

**Department of Community Planning and Economic Development – Planning Division Report**

Variance Request  
BZZ-3924

**Date:** February 7, 2008

**Applicant:** Brian Bergee, for the Minnesota Center for the Book Arts

**Address of Property:** 1011 Washington Avenue South

**Contact Person and Phone:** Brian Bergee, 612-215-2572

**Planning Staff and Phone:** Molly McCartney, 612-673-5811

**Date Application Deemed Complete:** January 7, 2008

**Publication Date:** February 1, 2008

**Hearing Date:** February 7, 2008

**Appeal Period Expiration:** February 19, 2008

**End of 60 Day Decision Period:** March 7, 2008

**Ward:** 7      **Neighborhood Organization:** Downtown

**Existing Zoning:** B4S-1 Downtown Service District, DP Downtown Overlay Parking District.

**Proposed Use:** Projecting sign

**Proposed Variances:**

- A variance to increase the maximum projection of a sign away from the building from 4 ft. to 6 ft.,
- A variance to increase the area of a projecting sign from 48 sq. ft. to 105 sq. ft., and
- A variance to allow for a flashing sign with on-premise advertising that exceeds the provisions that limit flashing signs to news, weather, time or other public service messages.

at 1011 Washington Avenue South in the B4S-1 Downtown Service District and the DP Downtown Overlay Parking District.

**Zoning code section authorizing the requested variance:** 525.520 (21) (21) (21)

**Background:** The subject site is a three-story storefront building along Washington Avenue South that houses a number of businesses, including a bookstore (Open Book), office (Milkweed Editions), the Minnesota Center for Book Arts, art gallery (Rosalux Gallery), the Loft Literary Center and a coffee shop. These businesses operate in the building that is known as the Open Book Building. Built in 1890

(building permit #A2008), the building has characteristics of Renaissance and Romanesque Revival styles, including a symmetrical façade, semi-circular arches for windows, and beltcourses. The proposed sign variances are to install a marquee-type sign for Open Book.

Open Book currently has signage on the building, both a large wall sign above the main entrance, and smaller projecting signs along ancillary entrances. The large wall sign above the main entrance is proposed to be replaced with a marquee-type sign. The current sign does have interchangeable type. The three smaller projecting signs identify the ground floor tenants, such as the Coffee Gallery and Rosalux Gallery. Ground floor tenants also have window signage.

The proposed sign requires three variances. The sign is like a marquee in that the sign is hung on a projecting-like structure above the main entrance. The proposed sign will have two faces projecting from the building and also text above the projecting portion. The faces that project from the building will have internally lit-LED interchangeable text, to be used to announce author appearances and events. The Open Book logo is also proposed to be above the marquee. The sign requires variances for the maximum distance a sign can project away from the building from 4 ft to 6 ft., a variance to increase the area of the sign, and a variance to allow for a flashing sign to have on-premise advertising. The property' zoning allows marquee signs as well as flashing signs, however, in the zoning code, flashing signs are limited to news, weather, time or other public service messages, and not on-site advertising, as the proposed sign would have. The last variance is being applied for to allow the on-site advertising. The material of the proposed sign is mainly aluminum, with a LED message board on the marquee face.

### **Findings Required by the Minneapolis Zoning Code:**

- 1. The property cannot be put to a reasonable use under the conditions allowed by the official controls and strict adherence to the regulations of this zoning ordinance would cause undue hardship.**

#### **Variance to increase the maximum projection of a sign away from the building from 4 ft. to 6 ft.:**

The proposed sign is a marquee-type sign, however, the zoning code treats these types of sign much like projecting signs, including the maximum distance a sign can project from a building. In this zoning district, projecting signs are permitted to be 4 ft. from the building. Complying with this required would reduce the visibility of the marquee faces.

#### **Variance to increase the area of a projecting sign from 48 sq. ft. to 105 sq. ft.:**

The proposed sign is a marquee-type sign, however, the zoning code treats these types of sign much like projecting signs, including the measurements for a projecting sign. Typically the area for a projecting sign is measured with only one of the sign faces. Due to the angle of the proposed sign both of the sign faces are measured. Complying with this required would reduce the visibility of the marquee faces.

#### **Variance to allow for a flashing sign with on-premise advertising that exceeds the provisions that limit flashing signs to news, weather, time or other public service messages:**

Limiting the flashing sign to news, weather, time or other public service message reduces the visibility of the sign and prohibits the intention of publicizing events at the property.

- 2. The circumstances are unique to the parcel of land for which the variance is sought and have not been created by any persons presently having an interest in the property. Economic considerations alone shall not constitute an undue hardship if reasonable use for the property exists under the terms of the ordinance.**

**A variance to increase the maximum projection of a sign away from the building from 4 ft. to 6 ft., a variance to increase the area of a projecting sign from 48 sq. ft. to 105 sq. ft., and a variance to allow for a flashing sign with on-premise advertising that exceeds the provisions that limit flashing signs to news, weather, time or other public service messages:**

The proposed sign is a marquee-type sign, however, the zoning code treats these types of sign much like projecting signs, including the measurements for distance away from the building and the size allowed. While the proposed sign is a design proposed by the applicant, the regulations for a projecting sign of distance and size prohibit a sign that is large enough to advertise the property. While the property does have existing signage, the proposed design will have greater visibility along Washington Avenue.

- 3. The granting of the variance will be in keeping with the spirit and intent of the ordinance and will not alter the essential character of the locality or be injurious to the use or enjoyment of other property in the vicinity.**

**A variance to increase the maximum projection of a sign away from the building from 4 ft. to 6 ft., a variance to increase the area of a projecting sign from 48 sq. ft. to 105 sq. ft., and a variance to allow for a flashing sign with on-premise advertising that exceeds the provisions that limit flashing signs to news, weather, time or other public service messages:**

Granting the variances to allow the proposed sign will be keeping with the intent of the ordinance and will not be injurious to the surrounding area, provided that the proposed sign does not obstruct character defining features of the building and that the interchangeable text does not change more than one time per day. In addition, the way in which the large sign is installed to the building may also affect the integrity of the building.

The variances to increase the size and distance from the building are keeping with the intent of the ordinance that restrict the size of signs that minimizes very large signs and sign clutter. While there is no evidence that this site has been used in the past for a theater, the design of the proposed sign is much like historic marquees elsewhere in Minneapolis.

Since this building was not originally designed for a marquee sign, there are character defining features that will be obstructed by the proposed sign. By minimum the height of the sign, the belt course line beneath the second story windows can be exposed, and the two middle windows on the second floor will be unobstructed. Reduce the size of the sign will ensure that signage is does not envelope the building and these building features are visible.

Even though the building is not protected as a locally historical designated building, there are installation techniques that will protect the integrity of the building from such a large sign. Limiting the number of masonry bricks that are disturbed by the installation and attaching the sign through the mortar and not the masonry will aid in disturbing the least amount of exterior materials.

- 4. The proposed variance will not substantially increase the congestion of the public streets, or increase the danger of fire, or be detrimental to the public welfare or endanger the public safety.**

**Variance to increase the maximum projection of a sign away from the building from 4 ft. to 6 ft., a variance to increase the area of a projecting sign from 48 sq. ft. to 105 sq. ft., and a variance to allow for a flashing sign with on-premise advertising that exceeds the provisions that limit flashing signs to news, weather, time or other public service messages:**

Granting the variances would not likely increase congestion in the area or increase the danger of fire safety, nor would they be detrimental to welfare or public safety. Reducing the size of the sign will allow for better views from the second story middle windows to the public sidewalk.

**Findings Required by the Minneapolis Zoning Code for a sign adjustment:**

- 1. The sign adjustment will not significantly increase or lead to sign clutter in the area or result in a sign that is inconsistent with the purpose of the zoning district in which the property is located.**

**Variance to increase the maximum projection of a sign away from the building from 4 ft. to 6 ft., a variance to increase the area of a projecting sign from 48 sq. ft. to 105 sq. ft., and a variance to allow for a flashing sign with on-premise advertising that exceeds the provisions that limit flashing signs to news, weather, time or other public service messages:**

The proposed sign will not lead to sign clutter, even with the other projecting signs on the building. The proposed sign will replace an existing sign and the existing projecting signs are much smaller than the existing or proposed sign above the main entrance. The site is located in the B4S-1 Downtown Service District, as well as along the Washington Avenue, which is being targeted for major pedestrian and streetscape improvements lead by Major R.T. Rybak's Washington Boulevard Great City Design Team.

- 2. The sign adjustment will allow a sign of exceptional design or style that will enhance the area or that is more consistent with the architecture and design of the site.**

**Variance to increase the maximum projection of a sign away from the building from 4 ft. to 6 ft., a variance to increase the area of a projecting sign from 48 sq. ft. to 105 sq. ft., and a variance to allow for a flashing sign with on-premise advertising that exceeds the provisions that limit flashing signs to news, weather, time or other public service messages:**

**CPED Planning Division Report**  
BZZ-3924

The design of the proposed sign is exceptional and a unique design. The proposed sign is mainly aluminum, a higher quality material than typical plastic face signs. The LED of the message boards shall not be changed from the one time per day, and will advertise events and speakers. By reducing the size so that the second story windows and belt course below is exposed, the proposed sign is consistent with the architecture of the building.

**Recommendation of the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development Planning Division:**

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development Planning Division recommends that the Board of Adjustment adopt the findings above and **approve** the following variances:

- A variance to increase the maximum projection of a sign away from the building from 4 ft. to 6 ft.,
- A variance to increase the area of a projecting sign from 48 sq. ft. to 105 sq. ft., and
- A variance to allow for a flashing sign with on-premise advertising that exceeds the provisions that limit flashing signs to news, weather, time or other public service messages.

at 1011 Washington Avenue South in the B4S-1 Downtown Service District and the DP Downtown Overlay Parking District, subject to the following conditions:

1. That the proposed sign does not obstruct the belt line course beneath the second story windows and does not obstruct the second story windows,
2. The interchangeable text on the marquee may not be changed more than one time per day,
3. Attaching the sign to the building through mortar and not the masonry, and
4. CPED–Planning Division review and approve the final sign plan, to include an elevation plan of the façade measured to an architect or engineer’s scale.