

# STAFF REPORT

## CONCERNING APPLICATION FOR A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS

**Date:** September 10, 2018

**Application Number:** 2018-0904A

**Property Location:** 237 N. Michigan Street

**Architectural Style/Date/Architect or Builder:** Renaissance Revival/Chicago School blend/1921/ Nicol, Schuler and Hoffman

**Property Owner:** LaSalle Apartments, LLC

**Landmark or District Designation:** Local Landmark (Ordinance #8652-1996) and Multiple Resource National Register

**Rating:** *Outstanding*

**DESCRIPTION OF STRUCTURE/ SITE:** The LaSalle Hotel is located on the southwest corner of LaSalle and Michigan Streets; it is a nine storey hotel constructed of stretcher bond laid brick with decorative and plain-cut stone string course. The first and second floors on the east and north facades are treated as one floor. The windows and doorways are flanked by spiral columns and surmounted by round-arched windows with tracery, voussoirs and keystones. A projecting string course separates the second floor from the third floor which has limestone window surrounds, as do the single end bay windows and the ninth floor windows. A projecting string course separates the eighth and ninth floors and the building is surmounted by a wide overhanging cornice. The windows on the first floor are large, fixed sash plates with multi-light side lights. Other windows are double hung sash in pairs.

**ALTERATIONS:** All of the single light double hung windows on all of the facades were vinyl replacement windows from the 1980s-1990s when the Charismatic Renewal Services owned the building. COA 2015-0326B approved repair and repointing of brick and masonry, replacement of existing vinyl replacement windows with new aluminum clad wood replacement windows, replacement of doors and awnings, and restoration of existing wood storefront windows.

**APPLICATION ITEMS:** “Per enclosed drawings requesting approval of window graphics on each window ~~and one (1) corner mounted illuminated sign.~~”

**DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED PROJECT:** Applicant seeks a Certificate of Appropriateness for improvements on the structure, including:

1. The application of vinyl window signs for Ancon Construction, the tenant of the corner unit.
  - a. Vinyl appliques four windows of the office at the northeast corner of the building, two on the east face and two on the north face.
  - b. Overall dimensions: approximately 32” x 48”
  - c. Description of sign design: arched “ANCON CONSTRUCTION” text over the company logo and the text, “SINCE 1975”, with smaller text stating “100% Employee Owned”. All text in gold with black border.

The applicant had originally intended to request a corner mounted illuminated sign, but conversations with the staff at the Area Plan Commission resulted in dropping that element from the application. The proposed four window design complies with Area Plan Commission requirements.

The Group B Standards and Guidelines state that “only one appropriate identifying sign will be permitted per business.” Staff believes this stipulation came about as a reaction to an over-abundance of signage on commercial buildings, specifically hanging or projecting signs. Signage on historic buildings remains contentious – ensuring the businesses that occupy and bring people to the structure are properly identified in a tasteful and complimentary way is paramount to the long-term preservation of the structure itself. Michael J. Auer wrote the following for the National Park Service in Preservation Brief #25, *The Preservation of Historic Signs*:

*The following points should be considered when designing and constructing new signs for historic buildings:*

- *signs should be viewed as part of an overall graphics system for the building. They do not have to do all the "work" by themselves. The building's form, name and outstanding features, both decorative and functional, also support the advertising function of a sign. Signs should work with the building, rather than against it.*
- *new signs should respect the size, scale and design of the historic building. Often features or details of the building will suggest a motif for new signs.*
- *sign placement is important: new signs should not obscure significant features of the historic building. (Signs above a storefront should fit within the historic signboard, for example.)*
- *new signs should also respect neighboring buildings. They should not shadow or overpower adjacent structures.*
- *sign materials should be compatible with those of the historic building. Materials characteristic of the building's period and style, used in contemporary designs, can form effective new signs.*
- *new signs should be attached to the building carefully, both to prevent damage to historic fabric, and to ensure the safety of pedestrians. Fittings should penetrate mortar joints rather than brick, for example, and signloads should be properly calculated and distributed.*

The proposed design compliments the architectural elements of the building (mimicking the curvature of the windows), is a facsimile of the gold-leaf signage that was so prevalent in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and is respectful to the size and scale of the windows themselves.

Other communities with large concentrations of historic commercial buildings have exemptions for the number of allowable windows with signs within their Standards and Guidelines.

## **STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES:**

### **GROUP B STANDARDS**

The Commission has the authority to determine the architectural merits and the extent of any proposed treatment, renovation, or addition to a historic landmark. The commission will require drawings, plans, specifications, and/or samples where appropriate.

#### **A. Maintenance**

The maintenance of any historical structure or site shall in no way involve any direct physical change except for the general cleaning and upkeep of the landmark. The Commission shall encourage the proper maintenance of all structure or sites.

#### **B. Treatment**

Treatment shall be defined as any change of surface materials that will not alter the style or original form. Such improvements include re-roofing, glazing, or landscaping lawns and may involve a change that can potentially enhance or detract from the character of the landmark. A treatment change of any surface whether on the landmark or in its environment may require a Certificate of Appropriateness if it significantly alters the appearance of the landmark. Although these kinds of changes may not require a Building Permit, a Certificate of Appropriateness may be necessary. The commission should review the proposed treatment for character and style consistency with the original surfaces.

#### **C. Renovation and Additions**

Renovation is the modification of a structure, which does not alter the general massing while and addition, is a change in mass. A modification, which involves the removal of a part of the landmark, should be considered under demolition (see demolition). Additions to landmarks should not detract from the original form and unity of the landmark and should not cover singular examples of architectural detail. Additions to landmarks should be added in a manner that does not disrupt the visible unity of overall

appearance of the site. The proportions, materials and ratios of the existing structures should be carried through in the additions. Care should be taken not to change or alter the following:

1. Structure—Necessary structural improvements, where safety demands should be accomplished in such a way as to cause minimal visual change to the original style and construction.
2. Material—Additions and improvements involving any new material in the landmark should be of the same material as the original. It should be the same size and texture. An alternative material may be allowed if it duplicates the original.
  - a. wood—all wood trim should conform with existing trim in shape and size.
  - b. siding materials—the Commission discourages the covering or alteration of original materials with additional siding. Structures already sided with incompatible materials should be returned to a siding similar to the original when renovation is considered.

#### **D. Demolition**

Historic landmarks shall not be demolished. When a landmark poses a threat to the public safety, and demolition is the only alternative, documentation by way of photographs, measured drawings, or other descriptive methods should be made of both the exterior and interior of the landmark. The person or agency responsible for demolition of the landmark shall be responsible for this documentation.

#### **E. Moving**

The moving of landmarks is discouraged, however, moving is preferred to demolition. When moving is necessary, the owner of the landmark must apply to the Commission for a Certificate of Appropriateness.

***F. Signs***

***No neon or flashing signs will be permitted unless they are original to the structure. Billboards and supergraphics will also be disallowed. Only one appropriate identifying sign will be permitted per business.***

**G. Building Site and Landscaping**

(These standards apply to both A and B)

**1. Required**

Major landscaping items, trees, fencing, walkways, private yard lights, signs (house numbers) and benches which reflect the property's history and development shall be retained. Dominant land contours shall be retained. Structures such as: gazebos, patio decks, fixed barbecue pits, swimming pools, tennis courts, green houses, new walls, fountains, fixed garden furniture, trellises, and other similar structures shall be compatible to the historic character of the site and neighborhood and inconspicuous when viewed from a public way.

**2. Recommended**

New site work should be based upon actual knowledge of the past appearance of the property found in photographs, drawings, and newspapers. Plant materials and trees in close proximity to the building that are causing deterioration to the buildings historic fabric should be removed. However, trees and plant materials that must be removed should be immediately replaced by suitable flora. Front yard areas should not be fenced except in cases where historic documentation would indicate such fencing appropriate.

Fencing should be in character with the buildings style, materials, and scale.

**3. Prohibited**

No changes may be made to the appearance of the site by removing major landscaping items, trees, fencing, walkways, outbuildings, and other elements before evaluating their importance to the property's history and development. Front yard areas shall not be transformed into parking lots nor paved nor blacktopped. The installation of unsightly devices such as TV reception dishes and solar collectors shall not be permitted in areas where they can be viewed from public thoroughfares.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Staff is cognizant of recent precedent regarding the proposed installation of multiple signs on other downtown commercial buildings (see the J.M.S. Building). Bearing that in mind, staff approves the format and appearance of the proposed signs – as they are historic and complimentary to the building's character – but would encourage debate regarding the number to be installed. It is also worth noting, however, that only the "The LaSalle" blade sign above the east entrance was approved by the Commission. All other window signs appear to have been installed un-reviewed. They are not, however, part of this application and need not be scrutinized as a part of it.

As to specific recommendations per the number of installations, Historic Preservation Administrator Feasel advocates for the installation of half the number of window signs (one each on the North and East faces). Historic Preservation Specialist Toering believes the wording of the Standards and Guidelines to be unintentionally ambiguous, and that further revision of those standards may be in order to better accommodate the various kinds of signage that can be found on historic commercial buildings. With regards to this particular application, Specialist Toering would advocate for the allowance of all four of the requested window signs.

Written by  
Adam Toering  
Historic Preservation Specialist

Approved by  
Elicia Feasel  
Historic Preservation Administrator

**Site Visit – Photos**



*Figure 1 – 237 N Michigan from the street, looking northwest. Two of the subject windows are at the right.*



*Figure 2 - The east entrance to the Lasalle Building. Two of the subject windows, at right. Note "South Blend Cafe" signage on door.*





*Figure 3 - The LaSalle Building, looking south. The two ground-floor windows closest to the corner are also part of this application.*



*Figure 4 - The LaSalle Building, looking southeast.*



*Figure 5 - The LaSalle Building, specifically "The Hideaway."*



*Figure 6 - Hideaway signage.*











**FOUR (4) SETS OF 1st SURFACE WINDOW VINYL**



TWO (2) EAST WINDOWS  
TWO (2) NORTH WINDOWS  
\*MEASUREMENTS = SAME

SCALE: 1"=1'-0"

WINDOW VINYL

CLIENT: ANCON  
LOCATION:  
ACCT REP: S. ANNIS

DRAWING: 6594\_1 REV:1 JDS 8.27.18  
DESIGNER: BSS  
DATE: 11.61.17

Customer Approval  
By signing this drawing, customer is acknowledging that all copy spellings, arrow directions and colors have been reviewed and are correct.

■ GOLD LEAF VINYL  
■ BLACK VINYL

This design is property of Burkhardt Advertising and not to be shared with other companies. The value of this design is 50% of the manufacturing cost of the display shown. Placement and size of sign on overlay drawings are for sketch purposes only.





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