

STAFF REPORT: 10/22/2022 REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: T. BOSCARINO

APPLICATION NUMBER: 22-8051

ADDRESS: 1465 CENTRE (AKA HEMMETER BUILDING, 230 E GRAND RIVER)

HISTORIC DISTRICT: MADISON-HARMONIE

APPLICANT: KEVIN DETERS, METRO SIGNS & LIGHTING

PROPERTY OWNER: FIRM REAL ESTATE MANAGEMENT I, LLC

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: JUNE 14, 2022

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: OCTOBER 4, 2022

SCOPE: INSTALL FOUR (4) WALL SIGNS

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The building at 1465 Centre Street is a seven-story, Neoclassical style, former cigar factory building built in 1911. The Centre and Grand River Avenue facades, subject of this application, are clad in white enameled brick on the upper stories and terra cotta on the ground floor. A stone belt course distinguishes the first story from the second, and a course with egg-and-dart molding runs between the second and third stories. The sixth-floor windows feature molded arches with cartouches and the top story bears a heavy, bracketed cornice. The building is currently vacant; the proposed signs described below are intended to identify forthcoming tenants.



View from intersection of Centre St. and Grand River Ave. looking south towards building. October 2022 Photo by staff.

PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes to install a total of four wall signs, two on the northwest (Grand River) façade, and two on the northeast (Centre) façade. All signs consist of 3” deep halo-lit (internally illuminated) 6500k white LED channel letters with dark-colored aluminum faces and returns and clear polycarbonate or acrylic backs. They will be attached to the façade with 8” steel studs.

“Lockton” wall signs

Two proposed wall signs bearing the name “Lockton” plus an additional graphic are each 3’ x 18.75’ (56.25 square feet) in area. The aluminum cabinets are to be black. One is to be mounted on each of the primary (Grand River and Centre) facades in the spandrel area between the fourth and fifth stories.

“UHY” wall signs

Two proposed wall signs bearing the letters “UHY” are each 14’ x 4’ (60 square feet) in area. The aluminum cabinets will be dark blue. They are to be mounted on both faces of the building’s northwest corner at the sixth-floor level.



Proposed placement of signs. Image by applicant, edited by staff.



Detail of proposed signs illuminated at night. Renderings from application.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Madison-Harmonie Historic District was enacted by Ordinance 11-88 in 1988. The Historic Designation Advisory Board Final Report mentions sixteen contributing buildings from 1895 through 1924, suggesting a Period of Significance. 1465 Centre Street, the subject building, is listed as a contributing resource. The Final Report emphasizes the architectural significance of the buildings of the district and their spatial relationship to Harmonie Park, which sits directly across from the subject building. The report states that many buildings in the area, including the subject building, are significant as being designed by architect Richard E. Raseman.
- Staff notes that the subject building, in addition to being an example of Raseman’s work, appears to be almost entirely unchanged, other than minor alterations to storefronts, from the Period of Significance. This, along with the building’s prominent position facing Harmonie Park, suggest that the façade is of paramount importance to the character of the district.
- The Elements of Design do not provide specific guidance for signs within the district, but mention illuminated rooftop signs on the Music Hall and now-demolished Madison-Lenox buildings as significant features, suggesting that prominent, illuminated business signs are appropriate within the district.



Prominent Madison-Harmonie signs. Photos: Wikipedia Commons (left), historicdetroit.org (right).

- Despite the historic precedent mentioned above, there is little precedent for illuminated signs approved by the Historic District Commission since the establishment of the Madison-Harmonie Historic District in 1988. The only comparable example is the internally illuminated, translucent-faced channel letter sign for the Ashley, at 1526-1538 Centre, issued a Certificate of Appropriateness in 2016. Most other signs in the district are smaller-scale awnings or blade signs which are typically not illuminated, or indirectly illuminated.



Internally illuminated sign at 1526 Centre St. October 2022 photo by staff.

- The proposed signs meet the *Sign and Awning Guidelines* (revised 2013), in the opinion of staff, with one exception: The *Guidelines* state that any sign should be situated “above the storefront opening so that it does not conceal architectural details and features.” The proposed signs are not located immediately above storefront openings. However, staff suggests that the proposed signs are appropriate within the context of the precedents mentioned above.
- The proposed signs are sized and placed in a matter that do not obscure, distract from, or overwhelm architectural elements of the facades. Staff therefore suggests that they are “compatible with the massing, size, [and] scale” of the façades (Standard #9) and they do not “alter features or spaces that characterize the property” (Standard #2).

ISSUES

None; staff recommends approval.

RECOMMENDATION

Section 21-2-78: Determination 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.