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

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Landmark/District:	<b>Downtown Historic District</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	<b>600 Massachusetts Avenue NW</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	<b>June 25, 2015</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration/Demolition
H.P.A. Number:	<b>15-432</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Steve Callcott</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conceptual Design

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Gould Property Company seeks conceptual review for signage on an office building at 600 Massachusetts Avenue, NW. The project, currently under construction, is located in the Downtown Historic District and was reviewed by the Board in 2006-07; it involves renovation of historic buildings along Eye Street, with relocation of one building and demolition of a second, and construction of an office building that fronts Massachusetts Avenue.<sup>1</sup>

### **Proposal**

The application is for installation of an illuminated sign on the fascia at the top floor of the building for the property's primary office tenant. The sign would consist of metal letters pin-mounted to a glass backing; it would measure 4'11" tall x 12'0" wide. The sign would be mounted on the east elevation to provide visibility from the east on Massachusetts Avenue.

### **Evaluation**

The sign is of a high quality in terms of materials and design, compatible with the contemporary character of the building to which it is being attached, and proportionally quite small for the size of the building. The proposed use of indirect halo lighting behind its letters would be softer and less obtrusive than illuminated channel letters or a backlit sign.

Nevertheless, the Board's sign regulations specifically prohibit roof signs as incompatible for historic buildings and within historic districts unless they recreate an historic condition.<sup>2</sup> The rationale for the prohibition is that signs at the tops of buildings, while not entirely unprecedented, have not traditionally been a feature of Washington's skyline. Rather, in a city that is organized by and developed according to the L'Enfant Plan, and restricted in height, the buildings have developed to form continuous street walls that focus visual attention on the most important civic buildings and the Plan's circles, squares and reservations. While occasional punctuation of the skyline is provided by architectural embellishments such as turrets, towers and

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<sup>1</sup> The project was approved as one of special merit by the Mayor's Agent based in part on the exterior restoration of the Chinese Community Church at 500 Eye Street.

<sup>2</sup> Historic Preservation Regulations, DCMR 10-C, Chapter 25 "Standards for Signage, Awnings, Canopies and Marquees"

#### **2506 PROHIBITED SIGN TYPES**

2506.1 Billboards and special signs as defined in § 2599 are not permitted on historic property.

2506.2 Roof signs and revolving signs are not permitted on historic property, except for vintage, historic, or replica signs as provided in § 2513.

2506.3 Televisions and video monitors are not permitted as signage on historic property.

steeple, advertising and commercial signage has not generally been a component of the city's horizontal rooflines. This particular sign's proposed location on Massachusetts Avenue would put it in the view shed of Mount Vernon Square, an important focal point of the L'Enfant Plan. The primacy of the square serving as the visual terminus of these axial views will be diminished if this and other signs like it become standard.

**Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Board find the proposed sign inconsistent with its regulations and the purposes of the preservation act.*