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

Landmark/District:	Cleveland Park Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	3426 Connecticut Avenue NW	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
Meeting Date:	July 26th, 2018	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept
Case Number:	18-384	<input type="checkbox"/> Alteration
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
		<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Applicant Brenda Merritt seeks conceptual review of a project at 3426 Connecticut Avenue NW, site of the Uptown Theatre.

Built in 1936 by architect John Zink, the Uptown Theatre is a Moderne style movie theatre with storefronts at the north and south corners of the façade and a recessed, centralized box office topped with a marquee. The limestone and brick masonry monumental façade features a neon sign that reads “Uptown” where the limestone meets the brick masonry, slightly higher than the midway point on the façade. The sign is composed of individual metal channel letters with exposed neon tubing. The sign is shown in early photographs of the building soon after the building’s construction.

Proposal

The project proposes replacement of the “Uptown” sign with a replica; the neon lighting would be changed to LED. Plans also call for additional signage on the marquee reading “AMC” on the north, south, and eastern edges of the marquee.

Evaluation

The preservation regulations encourage the preservation of “vintage and historic signs that express distinctive characteristics or aesthetics of an earlier period and that provide character to historic property.” The regulations encourage that such signs be repaired and reused where feasible.¹

HPO has requested that the applicant provide documentation that the repair of the existing sign is not feasible and that replacement, rather than repair, is necessary. The initial application contained photographs of the sign but little information regarding the feasibility of repair. The applicant has updated the submittal with more detailed photos documenting the condition of the sign, but beyond evidence of some surface rust, the photographs are not convincing in illustrating the need for replacement or the infeasibility of repair. While the new documentation provides the existing conditions, and recommendations to replace the sign, it does not clearly state the why restorative work cannot be done and no contains no evaluation from a professional with experience in metal repair.

As this sign is such an iconic element of the building and the Connecticut Avenue strip of buildings in the Cleveland Park Historic District, and one of the last remaining original signs from an early 20th century movie theater, HPO encourages that it either be more convincingly documented that repair truly isn’t feasible, or that the sign be repaired by a qualified metal worker.

¹ *DCMR10C sections 2513.1 and 2513.2*

Conversion of vintage neon signs and the production of new neon-style signs using LED lights is relatively common in Miami, Las Vegas, Los Angeles and other cities with older neon signs. Conversion of the Uptown sign to LED lighting could be performed within the context of a repair of the sign, and should replicate the thickness and number of tubes used in each letter.

In order to not compete with the original Uptown sign, the additional signage on the marquee should be reduced to the two locations on the north and south side edges of the marquee where it would be most effective when seen in perspective views by pedestrians and vehicles.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board not approve the concept and find that further study of the feasibility of repair by a qualified professional be conducted.

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