



City of Allentown Staff Report

To: Allentown City Council
From: Bureau of Planning & Zoning
Meeting Date: March 14, 2023
Staff Contact: Jesus Sadiua, Planner, jesus.sadiua@allentownpa.gov

Location: 900 Block of Hamilton
Proposal: Amend the Zoning Ordinance to Allow Entertainment Venue Signs on the 900 Block of Hamilton Street.
Case Number: 23-01 (Z)
Applicant: City Center Investments, Inc.

Description

1. Applicant proposes to amend Sec. 660.70.B of the Zoning Ordinance to add the 900 block of Hamilton Street (see Fig-1) where special business signs identifying entertainment venues and their attractions may be installed.
2. The petition is accompanied by a draft legislation to enable the proposed changes.

Fig-1. Aerial of the 900 block of Hamilton Street showing the parcels (and their land uses) affected by the proposed zoning text amendment.



Background and Context

3. The proposed action is an off shoot of an idea from City Center to create a place in Allentown that people will identify as an alternative destination for nighttime entertainment (like wining /dining, small stage performances for music, comedy, and the likes) where the attractions are clustered and lively lit at night.

4. Consistent with this idea -- aside from establishing new apartment buildings in the 900-blk Hamilton (The Nines, Gallery, Cityplace) -- City Center has submitted plans to construct an entertainment venue and a hotel in this same street segment of Hamilton (i.e., Archer Music Hall, Boutique Hotel).
5. The Zoning Ordinance already allows such nighttime business lighting (marquee, blinking neon) on the 500 block of Hamilton, on certain building facades and subject to prescribed standards. This was in recognition of the former music hall called Crocodile Rock on this street block, which was hoped to pave the way for similar entertainment venues to locate in the vicinity. This expectation, however, did not happen as hoped.

Findings /Comments

6. In previous reports to the ACPC, Planning Staff viewed the new land uses mentioned in Item 4 of this report consistent and supportive of the goals of Vision 2030 as these relate to Downtown Allentown (re: repopulate, rejuvenate, increase visitation and pedestrian engagement).
7. The proposed text amendment – as mentioned in Item 5 – is not new but merely adding a new location where special business signs and lighting may be installed on Hamilton Street. The rest of the sub-section remains as-is.
8. Nonetheless, in addition to the proposed amendment Staff suggests to add, in its Item (d), the underscoring below such that Item (d) will read as follows:

“Such sign may include blinking, flashing, electronically changing or animated displays, that do not shine directly onto existing residential uses and are dimmable in accordance with §660-66.R.6, with such displays not being restricted by § 660-67C.”
9. In fact, Staff does not object to making this amendment applicable on Hamilton Street between 5th and 10th Streets (Fig-2).

Figure 2. Aerial showing Hamilton Street between 5th Street and 10th Street where the text amendment with the change suggested by Staff may be applied.



Conclusion

10. In view of the foregoing, Staff recommends approval of the amendment with the change suggested in Item 8 of this report.

Decision of the Allentown City Planning Commission

11. Unanimously approved the inclusion of structures between 9th and 10th Streets where entertainment signs may be posted as requested, but with a further amendment to Section 660-70.B.5.d to read as follows (underscoring is the proposed additional change):

“Such sign may include blinking, flashing, electronically changing or animated displays, that do not shine directly onto existing residential uses and are dimmable in accordance with §660-66.R.6, with such displays not being restricted by § 660-67C.”