

ANN ARBOR HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

Staff Report

ADDRESS: 529 East Liberty Street, Application Number HDC11-049

DISTRICT: State Street Historic District

REPORT DATE: May 5 for the May 12, 2011 HDC Meeting

REPORT PREPARED BY: Jill Thacher, Historic Preservation Coordinator

REVIEW COMMITTEE DATE: Monday, May 9, 2011

OWNER	APPLICANT
Name: MTBU LLC	Bassem Alawie/Ultimate Signs
Address: 536 S Forest Ave Ann Arbor, MI 48104	8827 Mark Twain Detroit, MI 48228
Phone: (734) 761-2680	(313) 724-2456

BACKGROUND: This two-story commercial building is part of the west wing of the Michigan Theater Building. It was built in 1927 in the 20th Century Romanesque style, but underwent significant alteration in the 1950s that destroyed much of its original exterior character. All of the original windows and storefronts were changed and a large aluminum signboard was added running the length of the building. The storefronts are now mainly glass, framed in mill finish silver aluminum, with a low ashlar limestone sill and a few vertical panels of dark marble. In 1993, the HDC approved the remodeling of the entrance to 529 by removing the existing single door and squared-off show window and replacing them with a double door and side window. The original occupant of this storefront was Marilyn Shops, and the most recent occupant was Beyond Juice. An approval in July 2007 to add a recessed aluminum and glass entry door, with sidelight and transom, to the front elevation has expired.

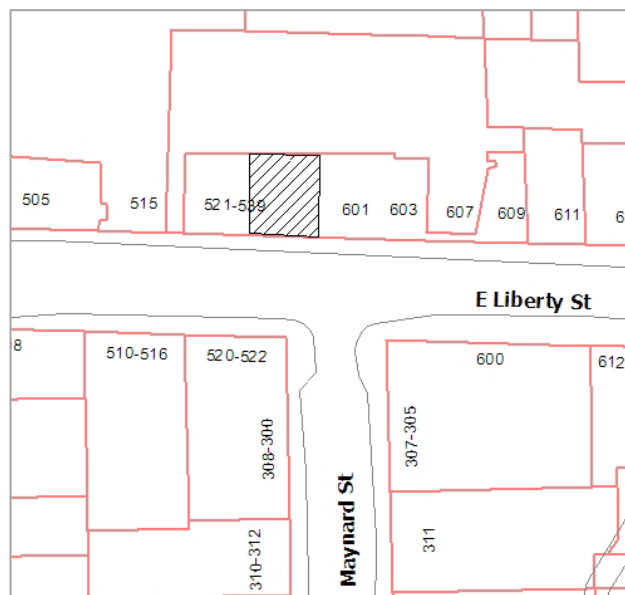
LOCATION: The site is located on the north side of East Liberty Street, between Maynard and Thompson.

APPLICATION: The applicant seeks HDC approval to install a vinyl fabric blade sign for a new business.

APPLICABLE REGULATIONS:

From the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation:

- (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.

- (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.

From the Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings (other SOI Guidelines may also apply):

Storefronts

Not Recommended: Using new illuminated signs; inappropriately scaled signs and logos; signs that project over the sidewalk unless they were a characteristic feature of the historic building; or other types of signs that obscure, damage, or destroy remaining character-defining features of the historic building.

STAFF FINDINGS:

1. This application is only to add a non-illuminated blade sign. The words "Mediterranean Grill" shown on the drawings have been removed from the application and are not under consideration. The applicant has obtained a staff approval for the oval-shaped LaPita sign-band sign shown in the drawings. Despite the electrical connection shown in the drawing, the oval sign will not be illuminated (this was a condition of approval).
2. The blade sign consists of two square galvanized brackets with a black vinyl banner hung between them. A good example of a similar sign can be found on the South State Street entrance to the Nichol's Arcade.
3. Staff has concerns about the scale of the sign and its placement on the sign band, which is traditionally used for signs hung flat against the wall (or having a parallel orientation instead of perpendicular to the wall). There are some examples of first-floor blade signs in the neighborhood, including at American Apparel on East Liberty, and the See, Pitaya, and Nichol's Arcade signs on South State Street. The first three, which are associated with traditional storefronts, are much smaller in scale than the proposed LaPita Fresh blade sign. The last three are the only signage on their street frontage.
4. The attachment of the sign to the metal sign band would not harm historic materials, and would be reversible (though future tenants of the space could re-use the blade sign with a new banner).
5. Staff believes that the sign's size and placement are inappropriate for this building, and therefore the proposal does not meet the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards or Guidelines for Rehabilitation*, especially standards 9 and 10 and the guidelines for storefronts.

POSSIBLE MOTIONS: (Note that the motion supports staff findings and is only a suggestion. The Review Committee, consisting of staff and at least two Commissioners, will meet with the applicant on site and then make a recommendation at the meeting.)

I move that the Commission deny the application for a certificate of appropriateness for 529 East Liberty Street, a contributing property in the State Street Historic District, to install a vinyl fabric

blade sign, as documented in the owner's submittal. As proposed, the work is not compatible in exterior design, arrangement, and relationship to the building and the surrounding area and does not meet *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*, in particular standards 9 and 10, and the guidelines for storefronts.

MOTION WORKSHEET:

I move that the Commission

___ Issue a Certificate of Appropriateness

___ Deny the Application

For the work at 529 East Liberty in the State Street Historic District

___ As proposed.

___ Provided the following condition(S) is (ARE) met: 1) CONDITION(s)

The work

___ Is generally compatible with the size, scale, massing, and materials and meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, standard(S) number(S) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

___ Is not generally compatible with the size, scale, massing and materials, and DOES NOT MEET the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, standard(S) number(S) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 for the following reason(S): 1) REASON(s)

ATTACHMENTS: application, drawings, photos

529 E Liberty (2010 photo)

