neon
- unlit neon sections
- approximate wire path
- clear acrylic cover

# EXTERIOR NEON AT DETROIT CLOTHING CIRCLE

## rendering



# EXTERIOR NEON AT DETROIT CLOTHING CIRCLE

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## proposal

One field installed skeleton neon sign installed on the porch outside Detroit Clothing Circle, 3980 2nd Ave, Detroit Michigan.

This neon sign will be the Detroit Clothing Circle logomark fabricated in 12mm Hot Pink neon tubing, powered by a single 30mA, 10500v-15000v self-adjusting neon sign transformer. This transformer will be installed in an inconspicuous location outside, near the neon sign, painted to match the brick wall. Power consumption for the sign will be no more than 500 watts.

Two inconspicuous conduit runs will feed power from the neon sign transformer to the neon sign itself, also painted to match the wall. The neon sign will be covered with a clear acrylic cover.

All elements – the transformer, conduit, acrylic cover, and the neon tubes themselves – will be installed into the masonry wall using plastic anchors and corresponding zinc plated steel screws. When possible, the anchors will be located into mortar joints to preserve the historic brick, although it will not be possible to do this in 100% of the cases.

The neon sign will be made in 6 neon "units", each one a unique neon lamp bent to the design – 'DET' 'ROIT' 'CLOT' 'HING' 'CIR' 'CLE' – installed to the wall with approximately 6 glass tube supports per unit. These 6 units will be wired together into a single circuit via high voltage GTO wire. Estimating 36 plastic wedge anchors for the neon tubes, about 12-16 anchors for the acrylic cover, four for the neon sign transformer, and 6-12 for the conduit, for a total between 58 and 68 1/4" plastic masonry anchors.

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