

**CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS  
CPED PLANNING DIVISION  
HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT**

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FILE NAME: 730 Stinson Boulevard NE (Cream of Wheat building)

DATE OF APPLICATION: 7-5-05

APPLICANT: Mike Brady for CW Lofts LLC

DATE OF HEARING: 7-26-05

HPC SITE/DISTRICT: individual designation

CATEGORY: contributing

CLASSIFICATION: Certificate of Appropriateness

STAFF INVESTIGATION AND REPORT: Amy Lucas

DATE: 7-19-05

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**A. SITE DESCRIPTION:**

General:

The Cream of Wheat Building is a four-story, brick building constructed in 1927 for the Cream of Wheat Company at the corner of Stinson and Broadway in Northeast Minneapolis. The building is significant as an architectural example of the success of the Cream of Wheat company and is a seamless incorporation of office and factory uses. The building is also significant as a noteworthy design of the Minneapolis engineer Walter H. Wheeler.

Property description from the designation study:

The Cream of Wheat Building is located at 730 Stinson Boulevard in northeast Minneapolis. The property, which occupies Lots 1 and 2 of Auditor's Subdivision No. 268 and 325 feet of vacated frontage road, is bounded on the east by Stinson Boulevard, on the north by Broadway Street Northeast, and on the south by a large parking lot associated with other buildings. The west border is edged by other industrial properties; the northwestern end curves to follow one of the two rail spurs that serve the building. The building was constructed in 1927-1928 and has had few alterations. Grass lawns with mature trees surround the building on the east and north sides.

Unlike other buildings in the neighborhood, Cream of Wheat is set back from Stinson Boulevard, allowing for a generous landscaped yard that is continued on the north side. This was mirrored historically by a similar space on the south side, but the south yard was partially occupied by a bulk handling plant in 1957. The structure for the twelve cylindrical, steel storage bins, which narrow into a funnel shape at the bottom, is reinforced concrete. A steel I-beam between the plant and the building, and steel platforms on the south train shed roof were added in 1976-1977 to support bins and equipment, which have since been removed. The bulk handling plant is linked to the building by an underground tunnel that holds pipes. A parking lot extends from the building's west facade to the western property boundary.

The Cream of Wheat Building is rectangular in form. The main block of the building is four stories in height with a 125-foot tower on the southeast corner. In addition to making the building a landmark, the tower holds a water tank for a gravity-fed sprinkler system. A one-story garage wing extends south from the west corner of the south facade. On the north and south sides, the first story is stepped out approximately twenty feet from the main block of the building. These

stepped portions accommodate train sheds on each side. Four penthouses, ranging in height from one to one-and-one-half stories, are located on the roof. Two sit on the south edge, are clad in brick, and are original to the building. The other two, built in the 1980s, are located on the west and north sides of the roof and are of concrete block painted a bright off-white. The western one is actually an addition to an original brick-walled roof access stair. Two metal-clad equipment sheds, constructed in the 1980s or 1990s, are situated on the east end of the roof. A smokestack, original to the building, rises from the southwest corner of the roof. The flat roofs of the main building, garage, and penthouses are covered with white PVC roofing. The flat roofs of the train sheds are built-up with top layers of gravel.

The building's structure is reinforced concrete, and all facades are clad in buff-colored Kittanning brick with Mankato-stone ornament. The water table on the east, north, and south sides is a light-colored artificial stone. The west facade has a concrete water table. All facades are punctuated by rectangular window openings with sills of Mankato stone. The openings are set off in recessed bays by brick pilasters. Stone capitals and dentil molding decorate the pilasters and bays. All the original windows were replaced with the current Kalwall window units in the early 1980s. Brick panels with recessed cross patterns form spandrels under the third- and fourth-story windows. The cross pattern is repeated on the parapets, which are topped with saw-tooth brick courses, stone cornices, and stone caps. The parapet details are repeated on the one-story garage and train-shed wings, and the two original penthouses.

The east facade, the building's formal front, has an elaborate entrance porch at the base of the tower. The porch is one story in height and has a flat roof. Like the building, the porch's structure is reinforced concrete. Granite stairs lead from the ground to the granite porch floor, which is level with the first floor of the building. Rusticated Mankato stone covers the staircase walls and the exterior and interior walls of the porch. The porch entrance is a large segmental arch. Two window openings, one each in the north and south walls, allow light and air into the space. The coffered plaster ceiling is suspended from a concrete slab. The stone on the front face of the south staircase wall is incised with the numbers "1927." The cornice on the porch parapet has carved dentils and round-edged parapet caps. A stuccoed handicap ramp, constructed in 1994, wraps around from the south facade to the east facade. The doorway for the ramp was created by enlarging a window opening immediately south of the entrance porch.

## **B. BACKGROUND:**

The HPC approved the renovation and condominium conversion of the Cream of Wheat building on December 12, 2004.

On June 27, 2005, the owner received a Notice of Violation for installing banners without City approval. The owner then applied for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the banners.

Chapter 543.300 of the Minneapolis Zoning Code regulates real estate signs. One (1) freestanding or wall real estate sign, not to exceed thirty-two (32) square feet in area, shall be permitted per street frontage. The maximum height (placement) of a wall sign in an industrial district may not exceed twenty-four (24) feet.

### C. PROPOSED CHANGES:

The banners were installed on the north and east elevations of the tower. These real estate banners are located at the top of the 125' tower. Two banners measure 21' feet tall by 11'6" wide and read "CW Lofts CWLofts.com." The banners above these two banners read "612-623-4444" and measure 4 feet tall by 19'6" feet wide.

Staff defines these banners as "real estate banners."

### D. GUIDELINE CITATIONS:

**Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings (adopted June 17, 2003) state:**

#### 1. *In General:*

- a. *Sign message:* All signs, except window signs, real estate signs, project information signs, auxiliary signs, temporary signs and portable signs, are limited to the name and address of the establishment.
- b. *Historic signs:* Maintenance or restoration of existing historic signs is encouraged and should not be counted in number of allowable signs.
- c. *Number of signs:* Each principal building entrance that faces a public street, or each ground floor principal use, whichever is less, is allowed two signs. A corner lot with a principal entrance on each street is allowed two signs per street frontage. The two signs may be a combination of one wall sign, one projecting sign, one ground sign, one banner, and awning signage. However, a property may not have both a projecting sign and a ground sign. Only one of the signs should be illuminated, except that banners and awning signs should never be illuminated. Awning signs are limited to ground floor awnings and are subject to the specific guidelines for awnings and awning signs. Parking lot signs are subject to the specific guidelines for signs accessory to parking lots.
- d. *Location of building signs:* Wherever possible, signs should be placed in traditional sign locations including the storefront sign band area. Signs should not obscure or damage architectural features including windows, doors, pilasters, columns and historic signs. Building signs should be located only on the primary façade of the building adjacent to the street and should be no higher than fourteen (14) feet, except as otherwise provided in the specific guidelines for wall signs.
- e. *Color:* Sign colors and materials should be compatible with the colors of the building and its surroundings. Day-glo, light reflecting or fluorescent colors or materials are not allowed.
- f. *Installation:* Sign installation should have a minimal impact on the building and to the extent practical allow the building to be returned to its original condition if the sign is removed. Existing signboards and sign frames should be reused to limit drilling new holes into masonry. Wall signs should be attached to the building through the mortar joints. Projecting signs should be attached to a permanent mounting plate. Awnings should be attached to window or door frames and should never damage masonry.
- g. *Illumination:* Signs may be illuminated externally, internally, or by neon. Plastic face covers should not be placed on illuminated signs. All illuminated building signs should connect to a permanent mounting plate located near the entrance. Electrical conduit should be installed through the permanent mounting plate. Not more than one brick should be damaged by the installation of the

permanent mounting plate. Electrical conduit and any lighting fixture should be attached to the sign and not the building wall.

**2. Sign Types Allowed:**

- a. Wall signs.
- b. Projecting signs.
- c. Banners.
- d. Ground signs.
- e. Awning signs.
- f. Window signs.
- g. Marquee signs, on theaters only.
- h. Project information signs.
- i. Real estate signs.
- j. Temporary signs.
- k. Auxiliary signs.
- l. Portable signs.

**3. Sign Types Not Allowed:**

- a. Off-premise advertising signs and billboards.
- b. Roof signs, unless present during the period of significance.
- c. Backlighted signs, backlighted awnings and backlighted awning signs.
- d. Balloon signs.
- e. Individual letters or elements applied to the surface of a building.
- f. Pole signs, unless present during period of significance, or a project information sign, real estate sign, auxiliary sign or sign accessory to a parking lot.
- g. Canopy signs and service area canopy signs.
- h. Signs placed on or painted on a motor vehicle or trailer and parked with the primary purpose of providing signage.
- i. Signs placed or maintained on natural features.
- j. Audible signs.
- k. Signs with moving or swinging parts or elements.
- l. Any sign relating to sexually oriented uses and prohibited by the regulations governing such uses in Chapter 549, Downtown Districts.
- m. Searchlights and strobe lights.
- n. Signs attached to skyway bridges and intended to be read from the public right-of-way.
- o. Animated signs.
- p. Flashing signs.
- q. Changeable copy signs, except on a theater marquee or ground sign.

*Banners:*

- i. Location. A banner should follow the location guidelines for a wall sign or a projecting sign.
- ii. Size. A banner should follow the size guidelines for a wall sign or a projecting sign.
- iii. Materials. A banner should be constructed of coated or uncoated fabric.
- iv. Installation. A banner should follow the installation guidelines for a wall sign or a projecting sign.
- v. Illumination. A banner should not be illuminated.

g. *Project information signs:*

- i. Location. If attached to a building, a project information sign should be a window sign.
- ii. Size. Freestanding project information signs should be no more than thirty-two (32) square feet in area and eight (8) feet in height.
- iii. Number. One project information sign is allowed per street frontage and will not be counted toward the number of signs allowed.
- iv. Illumination. Project information signs should not be illuminated.

h. *Real estate signs:*

- i. Location. If attached to a building, a real estate sign should be a window sign.
- ii. Size. Freestanding real estate signs should be no more than thirty-two (32) square feet in area and eight (8) feet in height.
- iii. Number. One real estate sign is allowed per street frontage and will not be counted toward the number of signs allowed.
- iv. Illumination. Real estate signs should not be illuminated.

i. *Temporary signs:*

Temporary signs are limited to window signs and portable signs.

**E. FINDINGS:**

1. The building is individually designated.
2. The banners are “real estate signs” and do not meet the *Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings* for real estate sign location which requires them to be placed in the windows or installed as freestanding signs.
3. The signs do not meet the *Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings* for general location which states that “signs should not obscure or damage architectural features including windows, doors, pilasters, columns and historic signs. Building signs should be located only on the primary façade of the building adjacent to the street and should be no higher than fourteen (14) feet.” These real estate signs obscure architectural features by covering windows and are located much higher than the allowed 14 feet.
4. The banner installation does not follow the guidelines which state that “sign installation should have a minimal impact on the building and to the extent practical allow the building to be returned to its original condition if the sign is removed. Existing signboards and sign frames should be reused to limit drilling new holes into masonry. Wall signs should be attached to the building through the mortar joints.” The applicant has admitted that the sign was installed improperly and a note from American Masonry was included in the Certificate of Appropriateness application.
5. The banners do not meet the zoning regulations for signage; they are too large and placed too high on the building.

**F. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends that the HPC **adopt** staff findings and **deny** the Certificate of Appropriateness with the following conditions:

1. All banners must be removed immediately.
2. All brick and masonry damage must be repaired following *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards* for masonry.

**G. HPC RECOMMENDATION:**

At the July 26, 2005 HPC public hearing, the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission voted to **adopt** the staff findings and **deny** the Certificate of Appropriateness with staff conditions.