



The City of Seattle

## Pioneer Square Preservation Board

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PSB 291/23

### Staff REPORT

for Board meeting November 28, 2023

Board Members Please Note: The citations from the District Ordinance, Rules for the Pioneer Square Preservation District, and Secretary of the Interior's Standards listed below are for your consideration in addition to any other citations you find relevant in considering each application.

**112823.41**     **Reedo Building**

FirstMode

542 1<sup>st</sup> Ave S

Presenters: James Zimmerman

Briefing regarding possible installation of a lighted sign on the top floor and a non-illuminated sign at the ground floor

Staff report: a briefing was presented to the Board on March 15, 2023

Members of the Board advised that the sign at the upper level of the building was generally not allowed and could only be considered as part of an overall sign plan for the building. They noted that a sign plan benefits all tenants by planning ahead.

The applicant explained that the FirstMode does not rely on pedestrian traffic and that the sign was designed to fit in with the stadium. He said that they were looking for brand advertising from a distance rather than pedestrian orientation. The Board noted that they make a decision based on how an application complies with the existing regulation and how it is compatible with the historic district aesthetic. The Board suggested they consider other ways of promoting their business and that the guidelines allow for the opportunity to identify the business is in the building at street level.

Board members noted that the sign brings attention to the addition making the addition no longer comply with the Secretary of Interior standards which says that addition should be background to the historic building and that the sign detracts from the historic building.

In summary, the Board asked for alternatives that are not at the top of the building, not at the penthouse, but at street level and for a sign plan for the building.

**Administered by The Historic Preservation Program  
The Seattle Department of Neighborhoods**

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Past considerations:

Several Certificate of Approval have been granted for directory signs listing upper-level tenants mounted near the entry or on the side of the building and for individual signs, when the sign plan indicates that there will only be one tenant sign.

The guidelines say that signage located on the upper floors of a building is not permitted, except when it is proposed as part of an overall integrated sign plan for the building. A letter from the person authorized on behalf of the building owners originally said that they do not intend to have a sign plan or limit signage on the building in anyway. They have revised the letter to provide the location and size of signs for a sign plan however they would want to be able to amend it to respond to future requests for signage from tenants. The Street level business, Elysian Fields has submitted an application also with the building owner's approval that is different than the sign plan submitted so it negates the sign plan submitted. This application is included in the agenda as a briefing so that it can be considered as the new sign plan. The building owners are not renaming the building to First Mode.

Even when proposed as part of a sign plan the sign has to be considered compatible with the code and the guidelines.

The exception to the prohibition for signs located on the upper levels of a building have been made on few occasions; building naming rights are sometimes given to a tenant so signs that are the building name have allowed in a neutral color and not illuminated. The other example are two hotels, which are allowed signage on the upper levels of buildings in other locations downtown. I am not aware of any other tenant signs on the top floors of a building. Existing historic building names and ghost signs have been considered architectural features rather than signs and therefor have not been considered as precedent for new signs, and in fact in some past reviews Board members have though that they distracted from historic ghost signs.

The proposed sign location is also proposed on an addition to the historic building. The Board might consider locating a sign on the addition influences the compatibility considering Preservation Brief 14.

The Board also look at as noted in the code, where business signs are typically located on a historic building including but not limited to:

- the location on the building (height near entries, etc.),
- primary or non-primary facades,
- what size signs are and letter size,
- how signs are lit,
- how the sign fits with other signs on the building and in the district and,
- what characteristics make a sign pedestrian oriented

The Board should either refer to other specifications in the District Rules or be able to provide a justification for exception for this sign.

Code Citations:

Seattle Municipal Code

### 23.66.030 Certificates of Approval required

- A. Certificate of approval required. No person shall alter, demolish, construct, reconstruct, restore, remodel, make any visible change to the exterior appearance of any structure, or to the public rights-of-way or other public spaces in a special review district, and no one shall remove or substantially alter any existing sign or erect or place any new sign or change the principal use of any building, or any portion of a building, structure or lot in a special review district, and no permit for such activity shall be issued unless a certificate of approval has been issued by the Department of Neighborhoods Director.

### 23.66.100 - Creation of district, legislative findings and purpose

- A. During the City of Seattle's relatively brief history, it has had little time in which to develop areas of consistent historical or architectural character. It is recognized that the Pioneer Square area of Seattle contains many of these rare attributes and consequently is an area of great historical and cultural significance. Further, the regional sports stadiums, constructed in and near the Pioneer Square area, and the traffic and activities that they generate have resulted in adverse impacts upon the social, cultural, historic and ethnic values of the Pioneer Square area. To preserve, protect, and enhance the historic character of the Pioneer Square area and the buildings therein; to return unproductive structures to useful purposes; to attract visitors to the City; to avoid a proliferation of vehicular parking and vehicular-oriented uses; to provide regulations for existing on-street and off-street parking; to stabilize existing housing, and encourage a variety of new and rehabilitated housing types for all income groups; to encourage the use of transportation modes other than the private automobile; to protect existing commercial vehicle access; to improve visual and urban relationships between existing and future buildings and structures, parking spaces and public improvements within the area; and to encourage pedestrian uses, there is established as a special review district, the Pioneer Square Preservation District.

### 23.66.160 - Signs

- A. Signs.
  2. The following signs are prohibited throughout the Pioneer Square Preservation District:  
  
Roof signs;
- B. To ensure that flags, banners and signs are of a scale, color, shape and type compatible with the Pioneer Square Preservation District objectives stated in Section 23.66.100 and with the character of the District and the buildings in the District, to reduce driver distraction and visual blight, to ensure that the messages of signs are not lost through undue proliferation, and to enhance views and sight lines into and down streets, the overall design of a sign, flag, or banner, including size, shape, typeface, texture, method of attachment, color, graphics and lighting, and the number and location of signs, flags, and banners, shall be reviewed by the Board and are regulated as set out in this Section 23.66.160. Building owners are encouraged to develop an overall signage plan for their buildings.

- C. In determining the appropriateness of signs, including flags and banners used as signs as defined in Section 23.84A.036, the Preservation Board shall consider the following:
1. Signs Attached or Applied to Structures.
    - a. The relationship of the shape of the proposed sign to the architecture of the building and with the shape of other approved signs located on the building or in proximity to the proposed sign;
    - b. The relationship of the texture of the proposed sign to the building for which it is proposed, and with other approved signs located on the building or in proximity to the proposed sign;
    - c. The possibility of physical damage to the structure and the degree to which the method of attachment would conceal or disfigure desirable architectural features or details of the structure (the method of attachment shall be approved by the Director);
    - d. The relationship of the proposed colors and graphics with the colors of the building and with other approved signs on the building or in proximity to the proposed sign;
    - e. The relationship of the proposed sign with existing lights and lighting standards, and with the architectural and design motifs of the building;
    - f. Whether the proposed sign lighting will detract from the character of the building; and
    - g. The compatibility of the colors and graphics of the proposed sign with the character of the District.
  2. Wall signs painted on or affixed to a building shall not exceed ten percent of the total area of the façade or 240 square feet, whichever is less. Area of original building finish visible within the exterior dimensions of the sign (e.g., unpainted brick) shall not be considered when computing the sign's area.
  4. When determining the appropriate size of a sign the Board and the Director of Neighborhoods shall also consider the function of the sign and the character and scale of buildings in the immediate vicinity, the character and scale of the building for which the sign is proposed, the proposed location of the sign on the building's exterior, and the total number and size of signs proposed or existing on the building.

### **Pioneer Square Preservation District Rules**

#### **XX. RULES FOR TRANSPARENCY, SIGNS, AWNINGS AND CANOPIES**

The Pioneer Square Preservation Ordinance reflects a policy to focus on structures, individually and collectively, so that they can be seen and appreciated. Sign proliferation or inconsistent paint colors, for example, are incompatible with this focus, and are expressly to be avoided. (8/93)

## B. General Signage Regulations

All signs on or hanging from buildings, in windows, or applied to windows, are subject to review and approval by the Pioneer Square Preservation Board. (8/93) Locations for signs shall be in accordance with all other regulations for signage. (12/94)

The intent of sign regulations is to ensure that signs relate physically and visually to their location; that signs not hide, damage or obscure the architectural elements of the building; that signs be oriented toward and promote a pedestrian environment; and that the products or services offered be the focus, rather than signs. (8/93)

Sign Materials: Wood or wood products are the preferred materials for rigid hanging and projecting (blade) signs and individual signage letters applied to building facades. (7/99)

## C. Specific Signage Regulations

1. Letter Size. Letter size in windows, awnings and hanging signs shall be consistent with the scale of the architectural elements of the building (as per SMC 23.66.160), but shall not exceed a maximum height of 10 inches unless an exception has been approved as set forth in this paragraph. Exceptions to the 10-inch height limitation will be considered for individual letters in the business name (subject to a limit of no more than three letters) only if both of the following conditions are satisfied: a) the exception is sought as part of a reduced overall sign package or plan for the business; and b) the size of the letters for which an exception is requested is consistent with the scale and character of the building, the frontage of the business, the transparency requirements of the regulations, and all other conditions under SMC 23.66.160. An overall sign package or plan will be considered reduced for purposes of the exception if it calls for approval of signage that is substantially less than what would otherwise be allowable under the regulations. (12/94)
6. Upper Floor Signage. Upper floor signage is not permitted, except for temporary signage as per SMC 23.66.160D or when it is proposed as part of an overall integrated sign plan for the building. (7/99) When permitted, the preferred location for temporary signs is in windows, rather than attached to the building. (8/93)
7. Internally Lit Signs. Internally lit or backlit signs are prohibited. (8/93)

8. Wall Signs. The Board recommends that wall signs be painted on a wood or metal backing and attached in such a manner that the building surface is not damaged. Colors and graphics of wall signs shall be compatible with the character of the District, and letter sizes shall be appropriately scaled to fit the overall design and dimensions of the sign. (7/99, 7/03)

#### Secretary of Interior's Standards

5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be taken 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.

#### Preservation Brief 14

Designing a New Exterior Addition to a Historic Building This guidance should be applied to help in designing a compatible new addition that that will meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation:

- A new addition should be simple and unobtrusive in design, and should be distinguished from the historic building- a recessed connector can help to differentiate the new from the old.
- A new addition should not be highly visible from the public right of way; a rear or other secondary elevation is usually the best location for a new addition.
- The construction materials and the color of the new addition should be harmonious with the historic building materials.
- The new addition should be smaller than the historic building-it should be subordinate in both size and design to the historic building. The same guidance should be applied when designing a compatible rooftop addition, plus the following:
  - A rooftop addition is generally not appropriate for a one, two or three-story building-and often is not appropriate for taller buildings.
  - A rooftop addition should be minimally visible.
  - Generally, a rooftop addition must be set back at least one full bay from the primary elevation of the building, as well as from the other elevations if the building is freestanding or highly visible.
  - Generally, a rooftop addition should not be more than one story in height.
  - Generally, a rooftop addition is more likely to be compatible on a building that is adjacent to similarly sized or taller buildings.

Issued: November 21, 2023

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