

**CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS
HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT**

FILE NAME: 1625 Hennepin Avenue
DATE OF APPLICATION: 4/16/03
APPLICANT: Olson + Co.
DATE OF HEARING: 4/13/03
HPC SITE/DISTRICT: Harmon Place Historic District
CATEGORY: contributing
CLASSIFICATION: Certificate of Appropriateness and Historic Variance
STAFF INVESTIGATION AND REPORT: Amy Lucas
DATE: 4/23/03

A. SITE DESCRIPTION:

The property at 1625 Hennepin Avenue was designed for L.H. Fawkes by the architecture firm, C.E. Bell, Tyrie and Chapman, in 1911. The building was originally occupied by the Fawkes Auto Co. Salesroom and garage. The property is contributing to the Harmon Place Historic District that was designated in 2001.

From the Harmon Place Historic District designation study:

“This 50’ x 150’, two-story reinforced concrete structure is clad in curtain walls of varigated brown and dark brown brick. At the first and second story, large display windows fill the entry bay of the building where new vehicles could be shown. The end bays of the upper story are filled with large, multi-paned units. Terra cotta and patterned brick fill the panels above the first story windows and entry.”

B. BACKGROUND:

The Harmon Place Historic District was designated by the Minneapolis City Council in November of 2001.

In March of 2003 the Zoning Inspector sent a notice of violation to the owner noting that the occupant, Olson & Co., had never obtained a sign permit for the signage located at 1625 Hennepin Avenue. In that letter, the Zoning Inspector explained that roof signs are prohibited as noted in Section 543.50 (c) of the Minneapolis Code of Ordinances. The letter also explained that the Heritage Preservation Commission must approve any signage in the historic district before Zoning reviews the signage. (see attached letter)

C. PROPOSED CHANGES:

The applicant is applying for a Historic Variance and a Certificate of Appropriateness to allow the previously installed rooftop signage that is prohibited by both the Zoning Code and the HPC sign guidelines. The rooftop signage includes a 10’ tall by 4’ wide “brick man” sculpture/logo and the letters “Olson + Company.” These individual letters measure approximately 2’ tall and 1’ wide. The construction materials of “brick man” and the individual letters is unknown.

The applicant is proposing to remove all other signage on the building façade including an awning sign, two sign brackets, two sign banners and one flat wall sign.

D. GUIDELINE CITATIONS:

HARMON PLACE HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES (2002) state:

Under Signs, Awnings, and Lighting:

- a. Signs and awnings should follow regulations contained in Chapter 543 of the city’s zoning ordinance. Refer also to “Guidelines for Signs and Signage and Murals for Historic Properties and Districts” and “Architectural Fabrics in Historic Properties and Districts ” adopted by the HPC.
- b. Wherever possible, signs should be placed in traditional sign locations including the storefront signband area and upper facade. Existing signboards and sign frames should be reused if possible to limit drilling new holes into masonry.
- c. Signs should be appropriately sized and complement the building exterior. They should be constructed of traditional materials such as wood and metal.
- d. Signs should not conceal architectural details or features and materials should be compatible with the materials of the building to which they are attached.
- e. No part of the historic facade should be irreversibly damaged or altered in the installation of signs and awnings. Limit drilling new holes into masonry. Signs must be attached to the building with holes drilled into mortar joints.
- f. Where appropriate, historic painted advertising signs on building walls should be conserved.
- g. Awnings should be sized to fit the windows and storefronts behind them. Simple canvas and a variety of metal awnings are traditional in the Harmon Place Historic District.
- h. Lighting should highlight building elements, signs, or other features rather than attract attention to itself. Lighting should have an even level of illumination and be indirect. New light fixtures should be of simple contemporary design.
- i. No part of the historic facade should be irreversibly damaged or altered in the installation of lighting. Electrical conduit and other hardware should be concealed and not installed across the building facade.

GUIDELINES FOR SIGNS & SIGNAGE FOR HISTORIC PROPERTIES & DISTRICTS (1993) state:

Codes:

- a. All signage is subject to Minneapolis building and zoning codes.

Installation:

- a. Signage is usually of a temporary nature. Thus, signage installation must have a minimal impact on the building and must allow the building to return to its original condition upon signage removal.

Sign Types Not Allowed:

- o Billboards, except in surface parking lots as permitted above.
- o Roof-top signage, unless it was present during the period of significance.
- o Backlit awning signage
- o Plastic-faced backlit signs
- o Vacuum-formed or extended plastic lettering
- o Murals on primary facades
- o Three-dimensional hanging signs (unless interpreted as an artistic sign)
- o Animated signs (unless interpreted as an artistic sign)

CHAPTER 599. HERITAGE PRESERVATION REGULATIONS

ARTICLE IX. HISTORIC VARIANCE

599.490. Purpose. This article is established to encourage the preservation and reuse of landmarks and properties in historic districts by providing the commission with authority to recommend departure from the literal requirements of any of the applicable zoning regulations.

599.510. Hearing on application for historic variance. The commission shall hold a public hearing on each complete application for historic variance as provided in section 599.170. Following the public hearing, the commission shall make findings with respect to the proposed historic variance and shall submit the same together with its recommendation to the zoning and planning committee of the city council.

599.520. Required findings for historic variance. Before recommending approval of a historic variance, the commission shall make findings that the variance is compatible with the preservation of the property and with other properties in the area, and that the variance is necessary to alleviate undue hardship due to special conditions or circumstances unique to the property and not created by the applicant.

599.530. Historic variance conditions and guarantees. The commission may impose such conditions on any historic variance and require such guarantees as it deems reasonable and necessary to protect the public interest and to ensure compliance with the standards and purposes of this chapter.

599.540. City council decision. The city council shall make the final decision on all historic variances.

E. FINDINGS:

1. The building is a contributing structure to the Harmon Place Historic District.

2. The current signage was installed without a required permit.
3. Chapter 543 of the Minneapolis Code of Ordinances, “On-Premise Signs”, prohibits roof signs. There is no authorized zoning variance to allow a prohibited sign.
4. Section 599.490 of the Minneapolis Code of Ordinances authorizes the HPC to recommend a variance from any applicable zoning regulation to encourage the preservation and reuse of landmarks and properties in historic districts.
5. Rooftop signage also is a prohibited sign type in the HPC sign guidelines, “Guidelines for Signs and Signage for Historic Properties and Districts,” adopted in 1993.
6. The Harmon Place Historic District Design Guidelines (adopted by HPC 2002) states “wherever possible, signs should be placed in traditional sign locations including the storefront signband area and upper facade. Existing signboards and sign frames should be reused if possible to limit drilling new holes into masonry.” The property at 1625 Hennepin has a signband area that is an appropriate location for signage.
7. The applicant has not exhibited special conditions or circumstances unique to property that require rooftop signage nor is rooftop signage compatible with the preservation of the property or with other properties in the area.

F. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Heritage Preservation Commission adopt staff findings and **deny** the Certificate of Appropriateness for the rooftop signage and forward to the City Council a recommendation to **deny** the historic variance for rooftop signage.