

May 30, 2023

CHAIR AND CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSIONERS

City of Long Beach
California

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve a Certificate of Appropriateness to allow for temporary removal, preservation, and relocation of the Dolly Varden Rooftop Sign to be re-located onto a replacement building at 335 Pacific Avenue in the Downtown Plan (PD-30) Planned Development District, as part of a Site Plan Review (SPR) entitlement (App. No. 2212-09). The Dolly Varden Rooftop Sign is a locally designated historic landmark. The relocation of the historic sign is part of an SPR entitlement that would consist of site clearance and construction of a new 8-story, 141-unit, multi-family residential building with parking. The historic sign would be relocated to the new rooftop amenity space at 335 Pacific Avenue. (District 1)

APPLICANT: Studio One Eleven
c/o Ryan Caldera, Senior Project Manager
245 E. 3rd Street
Long Beach, CA 90802
(Application No. COAC2212-02)

THE REQUEST

The applicant requests temporary removal, preservation, and temporary off-site storage of the Dolly Varden Rooftop Sign to be re-located onto a new building at 335 Pacific Avenue in the Downtown Plan (PD-30) Planned Development District as part of related entitlement Application No. 2212-09 (SPR22-135). The SPR entitlement would consist of site clearance and construction of a new 8-story, 141-unit, multi-family residential building with parking. The historic sign would be relocated to the new rooftop amenity space at 335 Pacific Avenue.

BACKGROUND

The project site is located at 335 Pacific Avenue, on the west side of Pacific Avenue, between 3rd Street and 4th Street (Attachment A – Location Map). The site is currently developed with a 35–room, 3-story hotel (approximately 9,730 square feet), constructed in 1929, and the Dolly Varden Rooftop Sign (Attachment B – Site Photographs). The site includes 44 surface parking spaces located north of the hotel building.



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The Dolly Varden Hotel sign is located on the rooftop of the hotel and measures 9 feet in height. While no building permits exist for the rooftop sign, building permits for post-earthquake repairs were taken out in August 1933, including work on the roof and it is assumed that the sign was erected at that time. The sign consists of two metal panels of neon lettering, each positioned in a diagonal fashion, on the front of the roof and joined at the corners in the shape of a “V.” The sign reads “DOLLY VARDEN HOTEL...BATH IN EVERY ROOM.” The letters are illuminated in blue and red neon colors. The red neon is limited to the word “HOTEL” with the remainder of the sign text in blue neon.

The rooftop sign was designated as a Historic Landmark, on August 2, 1995 (Attachment C – Ordinance No. C-7345). The 1995 ordinance designated the rooftop sign as a local historic landmark along with two other separate properties, the Le Grande Apartment building and the Silver Bow Apartment building. As part of the landmark nomination, the Dolly Varden Hotel building itself was found not to meet criteria for landmark designation, nor was it found to have any identifiable architectural style (Attachment D – Nomination Documents). Alternatively, the historic rooftop sign was found to feature notable design of the period and for its charming, nostalgic message and visual impact downtown. The landmark nomination documents include background information related to the protections provided by the landmark designation, including the statement that removal and relocation of the historic resource could potentially be considered as non adverse, as historic objects may be salvaged by relocation, by the Cultural Heritage Commission. In 2017, the sign was removed, restored, and reinstalled back onto the top of the hotel in its current location and condition.

On December 20, 2022, the applicant submitted an entitlement application to the Planning Bureau for Site Plan Review (SPR) approval to clear the project site of all structures and construct a new 8-story, 141-unit, multi-family residential building with subterranean parking. The application includes preserving the historic sign by relocating it to the new rooftop amenity space at the new multi-family residential building at the same address.

ANALYSIS

The proposed project requires approval of the CHC because it involves temporary removal, off-site storage, preservation, and reinstallation of a Historic Landmark (Dolly Varden Rooftop Sign). To be granted approval, the project must comply with the Secretary of the Interior (SOI) Standards for Rehabilitation and meet the criteria for a Certificate of Appropriateness.

DISCUSSION

The applicant is requesting approval for the removal and relocation of a historic sign to be included on the roof of a new building at 335 Pacific Avenue (Attachment E – Plans). The sign would remain on the historic site (335 Pacific Avenue) but would be incorporated into the design of a new 8-story multi-family residential building. The existing 3-story hotel and surface parking lot would be removed and replaced with an 8-story, 141-unit residential building. As part of the project proposal, the Dolly Varden Rooftop Sign would be removed and relocated to a secured and conditioned storage location. The historic sign would be removed one month prior to site

clearance. Upon construction completion, the historic sign would be re-installed on the rooftop amenity area of the new building. Conditions of approval are included to ensure that the historic sign is installed prior to the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy for the new building (Attachment F – Conditions of Approval).

The project applicant has prepared a historic treatment procedures document that includes the specific requirements related to plans, staff personnel, and treatments required prior to and during the removal, storage, and reinstallation of the sign (Attachment G – Historic Treatment Procedures). The historic treatment procedures require the preparation of a historic treatment program and fire-prevention plan prior to issuance of building permits. The final historic treatment program shall be prepared by a qualified historic professional and shall follow the SOI Standards for Rehabilitation.

While in secured storage, the sign would undergo periodic inspection, maintenance, and restoration. Upon reinstallation of the sign on the new building rooftop, the sign would undergo final inspection by City staff and a qualified historic treatment specialist. As outlined in the procedures plan, the entire removal, storage, and reinstallation of the historic sign would be overseen by a historic treatment specialist and contractors with prescribed qualifications and experience.

The historic treatment plan will include preparation of a detailed assessment of existing conditions, which includes photographic evidence of the existing sign. In the event deteriorated features require restoration or repair, the photographs will serve with a record of the existing condition. In addition, a qualified historic professional is required to be onsite for all removal, storage, restoration, and relocation activities associated with the historic sign.

The new building, which is not part of this Certificate of Appropriateness request, would be 8 stories in height, which would be taller than the existing 3-story hotel. While the site would be redeveloped with a new and larger building, the building design maintains the sign as a functional rooftop sign with the same content and in the same general location (southeastern portion of project site) as the existing sign. The sign would maintain its close relationship to the Pacific Avenue frontage. In order to preserve visibility of the sign at its higher location, the upper floor massing at the rooftop amenity area has been recessed back, creating 8-story building mass and amenity area atop the 6th floor. Furthermore, the rooftop sign location is buffered by two distinct rooftop open space areas to ensure an open view of the sign from all sides. The placement of the sign on the new deck maintains a similar level of visibility as the original sign and visibility along Pacific Avenue.

The relocated sign would maintain its character defining features, which include its sign content and its relationship to the downtown skyline as one of the few remaining rooftop signs. The project would have a net positive impact as the sign would be preserved and incorporated into the design of the new residential building while allowing for redevelopment of the site to provide needed housing to the downtown Long Beach area. The relocation of the sign onto new buildings was contemplated in the landmark designation documentation. As such, the design

of the new building has an intentional massing to enhance the visual sightlines for the historic rooftop sign.

Consistency with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*:

1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.

The current and previous use of the existing building at 335 Pacific Avenue is a hotel. The existing 3-story hotel and surface parking lot are not protected under Ordinance No. C-7345, the landmark ordinance which protects the sign. Only the rooftop sign is identified as a historic landmark. The proposed project would relocate the historic rooftop sign onto a new multi-family residential building.

The historic Dolly Varden Rooftop Sign will be temporarily removed, preserved, and relocated onto a replacement building at 335 Pacific Avenue. The landmark sign will continue to be used for its intended purpose (rooftop sign). While the building use would change, the content and location of the sign would remain. The landmark ordinance identifies the significance of the sign's notable design of the period and for its charming, nostalgic message and visual impact to the downtown skyline. The sign would be relocated onto the rooftop of the new 8-story building and would maintain the same sign content. Although the use of the underlying building would change and the height of the sign would be increased to the 8th story of the replacement building, the historic message, rooftop location, and visual impact of the sign in the downtown area would remain intact.

2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.

The character defining features of the original historic Dolly Varden Rooftop sign will be retained and preserved with completion of the proposed project. Procedures for treatment of the historic sign have been prepared to serve as framework for the temporary removal, preservation, and relocation of the historic sign. The historic treatment procedures require the preparation of a written plan for historic treatment for the whole project, including each phase or process and protection of surrounding materials during operations. The final treatment plan will describe in detail the professional staff qualifications, materials and equipment to be used, methods of preservation, and equipment to be used for each phase of work.

- 3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.**

The proposed project will remove the existing historic rooftop sign, temporarily store the sign at a secure off-site location, and reinstall the sign on a new building at the same address, 335 Pacific Avenue. While the hotel building will be replaced with a new 8-story multi-family residential building, which is of a different architectural style and height, the historic sign itself will be preserved and rehabilitated consistent with the SOI for Rehabilitation.

The location on the proposed building will continue to ensure the sign is recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. The sign location would have a similar relationship to the street frontage (Pacific Avenue) but would be located at a greater height from the ground level. The location of the sign has been located north of the historic location, and the building articulation has been designed to include considerations of sign visibility. The replacement building was designed to avoid creating a false sense of history since the placement is modified from the original condition. No changes that create a false sense of historical development will be undertaken and no conjectural features added to the sign.

- 4. Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.**

The proposed improvements will not change the historic significance of the sign or affect the integrity of the sign. The existing protected sign remains unchanged from historic conditions and its content and association with the downtown skyline would remain unchanged with installation of the sign on the rooftop of the new 8-story building.

- 5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.**

The Historic Dolly Varden Rooftop Sign consists of two panels of neon lettering each positioned in a diagonal on the front of the roof and joined at the corners in the shape of a "V." The sign reads: "DOLLY VARDEN HOTEL...BATH IN EVERY ROOM." The top panel is shaped in a basic "T"-form, with the words "Dolly Varden" forming the top bar, of the "T", and "Hotel" the bottom section. The outline is irregular, with a flattened peak at the top. The words "Bath In Every Room" are located on a bar shape slightly below the top panel. The sign panels are elevated by supporting steel struts. The sign letters are in block capitals with a serif. They are made of neon lights for nighttime illumination.

A condition of approval has been included to ensure that the distinctive features, finishes and construction techniques of Dolly Varden Rooftop Sign are preserved, consistent with

SOI Standards for Rehabilitation. The project would not change the design, finish or features of the sign, as it would be relocated in its entirety onto the new building.

- 6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.**

While the non-historic hotel building will be replaced with a new 8-story multi-family residential building, the historic sign itself will be preserved and rehabilitated, if damaged, consistent with the SOI Standards for Rehabilitation. The proposed historic treatment plan will include preparation of a detailed assessment of existing conditions, which includes photographic evidence of the existing conditions. In the event deteriorated features require restoration or repair, the photographs will serve with a record of the existing condition. In addition, a qualified historic professional is required to be onsite for all removal, storage, restoration, and relocation activities associated with the historic sign. In addition to the treatment program for construction, the applicant shall prepare a maintenance program that outlines a schedule and methods for ongoing maintenance, cleaning, and neon light repair for the historic sign.

- 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.**

The project would not include physical treatments that would damage the historic sign. As outlined in the historic treatment procedures, prior to issuance of building permits, a historic treatment program and fire-prevention plan would be prepared and submitted to the Department of Development Services. The fire-prevention plan would include compliance with standard procedures while addressing risk related to heat-generating equipment and combustible materials. All restoration would be overseen by a Historic Treatment Specialist with prescribed qualifications and experience. The final historic treatment program will use the gentlest means possible for all restoration efforts.

- 8. Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.**

No known archeological resources are located at this property. The sign relocation would not include excavation activities. The Site Plan Review (SPR) entitlement (App. No. 2212-09) includes analyses and reports regarding archaeological resources in conformance with Downtown Plan Certified Final EIR (SCH No. 2009071006).

9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.

Standard No. 9 states that "new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale and architectural features..." As conditioned, the historic sign shall be removed prior to the initiation of construction activities onsite related to the new 8-story building. The sign would be stored in a climate safe storage location until the new building is completed for installation.

The design of the new building provides a step-down mass to provide a lower scale rooftop that highlights the historic rooftop sign. In addition, the folded facade design on the north side of the building intends to accent verticality and reference Downtown's Art Deco legacy. The design of the new building is differentiated from the existing hotel structure, but the relocation of the historic sign to the new rooftop amenity area would maintain its spatial relationship to the downtown skyline.

10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

Consistent with Standard No. 10, any modifications undertaken during the temporary removal, preservation, and relocation of the Dolly Varden Rooftop Sign shall be done in such a manner that, "if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired." The project does not propose additions or alterations to the historic sign but preservation treatment plans will be implemented for instances where the sign is damaged at any time during the removal, storage and reinstallation of the sign. Should rehabilitation measures require new construction, the essential form and integrity of the historic sign will be unimpaired.

The new project complies with the requirements of the Landmark Ordinance by preserving and maintaining the historic features and its relationship to the downtown skyline. The temporary removal, preservation, and relocation of the Dolly Varden Rooftop Sign will be conducted in a manner to complement the visual impact in the downtown while also ensuring the landmark rooftop sign is the main focal point of the site. As proposed and conditioned, the project would not adversely affect the overall character of the historic landmark.

As detailed above, the proposed project subject to the SPR entitlement and relocated sign, in consideration of the treatment program, would be consistent with the City's development standards for the PD-30 Downtown Plan, the Dolly Varden Historic Sign Landmark Ordinance, and Downtown Plan Certified Final EIR (SCH No. 2009071006).

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 City of Long Beach Municipal Code, the *Secretary of the Interiors’ Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*, and the Landmark Ordinance (Ordinance No. C-7345) (Attachment H - Findings).

With the recommended conditions of approval, staff supports approval of the Certificate of Appropriateness request. All the findings can be made in the affirmative for the proposed treatment and relocation of the historic sign, as the project would preserve the landmark sign for ongoing display. Staff recommends approval of the Certificate of Appropriateness subject to the conditions of approval.

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 Categorical 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

Public notices were distributed on May 15, 2023. As of this date, no comments or objections have been filed related to the project. As of the preparation of this report, two (2) public comments have been received (Attachment I – Public Comment).

Respectfully submitted,



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Attachments: Attachment A – Vicinity Map
Attachment B – Site Photographs
Attachment C – Ordinance No. C-7345
Attachment D – Nomination Documents
Attachment E – Plans
Attachment F – Conditions of Approval
Attachment G – Historic Treatment Procedures
Attachment H – Findings
Attachment I – Public Comment