

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

FILE NAME: Electric Auto Sales Company Building, 1601 Hennepin Avenue (APN 2702924230028), BZH-25771

CATEGORY/DISTRICT: Harmon Place Historic District

CLASSIFICATION: Certificate of Appropriateness

APPLICANT: Greg Rendall, Sign Source, (952) 908-9130

DATE OF APPLICATION: February 10, 2009

PUBLICATION DATE: March 3, 2009

DATE OF HEARING: March 10, 2009

APPEAL PERIOD EXPIRATION: March 20, 2009

STAFF INVESTIGATION AND REPORT: John Smoley, Ph.D., (612) 673-2830

REQUEST: Master sign plan and new signs

A. SITE DESCRIPTION:

The Electric Auto Sales Company Building is a flat roofed, two-story red brick building originally designed as an automobile sales and service facility. Located at the southwest corner of Hennepin Avenue and Maple Street, the building occupies a prominent location in the Harmon Place Historic District.

Properties in the district meet local designation criteria 1. Minneapolis' automotive industry was centered in what is now the Harmon Place Historic District for over a half century. Extant automotive sales and service buildings from the district's period of significance, 1907 to 1930, represent the roller-coaster progress of Minneapolis' early automotive industry and twentieth-century economy.¹

Properties in the district are also significant for their architecture (local designation criteria 4). Real estate investors and architects coupled Renaissance Revival, Prairie and Art Deco styles with modern concrete and brick curtain wall construction to emphasize automobile display areas and eye-catching advertising.²

¹ Carol Zellie, *The Harmon Place Historic District: Final Report*, 2001, Files of the Harmon Place Historic District, Planning Division, Community Planning and Economic Development Department, Minneapolis, MN, 1, 17.

² Carol Zellie, *The Harmon Place Historic District: Final Report*, 2001, Files of the Harmon Place Historic District, Planning Division, Community Planning and Economic Development Department, Minneapolis, MN, 2-4.

During the 1930s the district's small dealers lost out to Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler, which controlled 80% of the market for new passenger cars. Service centers and used car dealerships dominated tenant space in the district for several decades until retreating further afield. A wide variety of commercial and non-profit enterprises occupy the district now.³

Existing signage on the building consists of a large number of window signs, a building mounted real estate sign, and four awning signs on the face and valence of 2 awnings totaling 24 square feet per awning (48 square feet total). All but the real estate sign appear on the first story of the building.

Additionally, one large roof sign sits atop the building. The City of Minneapolis' Zoning Code and the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings do not permit roof signs. This sign on the building predates the Harmon Place Historic District's designation in 2003. The proposed master sign plan does not include this signage, and the sign is required to adhere to provisions in the Zoning Code that deal with nonconforming signs.

B. PROPOSED CHANGES:

1601 Hennepin Avenue is currently occupied in part by an art supply store. The building owner would like to rent out space on the second floor of the building, and seeks new signage for this space. The City of Minneapolis' Zoning Code and the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings require multiple tenant buildings possess a master sign plan. Following approval of master sign plans by the Heritage Preservation Commission, staff issues Certificate of No Change for signs that are consistent with approved master sign plans.

The applicant is requesting approval of a master sign plan and new signs for the building.

Sections D.1.a-d, D.1.f-g, D2, D4 a-c, and D.4.e-f of the proposed master sign plan consists of:

D.1.a. STREET LEVEL-SIGN FACING HENNEPIN-(1) 50 SQF Sign consisting of illuminated channel letters mounted on raceway over first story window. Raceway to be painted color of the building attached to wall only on the mortar joints. Letters not to exceed 36" in height. Letters illumination consist of neon in a channel letter with clear faces.

D.1.b. SECOND STORY-SIGN FACING HENNEPIN- Either:

a. (1) 50 SQF Sign consisting of illuminated channel letters mounted on raceway over second story window. Raceway to be painted color of the building attached to wall only on the mortar joints. Letters not to exceed 36" in height Letters illumination consist of neon in a channel letter with clear faces; or

³ Carol Zellie, *The Harmon Place Historic District: Final Report*, 2001, Files of the Harmon Place Historic District, Planning Division, Community Planning and Economic Development Department, Minneapolis, MN, 10-17 .

b. One double faced illuminated 12 SFQ Projecting Blade sign to be mounted over first floor windows sign to project no more than 4' from wall.

D.1.c. STREET LEVEL-SIGN FACING MAPLE-(1) 50 SQF Sign consisting of illuminated channel letters mounted on raceway over first story window. Raceway to be painted color of the building attached to wall only on the mortar joints. Letters not to exceed 36" in height. Letters illumination consist of neon in a channel letter with clear faces.

D.1.d. SECOND STORY-SIGN FACING MAPLE-(1) 50 SQF Sign consisting of illuminated channel letters mounted on raceway over second story window. Raceway to be painted color of the building attached to wall only on the mortar joints. Letters not to exceed 36" in height. Letters illumination consist of neon in a channel letter with clear faces.

D.1.f. Main Door Signs - size not to exceed four (4) square feet, consisting solely of name and hours.

D.1.g. Window Signs ~ size not to exceed twenty-five percent (25%) of tenant's window area.

D.2. Sign Placement. The sign shall be placed on the exterior wall in the area shown on the attached sign area diagrams.

D.4. Prohibited Signs. The following types of signs or sign components shall be prohibited:

- a. Moving or rotating signs.
- b. Signs employing moving or flashing lights.
- c. Signs, letters, symbols or identification of any nature painted directly on exterior surfaces of the premises.
- e. Free-standing signs.
- f. Rooftop signs.

The remainder of the master sign plan consists of items relevant to the property owner and tenants only, thus this staff report neither analyzes those items nor recommends approval of those portions of the proposed master sign plan.

The applicant is also proposing new signs that comply with the proposed master sign plan:

1. one 50 square foot internally illuminated, channel letter, raceway mounted aluminum wall sign placed just below a series of existing gooseneck lamps that illuminate the first-floor awnings along the Hennepin Avenue side of this building;
2. one 50 square foot internally illuminated, channel letter, raceway mounted aluminum wall sign placed just below a series of existing gooseneck lamps that illuminate the first-floor awnings along the Maple Street side of this building;
3. one 50 square foot internally illuminated, channel letter, raceway mounted aluminum wall sign placed just below the Maple Street roofline of this 30 foot tall building
4. and either

- a. one 12 square foot internally illuminated painted aluminum skin projecting sign mounted on the northeast corner of the building at the same level as a series of existing gooseneck lamps that illuminate the awnings below; or
- b. one 50 square foot internally illuminated, channel letter, raceway mounted aluminum wall sign placed just below the Hennepin Avenue roofline of this 30 foot tall building

C. ANALYSIS:

Certificate of Appropriateness

Article VI of the city of Minneapolis' Heritage Preservation Regulations state:

...Any alteration of a landmark, property in an historic district or nominated property under interim protection shall be prohibited except where authorized by a certificate of appropriateness approved by the commission...

...Before approving a certificate of appropriateness, the commission shall make findings that the alteration will not materially impair the integrity of the landmark, historic district or nominated property under interim protection and is consistent with the applicable design guidelines adopted by the commission, or if design guidelines have not been adopted, is consistent with the recommendations contained in The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, except as otherwise provided in this section...

As conditioned, the proposed signs and sections D.1.a-d, D.1.f-g, D2, D4 a-c, and D.4.e-f of the proposed master sign plan will not materially impair the integrity of the subject property and are consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Harmon Place Historic District Design Guidelines but they do not comply with the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings.

Integrity

Both the city of Minneapolis' Heritage Preservation Regulations and the National Register of Historic Places identify integrity as the authenticity of historic properties and recognize seven aspects that define a property's integrity: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The most widely recognized standard in the United States for determining adverse effects to the integrity of historic properties is the Secretary's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (36 CFR part 68), one part of which is the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. In all but rare circumstances, alterations consistent with the Secretary's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties produce no adverse effects to historic properties. The proposed alterations at the subject property comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Staff finds no unusual circumstances that cause the proposed project to meet these standards while materially impairing the integrity of the subject property.

Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

The proposed signs and sections D.1.a-d, D.1.f-g, D2, D4 a-c, and D.4.e-f of the proposed master sign plan are consistent with the very limited sign standards in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. These standards are consistent with the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings (analyzed below).

Harmon Place Historic District Design Guidelines

The proposed signs and sections D.1.a-d, D.1.f-g, D2, D4 a-c, and D.4.e-f of the proposed master sign plan are consistent with the Harmon Place Historic District Design Guidelines "Signs, Awnings, and Lighting" standards. These standards are consistent with the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings (analyzed below).

Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings

Sign Numbers: The Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings also state that each principal building entrance that faces a public street, or each ground floor principal use, whichever is less, is allowed two signs. The application proposes four new signs. Four awning signs currently exist on the building. Staff recommends the project be conditioned to require elimination of the four signs currently on the awnings.

Projecting Sign Height: The Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings state that projecting signs should be located near a building entrance and should not be higher than 14 feet. Since projecting signs routinely appeared higher than 14 feet, at the corner of buildings, and not near building entrances during the district's period of significance, staff recommends approval of the proposed projecting sign and related sections of the proposed master sign plan.

Wall Sign Height: The Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings state that wall signs should be located between the first and second floor and should not be higher than 14 feet, except where the historic sign band is higher. Staff has found no evidence of the historic sign band on this building being higher than 14 feet during the district's period of significance. Indeed, photos from this time period indicate signs mounted above this height tended to be roof signs and/or signs designed for off-site advertising, thus staff recommends denial of the proposed second story wall signs and related sections of the proposed master sign plan.

Wall Sign Size: The Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings state that wall signs should be no more than 2 feet high and 32 square feet in area. The master sign plan allows for wall signs up to 3 feet in height and 50 square feet in area, and the proposed signs are two feet high and 50 square feet in area. Photos from this time period indicate the presence of wall signs greater than 2 feet high and 32 square

feet in area, thus staff recommends the proposed first story wall signs and related sections of the proposed master sign plan be approved.

Mounting: The Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings state that 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. Wall signs should be attached to the building through the mortar joints. Staff recommends conditioning the project to meet these standards since the plans do not include these mounting details.

Illumination: The Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings state that each principal building entrance that faces a public street, or each ground floor principal use, whichever is less, is allowed two signs. Only one of the signs should be illuminated. The proposed master sign plan includes provisions for 4 internally illuminated signs at any one time, and does not propose removal of the gooseneck lamps that illuminate the existing awning signs and two of the proposed wall signs. Staff recommends the project be conditioned to ensure that the proposed and existing illumination light no more than 2 signs.

Additionally, the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings state that plastic face covers should not be placed on illuminated signs. The proposed wall signs and master sign plan include wall signs with clear plexiglass face covers. Since staff cannot find evidence of signs with such covers but can find considerable evidence of signs with exposed neon tubing during the district's period of significance, staff recommends the project be conditioned to eliminate clear plexiglass face covers from signs.

Real Estate Sign: The Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings state that, if attached to a building, a real estate sign should be a window sign. The building currently possesses one building mounted real estate sign on the north wall of the building. Staff recommends conditioning the project to ensure removal of the existing building mounted real estate sign.

Other Items: The proposed master sign plan does not address numerous regulations stipulated in the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings. Staff recommends conditioning the project to ensure that, when the master sign plan does not address particular issues, signs on the subject property abide by the regulations stipulated in the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings.

D. FINDINGS:

1. The Electric Auto Sales Company Building, 1601 Hennepin Avenue, is a contributing resource in the Harmon Place Historic District.

2. The proposed signs and sections D.1.a-d, D.1.f-g, D2, D4 a-c, and D.4.e-f of the proposed master sign plan comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, the City of Minneapolis' Zoning Code, and the Harmon Place Historic District Design Guidelines.
3. The proposed signs and sections D.1.a-d, D.1.f-g, D2, D4 a-c, and D.4.e-f of the proposed master sign plan do not comply with the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings, but staff feels all deviations *apart from sign height* are appropriate to the historic district and building.
4. The existing roof sign does not comply with the City of Minneapolis' Zoning Code and the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings, but since it existed prior to the designation of this building, the sign follows the Zoning Code's regulations related to nonconforming signs.
5. The proposed master sign plan does not address numerous regulations stipulated in the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings.

E. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Heritage Preservation Commission adopt staff findings and **approve** a Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed master sign plan subject to the following conditions:

1. The real estate sign currently mounted to the building shall be removed prior to issuance of Building Permit.
2. The four signs currently on the awnings shall be removed prior to issuance of Building Permit.
3. Amend the proposed sign plans and proposed master sign plan to indicate the following conditions prior to issuance of Building Permit:
 - a. The projecting sign shall be attached to a permanent mounting plate.
 - b. Electrical conduit for the projecting sign shall be installed through the permanent mounting plate.
 - c. Not more than one brick shall be damaged by the installation of the permanent mounting plate.
 - d. Electrical conduit shall be attached to the projecting sign and not the building wall.
 - e. The wall signs shall be attached to the building through the mortar joints.
 - f. The proposed and existing illumination shall light no more than 2 signs.
 - g. No clear plexiglass face covers are permitted on signs.
 - h. Only sections D.1.a, D.1.c, D.1.f-g, D2, D4 a-c, and D.4.e-f are approved.
 - i. When the master sign plan does not address particular issues, signs on the subject property shall abide by the regulations stipulated in the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings.
4. Deny the request for the two illuminated wall signs to be placed just below the roofline of this 30 foot tall building.
5. CPED-Planning Preservation Staff shall review and approve the final plans and elevations prior to building permit issuance.

Attachments

- A. Vicinity Map
- B. Application
- C. Article VI, City of Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Regulations
- D. Plans and Contemporary Photos Submitted by Applicant
- E. Historical Photos
- F. Harmon Place Historic District Design Guidelines (“Signs, Awnings, and Lighting” standards)
- G. Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings