
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Property Address:	1701 Q Street, NW	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Dupont Circle Historic District	X Consent Denial
		X Concept Review
Meeting Date:	September 22, 2011	X Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	11-417	New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott	Demolition
		Subdivision

Bob Biroonak (Art Display Co.), representing owner John Perazich, seeks permit review for installation of a sign on a contributing historic property in the Dupont Circle Historic District.

Property Description

1701 Q Street, NW is a three-story brick and brownstone Romanesque row house located at the corner of 17th and Q Streets, NW. It was originally constructed as a residence and is part of a block-long row of houses on the north and south side of Q Street that was developed and designed by architect Thomas Franklin Schneider between 1889-1892. The block is one of the most distinct and unified in the Dupont Circle district, with an extraordinary variety of architectural styling, materials, detailing and craftsmanship.

Proposal

The proposal calls for installing an internally-illuminated sign cabinet, measuring 2 feet high x 3 feet wide, on a smooth brick wall surface on the raised first floor of the Q Street face of the building. The sign face would have a weathered metal finish with back-lit translucent white acrylic letters. Installation would require penetration into the masonry or mortar joints.

Evaluation

DC Municipal Regulations 10-C, Chapter 25 (“Standards for Signs, Awnings, Canopies and Marquees”), which were adopted by the Board, provides the preservation and design standards for the review of signage for historic property. Like many of the Board’s guidelines and standards, the sign standards recognize that the individual qualities of a building and its context need to be considered and evaluated, and that not all solutions are appropriate for all situations.

2303.1

Different historic buildings impose different constraints and may require varied signage solutions. Signage needs also vary by use. For instance, the requirements for a large department store, a small neighborhood retailer, a church, and a home occupation will differ, and signs for each should be tailored to the specific character of each building and entity.

2504.1

Signage shall be appropriate to the building, site, or historic district it will affect. Signage shall relate to, take advantage of, and be compatible with the building’s particular composition, scale, design features, and architectural character. It shall be designed with sensitivity to adjacent historic properties, the landscape of historic sites, and the streetscape of historic districts, especially when placed in public space.

In particular, the standards recognize that signs on historic residential buildings should be reviewed with particular care and consideration of the impact of signage on its context.

2503.2

Special considerations apply to residential and institutional signage. Signs are not typically a prominent visual element on historic residential buildings, and commercial signage is strictly limited by the D.C. Building Code within residential and special purpose zoning districts.

2508.1

Signs are not typically a prominent visual element on historic residential buildings. In order to preserve the character and setting of historic residential buildings, signage on these buildings and in historic residential areas shall not be visually intrusive, overwhelming, or incompatible with the significant historic characteristics of the particular building, site, and context.

While signage has been introduced on similar buildings that face commercial 17th Street, signs are not found on the residential block of Q Street, and would establish an inappropriate and incompatible precedent. While the brown sign face seeks to relate to the coloration of the building's masonry, its internal illumination would introduce a discordant element for a residential block. Also of concern is that the sign's permanent installation through historic masonry would leave a scar on the building when and if it were ever removed.

The HPO would encourage that alternative locations, installations and designs be explored. Non-illuminated signage on or in the glass of the (non-original) front door, within a window, mounted to the side of the door (under the porch), or ground-mounted in the public space oriented to 17th Street would be more discrete locations that would have far less visual impact and not intrude on the residential character of the block. Signs in these locations would also be easily removable without permanent damage to the building.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the proposed sign incompatible with the character of its location in the Dupont Circle Historic District, and recommend to the Mayor's Agent that the permit be denied as inconsistent with the purposes of the preservation act.