

STAFF REPORT: FEBRUARY 7, 2024, REGULAR MEETING
APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2024-00024
ADDRESS: 18 W. ADAMS
HISTORIC DISTRICT: GRAND CIRCUS PARK LOCAL
APPLICANT: LAWRENCE WORDEN, GALAXY SIGNS
PROPERTY OWNER: 18-24 WEST ADAMS LLC
DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: NOVEMBER 29, 2023
DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: JANUARY 24, 2024

PREPARED BY: T. BOSCARINO

SCOPE: INSTALL THREE PROJECTING SIGNS



The subject property viewed from Grand Circus Park across the street. The Brass Rail sign depicted is a violation. January 2024 photo by staff.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

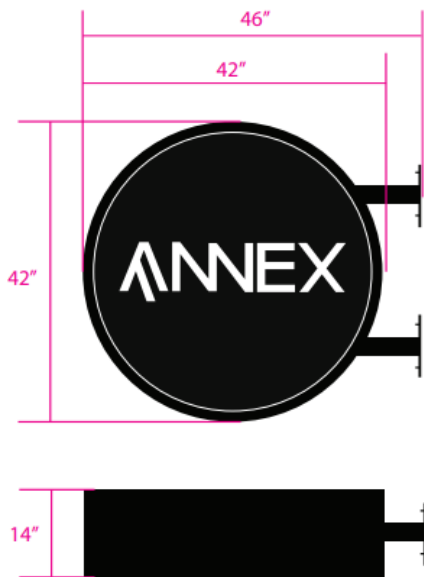
This Neoclassical building was built in 1924 as the First National and Central Savings Bank. It sometimes known as 18-24 W. Adams, reflecting in the range of addresses assigned to the building. It consists of two, tall stories, separated by limestone pilasters into four bays. Like most buildings in the Grand Circus Park Local Historic District, it is sited on the lot line and directly abuts the public sidewalk. At some point in the late twentieth century, the historic storefront openings were eliminated and all four intercolumnal spaces were closed in with fixed glazing; with no doors, the building was entered through the adjacent building at 28-36 W. Adams. More recently, doors were added to create distinct storefronts. At present, a projecting identification sign is mounted on one of the pilasters. This sign appears to have been installed without approval of the Historic District Commission.

PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes to remove the existing sign and install three new projecting, internally illuminated signs.



Rendering of proposed work. Image from application documents, cropped by staff.



- Illuminated Projecting Wall Sign
- 42”h x 42”w x 14”d
 - Aluminum sign cabinet
 - Aluminum retainers
 - Acrylic faces
 - vinyl graphics applied to face
 - internal LED illumination
- Sign is a total of 16sqft

3 signs total, all with the same build specifications

Dimensions and specifications of proposed signs. Image from application.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Grand Circus Park Local Historic District was enacted by the City Council in 2002. It includes the eponymous park and all buildings surrounding the park. Previously, the Grand Circus Park Historic District had already been listed on the National Register of Historic Places (though with wider boundaries) in 1985, with a period of significance of 1867–1930. The Historic Designation Advisory Board Final Report for the local historic district does not delineate a clear period of significance, but states that the significance is based in the area’s history “as the hub for the social, cultural and business activities that took place during

the early decades of dynamic growth of the City of Detroit as the automobile-manufacturing capitol [sic] of the world.” Subsequently, a 2012 boundary increase to the National Register listing recognized a period of significance extending to 1960. (The Commission often recognizes periods of significance identified in federal reports if they are not included in the corresponding local reports.)

- The Elements of Design include the following pertinent observations:
 - “Marquees and awnings above first-floor entrances were common and some still exist.”
 - “Signage is provided for above the ground floor storefront windows, often in a panel designed for such purpose and sometimes as part of a marquee. Rooftop sign structures also exist.”
 - “Individual buildings are oriented toward the Grand Circus Park.”
- The proposed signs are largely consistent with the *Sign and Awning Guidelines* (2013), but deviate in a few areas:
 - “Locate signage above the storefront opening so that it does not conceal architectural details and features.”
 - “Limit the number of projecting signs.”
 - “In pedestrian areas, orient signs to sidewalk instead of motorists.”
- The deviations from the Sign and Awning Guidelines are consistent with the historic context and the period of significance.
 - Large signs, projecting from the pilasters at the second floor or mezzanine level, were a feature of this building from the 1930s through the 1950s, if not earlier. The HDAB report notes that, by 1935, a shoe repair business located in the building “placed an oversized boot hanging from the frieze to signify their business trade.” Historical photos also show a series of such signs occupied the façade throughout the mid-twentieth century.
 - There were often several different signs on this building at the same time, denoting separate businesses or occupants.
 - Possibly due to the relationship between this building and the open spaces of Grand Circus Park and Woodward Avenue, signs on this building were often large in scale and oriented to be seen from a distance.



Left to right: Unsourcesd 1931 photo (found on Facebook), undated photo (Detroit Public Library), undated photo (Detroit Public Library), 1957 photo (Detroit Historical Society).

- Removing the existing sign is permissible, as it was installed without approval.

ISSUES

- It is not clear from the proposal how the signs will be affixed to the building. The *Sign and Awning Guidelines* state that signs should “install into mortar joints—no fastening into brick, stone or arch details.” *Preservation Briefs 25: The Preservation of Historic Signs* (National Park Service, 1991) directs that “new signs should be attached to the building carefully ... fittings should penetrate mortar joints.”

RECOMMENDATION

Section 21-2-78, Determinations of Historic District Commission

Staff recommends that the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed work as it meets the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, with the following condition:

- The signs must be anchored to mortar joints rather than stone, with such details subject to staff review prior to permit approval.