

**STAFF REPORT:** 12/08/2021 MEEETING

**PREPARED BY:** J. ROSS

**ADDRESS:** 1502 RANDOLPH

**APPLICATION:** #21-7616

**HISTORIC DISTRICT:** MADISON-HARMONIE

**APPLICANT:** ISMAIL HOUMANI

**OWNER:** ISMAIL HOUMANI

**DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION:** 11/15/2021

**DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT**10/7/2021

**SCOPE:** INSTALL A NEW ELECTRONIC MESSAGE CENTER/DYNAMIC DIGITAL BILLBOARD AT THE SIDE/NORTH ELEVATION

### **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

Erected ca 1910, the building located at 1502 Randolph is a three-story, commercial building that is located within the Madison-Harmonie historic district. The building's primary/west elevation features a number of distinctive architectural details which are most closely associated with the Mediterranean Revival style. The north and south elevation are painted brick while unpainted buff brick is located at the front elevation's second and third story. Painted limestone and decorative tile is located at the front elevation's first story. Tile panels decorative detailing is located at the front elevation's second and third story. The first-story storefront is aluminum and the second and third-story windows at the front elevation are aluminum, non-historic fixed units.



1502 Randolph, staff photo taken 10/7/2021

## PROPOSAL

Per the submitted documentation, the application seeks this body's approval of the following work item:

- At the north elevation, install a 39'-0"x17'-8" dynamic electronic message center/digital billboard. Note that the applicant has indicated that the message board will display advertisements which will "...change every 8 seconds." The sign will be located towards the western edge of the wall, below the existing window at the elevation, per the submitted application materials.



1502 Randolph, staff photo taken 10/7/2021, view of the north/side elevation. The new digital billboard will be installed at this location, beneath the window at the north elevation

## STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- A parking lot is located directly to the north of 1502 Randolph. Therefore, the building's north elevation is highly visible from the public right-of way, although it is relatively utilitarian in appearance.
- While conducting their field visit, HDC staff noted that the front and side elevations of the building have been painted without HDC approval. Specifically, note the following:

- Google Streetview images indicate that the north and south elevations were painted brick going back to 2009. However, sometime between 2015 and 2019, the current paint color was added to these elevations. Also a metal panel was added to the north elevation
- Google Streetview images indicate that the front elevation first story featured unpainted limestone. However, by 2019, the limestone had been painted without HDC approval

## ISSUES

- It is staff's opinion that the proposed billboard will detract from the building's historic character due to the scale and nature of the signage. Further, staff feels that the proposed signage represents an element of visual clutter that is highly incompatible with the character of the building's historic/adjacent surrounds and therefore does not meet the Secretary of the Interior Standards.
- The current submission includes a narrative in which the applicant outlines their desire to receive a Notice to Proceed (NTP) from the Commission to allow for the installation of the proposed signage. Per Detroit City Code, Sec. 21-2-75, an NTP can only be issued for historically-inappropriate work if an applicant can demonstrate that at least one of the following conditions prevail *and* the Historic District Commission finds that the work is **necessary to substantially improve** that (those) condition(s):
  - The resource constitutes a hazard to the safety of the public or the occupants;
  - The resource is a deterrent to a major improvement program that will be of substantial benefit to the community. Substantial benefit shall be found only if the applicant proposing the work has obtained all necessary planning and zoning approvals, financing, and environmental clearances, and the improvement program is otherwise feasible;
  - Retention of the resource would cause undue financial hardship to the owner. Undue financial hardship shall be found only when a governmental action, an act of God, or other events beyond the owner's control created the hardship, and all feasible alternative to eliminate the financial hardship, which may include offering the resource for sale at its fair market value or moving the resource to an appropriate vacant site within the historic district, have been attempted and exhausted by the owner
  - Retention of the resource would not be in the interest of the majority of the community.

It staff's opinion that the proposed billboard installation does not meet any of the above-listed conditions and that the project does not merit the issuance of a NTP.

## RECOMMENDATION

### Section 21-2-78. Determinations of the Historic District Commission

Staff recommends that the Commission issue a Denial for the proposed project because it does not conform to the district's Elements of Design nor does it meet the Secretary of the Interior (SOI) Standards for Rehabilitation, in particular standards #:

*2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.*

*5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.*

*9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.*





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**Capitol Outdoor  
Out-of-Home Media**

Dear Members or the Board,

Capitol Outdoor has over 30 years of experience providing outdoor advertising services throughout the country. Capitol Outdoor is headquartered in Washington, D.C. and is an independent, full service outdoor media company founded in 1990.

For a past year, we have been working with Ismail Houmani, the owner of La Casa Cigars and Lounge located at 1502 Randolph, Detroit to potentially erect an on-premise TEMPORARY digital sign on the north side of the building that was approved by the city and will fully comply with city ordinances in regards to the size and brightness. However, this letter is to specifically address **advertising content concerns** that some of board members may have.

Regarding proposed sign at 1502 Randolph, Detroit, Capital Outdoor promises to comply with the following:

- All ads on La Casa signs will be representing only Fortune 1000 Companies
- There will never be promotion of tobacco, sexual promiscuity, vulgarity, or cannabis products
- There will never be promotion of a competitor of the Landlord.

As a show of good faith when there is unsold ad space on the digital sign Capitol will allow:

- *Paradise Valley Conservancy to promote activities, community events, and other community messages free of charge.*
- *Paradise Valley Conservancy can produce and send the file to Capitol Outdoor, and we will run the ad mixed in with others on the board.*

We are excited to be part of the community and hope to do all we can to help promote and activate the Paradise Valley District.

*Peter Wallace*

Peter C. Wallace  
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November 15, 2021

Atlanta  
Chicago  
Detroit  
Pittsburgh

Detroit Historic District Commission  
2 Woodward Avenue, #808  
Detroit, MI 48226

Dear Commissioners:

On behalf of Real Times Media (RTM), we wish to endorse the initiative of the proposed electronic sign on the north facing wall outside La Casa Habana located at 1502 Randolph Street.

Given the dynamic energy of the area, which serves as our city's theater and entertainment district, we are confident that this type of electronic LED signage will only enhance the appeal of the area for the steady flow of city dwellers and visitors who make the area a destination location.

If additional information is required, do not hesitate to contact us at the number below.

Best regards,

Hiram Jackson  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Real Times Media and The Michigan Chronicle



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Mr. Shaun Wilson  
Mr. William Patrick Young

October 18, 2021

Detroit Historic District Commission  
2 Woodward Ave #808,  
Detroit, MI 48226

RE: Electronic Sign on north face of La Casa Habana

Dear Commissioners:

On behalf of the Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts and its Board of Trustees, we wish to endorse the initiative of the proposed electronic sign on the north facing wall outside La Casa Habana located at 1502 Randolph Street. This wall faces north toward Madison Avenue across from our parking lot and is adjacent to the Music Hall itself.

We hope to see initiative realized as we strongly believe this type of electronic LED signage adds to the overall dynamic impression of the Detroit Theater District. It would contribute to the vitality and excitement our millions of yearly visitors have come to expect from our city's remarkable transformation.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely Yours,

President and Artistic Director

