

**CITY OF SAINT PAUL  
HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT**

---

---

FILE NAME: 255 Sixth Street East  
DATE OF APPLICATION: April 3, 2013  
APPLICANT: Dave Brooks, 9 & 19 Properties LLC  
OWNER: 9 & 19 Properties LLC  
DATE OF REVIEW: April 25, 2013  
HPC SITE/DISTRICT: Lowertown Historic District  
CATEGORY: Noncontributing  
CLASSIFICATION: Sign Permit  
STAFF INVESTIGATION AND REPORT: Bill Dermody  
DATE: April 22, 2013

---

---

**A. SITE DESCRIPTION:**

The building is located on the northwest corner of Wall and Sixth Streets. This six-story commercial building houses four levels of parking and two upper levels of office space. The National Register Nomination for Lowertown describes this building as an addition to the 1905 Classical Revival style warehouse to the west. The George Sommers and Company Building (now River Park Lofts) was designed by J. Walter Stevens with brown brick walls and a simple cubic design that is devoid of much ornamentation; a contrast to the row of J. Walter Stevens early Victorian buildings on the north side of Mears Park. In the mid-1970's Control Data Corporation acquired and renovated this building (prior to designation as a local and National Register Historic District) at a cost of six million which was a major stimulus to revitalization efforts in Lowertown. A façade renovation was completed in 2010-11.

**B. PROPOSED CHANGES:**

The applicant proposes to install a vertically oriented, 19' by 4' building sign on the upper portion of the building's southeast corner, facing east toward 6<sup>th</sup> Street traffic. This is one of the building's two primary façades. The sign is located upon the gray metal fins between the building corner and a continuous band of black metal-framed windows that extend across the east façade. The sign features a logo and individually mounted, reverse pan-channel metal letters with halo illumination ("A'Bulae"). The method of attachment is not specified in the application, except that it is "bolted down"; no raceway or attachment devices are shown exterior to the logo or letters.

**C. BACKGROUND:**

In August 2002, the HPC approved three non-illuminated, horizontally oriented signs on the first floor ("Avis"). In October 2005, HPC approved a new garage structure within the parking structure that is owned separately by River Park Lofts. In October 2010, the HPC conditionally approved an after-the-fact building permit to install a new storefront and entrance, new metal canopies, glass block walls and pilaster panels, removal of the corner siding, and the installation of artwork on the exterior elevations. The artwork panels were never installed. In the same month, the HPC also approved an after-the-fact application to replace windows on the two upper floors. In June 2011, the HPC denied the installation of glass block walls at the corner of the subject building on floors 2 through 4, though City Council approved the installation through an appeal.

The Greater Lowertown Master Plan Summary was adopted by the City Council in 2012 and amended to the Comprehensive Plan. The following goals and strategies should be taken under consideration and relate to this current proposal:

***Historic Preservation***

*Goal 9.2 Continue to preserve the historic character of the Historic District.*

Goal 9.5 *Welcome and celebrate changes and investments in Lowertown by managing them within the strong historic fabric.*

Strategy 9.1 *Apply the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties and the local Design Review Guidelines to all repair, alteration, new construction and demolition in the Historic District.*

**Land Use & Urban Design**

Goal 3.4 *Welcome new investments that enhance and augment the unique qualities of Lowertown.*

Goal 3.5 *Maintain the historic character of the district and neighborhood.*

**D. GUIDELINE CITATIONS:**

**Lowertown Historic District Guidelines (Sec. 74-112)**

**III. Signs and accessories.**

*Signs should be compatible with the character of the District, and blend with the character of the structures on or near which they are placed. Signs should not conceal architectural detail, clutter or detract from the intended facade; but rather complement the overall design of the building and the period in which it was built.*

**A. Materials.** *Sign materials should complement the materials of the related building and/or the adjacent buildings. Surface design elements should not detract from or conflict with the related structure's age and design in terms of identification symbol (logo), lettering, and related patterns or pictures. Materials used should be the same as those used for signs during the period of the building's construction, such as wood, wrought iron, steel, and metal grill work. Newer materials such as extruded aluminum and plastics may not be appropriate.*

**B. Types.** *The sign type should enhance the building's design and materials. New billboards are not permitted in the Lowertown District.*

**C. Location and method of attachment.** *There should be no sign above the cornice line or uppermost portion of a facade wall. Signs should not disfigure or conceal architectural details. Painted signs of pedestrian scale may be permissible on glass windows and doors. The facade should not be damaged in sign application except for mere attachment. The method of attachment should respect the structure's architectural integrity and should become an extension of the architecture. Projecting signs should have a space separating them from the building. (Protection of architecture in method of attachment shall be regarded as a basis for granting variance of the normal zoning code prohibition against guy wire supports for projecting signs).*

**D. Lighting.** *Location of exterior lights should be appropriate to the structure. Signs should generally be lit from on the site. There should be no flashing, blinking, moving, or varying intensity lighting. Subdued lighting is preferred. Backlit fluorescent or exposed neon are generally inappropriate.*

**E. Grills, exhaust fans, Etc.** *Grills, exhaust outlets for air conditioners, bath and kitchen exhaust fans should be incorporated into filler panels and kept out of principal facades, if possible. They may be painted the same color as the filler panel.*

**The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation relating to new construction:**

**9.** *New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize a property. The new work shall*

*be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.*

**10.** *New additions and adjacent or related new construction will 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.*

**E. FINDINGS:**

1. On March 22, 1984, the Historic Lowertown Heritage Preservation District was established under Ordinance No. 17120, § 2. The Heritage Preservation Commission shall protect the architectural character of heritage preservation sites through review and approval or denial of applications for city permits for exterior work within designated heritage preservation sites §73.04.(4).
2. **Classification of the building.** The building is classified as Noncontributing to the architectural character and integrity of the Historic Lowertown Heritage Preservation District.
3. **Materials.** The individual metal letters and logo are appropriate on this noncontributing building's metal façade and generally *complement the materials of the related building but not the materials of the historic adjacent buildings.*
4. **Location and method of attachment.** The Lowertown guidelines state that *there should be no sign above the cornice line or uppermost portion of a facade wall.* The proposed sign is located on the uppermost portion of the façade wall in violation of this guideline. The intent of this guideline is to avoid large signage at the top portion of buildings, but rather to encourage more modest lower-level signage that is pedestrian oriented. Also, details are not provided in the application to determine whether *(t)he method of attachment... become(s) an extension of the architecture.*
5. **Lighting.** There is no flashing or blinking light proposed. However, the backlit (halo) illumination is *generally inappropriate* according to the Lowertown guidelines. Some halo lit signs have been approved by the HPC when the materials are opaque and the light does not illuminate through plastic but casts a shadow onto the exterior of the sign.
6. The proposal will not have an adverse affect on the program for the preservation and architectural control of the Historic Lowertown Heritage Preservation District (Leg. Code §73.06 (e)) provided the conditions are met.

**F. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Based on Finding 4 , staff recommends denial of the application to install a sign at this location. The sign itself could be recommended for approval as a projecting or wall sign that is lower on the building and scaled down.

**G. ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Application with photos and plans
2. Written testimony- none received