



Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report

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HPC meeting date: 2/10/2019
Ald. Robert Bauman District: 4
Staff reviewer: Tim Askin
PTS #114901 CCF #191498

Property	144 E. WELLS ST.
Owner/Applicant	PABST THEATER FOUNDATION INC Pabst Theater 144 E WELLS ST 144 E Wells St MILWAUKEE WI 53202 Milwaukee, WI 53202
Proposal	Erect two double-sided movie theater type blade signs on each street elevation. Each sign is roughly 7' x 27'. Lighting consists of faux-incandescent bulbs in standard and miniature size. Lights will scroll around the edges giving motion.
Staff comments	<p>Prior sign on Wells was larger and neon. It is assumed to have been installed as part of the 1928 renovations of the theater, but was not mentioned in the permits or filed plans. It was present by 1936, based on a photo. It appears to have been retained until bicentennial renovations in 1976. There is no record of a projecting sign on the Water Street elevation. The east elevation face has always been covered by another building or by advertising.</p> <p>The design is an homage to the late 1920s sign. Locations were carefully selected to be the best possible locations. Sightlines on Water Street are such that there is no visibility from the north in other locations. The new Wells Street location does not obscure a bust like the original did.</p> <p>Traditional signage on grand 19th century opera houses has been minimal. The Paris Opera 1861 (AKA Palais Garnier), Chicago Civic Opera 1929, Mabel Tainter Memorial 1889 (Menominee, WI). This has remained true into the 20th and 21st centuries. Even the modern opera house or other live theaters, such as our 1971 PAC, 1971 Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center (1955-1969), the original 1963 Guthrie Theater. The 2006 Guthrie Theater and the new 1989 Paris Opera were designed with negligible signage. All have kept their signage subtle over the decades.</p> <p>Buildings meant for large blade signs were usually designed with these signs in mind (New York Edison Building, 1912).</p> <p>While staff appreciates the effort, they cannot support the signs as proposed. They do not speak to the pedestrian scale of nineteenth century Milwaukee architecture, even large, grand architecture such as the Pabst. Additionally, a sign with motion at such a busy intersection seems likely to cause driver distraction.</p> <p>If the Commission chooses to approve any signs, the locations proposed appear to be acceptable.</p>
Recommendation	Recommend HPC Denial
Conditions	If the Commission chooses to approve. <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Maximum one sign, preferably Water Street2. No moving lights in the sign.
Previous HPC action	
Previous Council action	