

June 29, 2021

CHAIR AND CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSIONERS  
City of Long Beach  
California

**RECOMMENDATION:**

A Certificate of Appropriateness to re-install the original Walker's Department Store sign on the marquee over the Pine Avenue building entry on the Walker's Department Store building, a designated historic landmark building located at 401 Pine Avenue in the Downtown Plan Area (PD-30) Zoning District. (District 1)

APPLICANT: Walker Building HOA – Brock Shetley  
401 Pine Avenue  
Long Beach, Ca 90803  
(Application No. COAC2104-01)

**THE REQUEST**

The applicant requests approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness to re-install the original Walker's Department Store sign to its original location on the face of the metal marquee over the Pine Avenue entry. The original sign is currently stored inside the building. No other improvements are proposed to the building at this time.

**BACKGROUND**

The subject property is located on the northwest corner of E. 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Pine Avenue, between Pacific Avenue to the west and Pine Avenue to the east (Attachment A – Vicinity Map) within the PD-30 Downtown Plan zoning area (Downtown Plan Zoning District).

The subject property is a locally designated historic landmark building known as the Walker's Department Store Building built 1929 (Attachment B - Historic Landmark Ordinance). The structure was designated as a historic landmark in 1989. The building features elements of the Art Deco style and Renaissance Revival Styles. The architects of the building are the firm of Meyer and Holler, a prominent Los Angeles firm whose most famous building was Grauman's Chinese Theater in Hollywood. They also designed two (2) other Hollywood landmarks: Grauman's Egyptian Theater and the Security Pacific Bank. In Long Beach they designed the Fox West Coast Theater (demolished) and the Ocean Center Building.



In 2001, the building underwent an extensive adaptive reuse project to rehabilitate the building and convert the upper floors to for-sale residential dwelling units. At the time of construction, the sign was carefully removed by the developer for preservation purposes and stored in the building. One other original and smaller sign, originally mounted to the side of the Pine Avenue marquee, is mounted in the residential lobby where it will remain. The buildings Homeowner's Association (HOA) was granted a Mills contract last year and this proposed sign restoration and re-installation is a required part of the scope of work of the contract.

The applicants have also applied and have been awarded grant funding by the Long Beach Memorial Navy Heritage Association (Navy Trust) to help fund the proposed project. The Navy Trust generally requires Cultural Heritage Commission (CHC) approval as a condition of the grant, where projects require CHC action.

### **ANALYSIS**

The project requires approval of the Cultural Heritage Commission (CHC) because the proposed scope of work will be visible from the street and involves work to the exterior façade of a designated historic landmark building. Specifically, the work involves the re-installation of the primary Walker's Department store sign which is currently stored inside the building. To be granted approval, the project must comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and meet the findings for a Certificate of Appropriateness.

To identify when the Walker's Department Store sign was installed, building permit record searches were completed, but no records were found for the subject sign. The original architectural plans from 1928 were drawn for Marti's Department Stores, but no signs or proposed sign locations were shown in the drawings. Archival records indicate that Walker's Department Store took over the building in 1932. As early as 1933, the sign is shown on the Pine Avenue marquee in a photo of the building and remained until 2001 (Attachment C - Historic Photo and 2001 Photo). The sign also appears in a 1942 newspaper advertisement which shows two signs on both the Pine Avenue and 4<sup>th</sup> Street marquees (Attachment D - Supporting Documentation). Restoring and reinstalling the sign in the same location is appropriate preservation practice.

The sign itself is made of a metal frame in a rectangular shape with varying heights. The sign is 14' – 9 inches wide, and 27 inches to 35 inches in height. The sign retains the original individual metal letters which previously had affixed neon tubing displaying the word "Walker's" with a shield shape. New neon tubing will need to be installed since the original tubing is no longer on the sign. The new neon will be a violet color, to match the original color. Existing electrical lines within the marquee will be used to provide electrical power to light the sign. Prior to re-installation, parts of the sign will be rehabilitated and will include patching of holes, removing rust, and in some cases removing and replacing deteriorated portions as needed. Prior to installation, the sign will need rehabilitation work. The applicants will apply the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation which provides guidance on restoration of existing historic materials. Two of the Secretary of Interior's Standards apply and state the following:

Standard No. 6 - *“Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced.”*

Standard No. 7 - *“Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.”*

Applying Standard No 6, the applicants plan to reuse the existing sign which is consistent with the guidance to reuse rather than replace. For Standard No. 7, the applicants' plans to rehabilitate the physical sign are to use gentle cleaning methods, hand scraping and wire brushing to treat the materials. The neon tubing will need to be recreated in a violet color which is the original neon color in the sign. This is also consistent with Standard No. 7 for treating historic materials.

As a condition of approval, staff is conditioning that final color samples and painted metal samples be submitted to Planning Bureau staff for review and approval prior to permit issuance. A set of construction drawings showing the method of attachments to the marquee, electrical lighting, neon tubing size and a photo simulation must be approved by Planning Bureau staff prior to issuance of a building permit. Also, while the sign is in fair condition, based on staff's inspection, some portions of the sign frame will likely not be salvageable, so replacement with appropriate materials will be needed. A final condition is required that the HOA and the sign contractor prepare a treatment plan to be approved by Planning Bureau staff prior to proceeding with the rehabilitation work.

In conclusion, the project proposes to reinstall a historic sign currently in storage that uses documentation in the form of archival newspaper articles, and more contemporary photos to reinstall the sign to its original location. The proposed rehabilitation and treatment of the sign is in accordance with the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation Standard No. 6 to reuse historic materials rather than replace them; and Standard No. 7 to treat with the gentlest means possible. The original sign will be rehabilitated, reused and installed at its original location which is consistent with Standard No. 6. The methods proposed to treat and rehabilitate the sign are consistent with Standard No. 7.

The proposed project will be consistent and in full compliance with the City's development standards for the PD-30 (Downtown Plan Area) zoning district. The project is also consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards which allows for restoration of missing features when based on photo documentation or verifiable records.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Staff has analyzed the proposed project and has determined that the project meets the requirements set forth in Title 21 of the City's Zoning Code, Section 2.63.080 (Cultural Heritage Commission) of the Long Beach Municipal Code, the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, and Guidelines for Rehabilitation. Staff recommends approval of the Certificate of Appropriateness, subject to the conditions of approval (Attachment E - Conditions of

Approval). All the required findings can be made in the affirmative for the proposed improvements (Attachment F - Findings).

**ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

This project has been reviewed for compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Based on that assessment, the City has determined the project to be Categorically Exempt from the provisions of CEQA pursuant to the provisions of Article 19 Section 15331 (historical resource restoration/rehabilitation) of the CEQA Guidelines. No further environmental review is required.

**PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE**

A total of 2,716 public hearing notices were distributed on June 15, 2021. As of this date, no response to this project were received.

Respectfully submitted,



ALEJANDRO PLASCENCIA  
PRESERVATION PLANNER



ALISON SPINDLER-RUIZ, AICP  
ADVANCE PLANNING OFFICER



PATRICIA A. DIEFENDERFER, AICP  
PLANNING BUREAU MANAGER

PD:ASR:ap

- Attachments:
- Attachment A - Vicinity Map
  - Attachment B - Historic Landmark Ordinance
  - Attachment C - Historic Photos
  - Attachment D - Applicants Supporting Documentation
  - Attachment E - Conditions of Approval
  - Attachment F - Findings