

# Historical Architectural Review Board COA Final Review Sheet

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HDC-2023-00069

Address: 248 N. 9<sup>th</sup> Street

District: Old Allentown Historic District

Applicant: Kanha Real Estate Group LLC, owner

Proposal: Legalize signage, lighting, and masonry coating (violation correction)

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## Building Description:

This 3-story brick end of row house, c. 1888, is lacking architectural style. There is a flat roof with projecting eaves covered with aluminum. The 1<sup>st</sup> floor is a corner store, and the front façade has been partially covered by a masonry coating. The upper floors are brick and have apartments. The front façade has two large display windows with a recessed entrance and four windows in a bay configuration for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors.

## Project Description:

On August 10, 2023, staff sent a notice of violation for the installation of storefront signage, lighting, and a masonry coating surrounding the storefront. None of the work had been permitted, and a Certificate of Appropriateness was not obtained. This application proposes to legalize the work.



Front façade of 248 N. 9<sup>th</sup> Street, 2023.  
(Google StreetView)



Front façade of 248 N. 9<sup>th</sup> Street at night, 2023.  
(Staff)

## Applicable Guidelines:

### Chapter 3.3 – Masonry

**3.3.7** Avoid painting, sealing, or coating historically unpainted brick masonry. Adding exterior coatings can trap moisture and cause deterioration of masonry walls. It also detracts from a building's architectural character.

**3.3.8** For existing painted or coated exterior walls, maintain, and repair the painted surface rather than attempt removal. Removal is not recommended due to the likelihood of damaging the masonry substrate. Avoid removing paint or coatings that are firmly adhered to the masonry. Consider removal of non-historic coatings only if they are demonstrated to be causing or exacerbating other types of deterioration.

### Chapter 3.13 – Commercial Storefronts

**3.13.2** Preserve the historic pattern of the storefront and façade, such as the location of the entrance, the size and number of display windows, configuration of display windows and transoms, and recessed entrances.

## Historical Architectural Review Board

### COA Final Review Sheet

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- 3.13.3** Repair and restore historic storefront materials and features whenever possible.
- 3.13.4** Replace in-kind any materials, features, or components of storefronts that are irreparably damaged or missing. In-kind replacements should match the original in material, size, profile, and appearance.
- 3.13.5** Consider removing non-historic alterations that are not consistent with the original design of the storefront and overall architectural style. Consult available information such as historic photographs to inform the restoration of a façade.
- 3.13.9** Where a historic storefront no longer exists, greater flexibility in design and materials is possible. An alternative design that is a contemporary interpretation of the historic storefront may be considered. A new storefront should be compatible with the historic building and the streetscape. Simple designs that respond to the rhythm and proportion of the building façade and/or interpret visible patterns on the block are usually the most appropriate. Consider referencing the surrounding context and related architectural style of the building with regards to proportion, placement, and scale.
- 3.13.12** Locate new signs in historically appropriate locations, such as the sign band directly below a cornice or the ends of a facade at the second story.
- 3.13.15** Scale signs to be compatible with the proportions and scale of the storefront and building. Compatible proportions should minimize the visual impact of the sign when looking at the building or streetscape. Small signs are usually the most appropriate. The size of signs and lettering should prioritize pedestrians rather than vehicles. Text heights between 6 and 12 inches is generally recommended.
- 3.13.16** For wall or projecting signs, use simple shapes and profiles such as ovals and rectangles. Shaped signs that relate to the business use may be appropriate on a case-by-case basis but are usually not recommended.
- 3.13.17** For projecting signs, use brackets that are simple in design and profile. Single rods and scrollwork are both historically appropriate. Metal brackets with black painted or coated finishes are the most appropriate and minimize the visual impact to the building and street.
- 3.13.18** For window signs (surface-applied or painted), maintain the transparency of the window by using lettering and/or logos without a solid background. High transparency lettering and window-applied signage helps to minimize the visual impact to the building and street. Solid backgrounds are not encouraged but are not prohibited. An advantage of window signs is that they are easily reversible and do not damage historic materials.
- 3.13.19** Design signs to complement the architectural character of the building and the surrounding historic districts. Individual expression and creativity are encouraged while respecting the primary of historic character. Simple fonts are recommended and both serif or sans serif fonts can be appropriate. Use colors that promote legibility and complement the building's existing color scheme; muted tones, colors found in nature, white, and black are generally appropriate. Avoid excessively ornate fonts, a mix of many different fonts, and bright, neon, or high-contrast color schemes.
- 3.13.20** Coordinate the fonts and color palettes used if multiple signs are proposed for an individual building.
- 3.13.21** Use high-quality and durable materials. Wood was the most common material historically for signs, especially projecting and hanging signs, and is appropriate. Metal brackets and hardware are appropriate. Metal lettering and signs, pigmented glass, and painted lettering are also appropriate. Box signs are not recommended, and internally-illuminated box signs are not permitted by the Zoning Ordinance. Avoid vinyl and plastic lettering and signs.
- 3.13.22** Comply with all Zoning Ordinance requirements including those related to number, size, and location of signs.
- 3.13.27** Use sign illumination and lights that are simple and complement the historic building and district. Simple gooseneck lights mounted above the sign are recommended as historically appropriate shape and profile.

## Historical Architectural Review Board

### COA Final Review Sheet

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**3.13.28** Direct lighting toward the sign and avoid excessive illumination of areas outside of the sign. Uplighting is not appropriate.

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#### **Observations & Comments:**

The property at 248 N. 9<sup>th</sup> Street historically functioned as a residence. Over time, it was converted into a corner commercial property, and numerous ground-story alterations were made to accommodate the commercial use. The series of alterations have left the building with relatively low historic integrity at the ground story.

#### *Storefront Signage:*

The signage displayed on the 9<sup>th</sup> Street elevation has a solid background with minimal transparency covering over 75% of the window and does not comply with Guideline 3.13.18. The design guidelines encourage the use of high transparency lettering without a solid background to help minimize the visual impact to the building and street. Solid backgrounds are not encouraged but are not prohibited. The scale is also out of proportion with the storefront and building and does not comply with Guideline 3.13.15. Staff recommends reducing the overall scale of the window signage and changing to a transparent background using fonts and colors that complement the historic district. Staff notes that the existing signage is also in violation of the Zoning Ordinance for the number and size of signs.

#### *Storefront Lighting:*

Staff finds the current lighting configuration to be inappropriate for the Old Allentown Historical District. The lighting fixtures situated above the window signage on the 9<sup>th</sup> Street façade display an unrestrained amount of light. The design guidelines encourage direct lighting towards the signage to reduce excessive illuminations outside of the signage. In addition, the projecting sign along the Chew Street elevation will need to comply with all Zoning Ordinance requirements. Staff suggests using appropriate light fixtures such as gooseneck lights mounted above the sign to direct lighting toward the sign to avoid excessive illumination. Any fixtures used should be integrated into the sign in a manner that does not damage the historical materials or features of the building and are easily reversible.

#### *Masonry Coating:*

Stucco was applied to the brick façade at the masonry piers flanking the storefront. Staff notes that the storefront was recently restored, and the brick was exposed and appeared to be in good condition. Staff recommends testing the removal of the coating to determine whether the brick would sustain damage from the removal. If no damage is observed, the coating should be removed.

#### *November HARB discussion:*

At the November 6, 2023 meeting, the applicant provided a drawing showing PVC panels flanking the storefront and a written scope of work that included leveling the stucco on the brick piers, installing PVC panels, and adding gutters. The HARB asked that a stone veneer be incorporated at the base of the panels and that the panels be comprised of a hardwood, such as mahogany, rather than PVC. The board found that the application lacked the necessary detail to offer an approval and requested that the applicant, in working with a contractor, provide the following information:

- a detailed drawing showing the extent of stone and the wood applied to the storefront;
- clarification on the use of gutters or flashing; and
- specifications on the material proposed to apply over the brick to create a smooth surface for the panels.

Staff notes that no additional information has been submitted since the November 6, 2023 HARB meeting.

#### **Staff Recommendation:**

Approval, with the staff to review details, pursuant to Chapter 3, Section 3.1 Masonry and Section 3.13 Commercial Storefronts, provided the following:

- a detailed drawing is submitted to show the extent of stone and wood applied to the storefront;
- the use of gutters or flashing above the panels is clarified;

## Historical Architectural Review Board COA Final Review Sheet

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- specifications are submitted on the material proposed to apply over the brick to create a smooth surface for the panels;
  - the existing lighting above the storefront is removed; and
  - the storefront signage is modified to comply with guidelines.
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### **HARB Discussion:**

Ms. Keller summarized the scope the HARB had reviewed previously and the information the board requested ahead of the current review, noting that no new information had been provided since the previous month. Mr. Monteith described his proposal to attach paneling to the brick piers by anchoring wood strips at intervals along the façade. The HARB requested that the wood strips be attached at the mortar joints.

Mr. Lichtenwalner asked if stone had been considered for the base. Mr. Monteith responded that stone or brick could be installed at the base. The HARB agreed that thin stone would be preferable for the base and noted that ¾-inch thick limestone, slate, marble, or sandstone would be appropriate, though it would be up to the owner to select the stone. Mr. Monteith clarified that flashing would be installed on top of the stone and wrapped under the wood panels.

The HARB discussed lighting and whether the existing lighting would be removed. The applicant requested to keep the existing lighting and install a hood to focus light down. The HARB referenced the lighting guidelines in Section 3.13 and noted that gooseneck lights would be most appropriate. The applicant agreed to remove the existing lighting and install gooseneck lights.

The HARB then discussed the existing window signage. The applicant suggested removing the window decals and submitting a new application for signage in the future. Ms. Keller noted that the existing signage is in violation of the zoning code, which has minimum transparency requirements. Mr. Jordan stated that the replacement signage would need to meet code guidelines for transparency and Chapter 23, Section 3.13 of the Guidelines for Historic Districts.

### **Action:**

Mr. Jordan moved to approve the revised application presented on 12/4/2023 for the legalization of signage, lighting, and a masonry coating, pursuant to Chapter 3, Section 3.3 Masonry and Section 3.13 Commercial Storefronts, with the following conditions:

- The use of gutters above the panels is removed from the scope and flashing is used;
- All wood furring strips are secured in the mortar joints;
- ¾-inch stone is applied at the base of the storefront and consists of limestone, sandstone, marble, or slate;
- Existing signage is removed from the windows and any new signage meets zoning requirements and the signage guidelines in Chapter 3, Section 3.13 Commercial Storefronts; and
- The existing lighting above the storefront is removed and new gooseneck lighting is installed according to the lighting guidelines in Chapter 3, Section 3.13 Commercial Storefronts.

Mr. Encelewski seconded the motion, which carried with unanimous support.