



CPED STAFF REPORT

Prepared for the Heritage Preservation Commission

HPC Agenda Item #1
 April 1, 2014
 BZH-28102

HERITAGE PRESERVATION APPLICATION SUMMARY

Property Location: 100 3rd Avenue Southeast
Project Name: Pillsbury's Best Flour Sign Rehabilitation
Prepared By: Aaron Hanauer, Senior City Planner, (612) 673-2494
Applicant: Lawrence Sign
Project Contact: David Peltier
Ward: 3
Neighborhood: Marcy Holmes
Request: To rehabilitate the Pillsbury's Best Flour roof sign.
Required Applications: Certificate of Appropriateness

Certificate of Appropriateness	To allow for the rehabilitation of the Pillsbury's Best Flour sign, a contributing resource to the Saint Anthony Falls Historic District.
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HISTORIC PROPERTY INFORMATION

Current Name	Pillsbury "A" Mill/Red Tile Elevator
Historic Name	Pillsbury "A" Mill/Red Tile Elevator
Historic Address	100 3 rd Avenue Southeast
Original Construction Date	Pillsbury's Best Flour Sign/1920
Original Architect	N/A
Original Builder	H.L. Salvage and Midland Electric Company
Original Engineer	H.L. Salvage and Midland Electric Company
Historic Use	Grain elevator
Current Use	Vacant
Proposed Use	Multifamily residential

Date Application Deemed Complete	February 24, 2014	Date Extension Letter Sent	N/A
End of 60-Day Decision Period	April 21, 2014	End of 120-Day Decision Period	N/A

CLASSIFICATION

Local Historic District	Saint Anthony Falls
Period of Significance	1848-1941
Criteria of Significance	Architecture and social significance
Date of Local Designation	1971
Date of National Register Listing	1971
Applicable Design Guidelines	<i>Saint Anthony Falls Historic District Guidelines</i> <i>Secretary of Interior Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties</i>

SUMMARY

BACKGROUND.

History: After the Pillsbury “A” Mill was completed in 1881, other buildings were gradually added to the Pillsbury “A” Mill Complex. In 1910, the 400,000 bushel Red Tile Elevator was built for receiving and cleaning. It consists of twenty-five tanks and an 85-foot-high workhouse. It is made of structural steel and sheathed with five inch square tiles. In addition to the Pillsbury “A” Mill Complex being a contributing resource to the Saint Anthony Falls Historic District, it is one of three national historic landmarks in Minneapolis.

The “A” Mill complex had signs on the complex buildings and on the land near the falls dating back to the 1880s. However, in 1920, the Pillsbury Company placed its most prominent sign on top of the Red Tile Elevator, the Pillsbury’s Best Flour sign. This original sign stayed on the building until circa 1940. The original sign had a large flour bag in the middle and lower case letters. It is likely that the original Pillsbury’s Best Flour sign was illuminated since the Gold Medal Flour sign, constructed in 1910, across the river on the Washburn Crosby grain elevator was illuminated and these two companies were in competition with each other. However, the original Pillsbury’s Best Flour sign was not illuminated in neon. The first recorded neon sign in the United States was in 1923 in Los Angeles.

In reviewing Minnesota Historical Society images, the Pillsbury’s Best Flour sign with the flour bag was replaced between 1937 and 1940 with the sign that exists today (see Pillsbury’s Best Flour Sign History attachment). The new sign that was installed was similar to the original, however, the flour bag was not retained and the letters were changed from a combination of capital and lower case letters to all capitals. It is assumed that the new sign contained neon lighting as neon lighting was common place by the late 1930s/early 1940s. The sign, installed before the end of the period of significance (1941), is a contributing resource to the Saint Anthony Falls Historic District.

In 1992, the Pillsbury Company sold the “A” Mill Complex to Archer Daniels Midland Company. In 1998, the Pillsbury Company proposed to remove the sign from the top of the Red Tile Elevator citing they did not want a sign atop a building with their name that they did not own. The request to remove the sign was slated for a review by the Heritage Preservation Commission on June 9, 1998. Prior to the Heritage Preservation Commission review, The Pillsbury Company withdrew their request to dismantle the sign after the public urged the Pillsbury Company to maintain the sign and wrote letters of opposition to the Heritage Preservation Commission. It is unknown if any rehabilitation took place to the sign after the 1998 proposal. In 2007, Schaffer Richardson proposed to temporarily remove the Pillsbury’s Best Flour sign and rehabilitate it as part of their development plan for the “A” Mill Complex; however, that did not take place. The sign remained lit until 2010, when a contract between General

Mills (the parent company of Pillsbury) and Schafer Richardson expired to keep the sign lit and maintained.

Sign Details: The Pillsbury Best Flour sign is a massive structure. The roof of the Red Tile Elevator, measured from Main Street Southeast, is 189 feet from grade. The sign, from the roof of the Red Tile Elevator to the top of the upper letters, is approximately 30 feet in height. The letters, which are constructed of steel, range in size from 6.5 feet to 11 feet tall and are attached to the supporting steel structure. The letters are approximately 9.25 inches thick. The steel portion of the letters has two parts: letter faces/returns and the back cabinet. The letter face contains neon tubing that is flush with the outer plane of the face cabinet face. According to a 1998 Star Tribune article, the sign and sign structure weighs approximately 20,000 pounds.

Sign condition: According to the applicant, the two parts of the steel channel letters have experienced different levels of deterioration over the past 74 plus years. The letter faces/returns are in good condition and are able to be repaired. The letter back cabinets have deteriorated to a point of not being able to be repaired. The applicant states that a main reason for this deterioration of the steel letter back cabinets is due to a lack of drainage accommodations for each letter. Precipitation would enter the letter and not have a place to easily runoff. Because of this, rust has attached to the letter back cabinets causing corrosion from the inside out. Images submitted by the applicant show the rusting and peeling paint of the back cabinets and that holes are common at the bottoms of the letters. As stated in the application, this compromised condition will make it difficult to graft new steel into each letter. Welding steel into the rusted areas will cause further breakdown of the base metal due to the heat produced by the welding equipment. Furthermore, the corroded letters will likely display areas that have become so thin that the welding process will simply create more holes and voids leaving very little, if any salvageable parts of many letters. The sign structure that supports the sign is in generally good condition.

APPLICANT'S PROPOSAL. The Pillsbury "A" Mill is currently undergoing a major renovation to convert the historic complex into 250 artists' lofts. As part of the renovation project the applicant is proposing to restore the Pillsbury's Best Flour sign. For this proposal, the applicant is proposing to reuse the existing steel letter faces/returns and create new fabricated aluminum letter backs. When completed, the steel faces/returns and aluminum backs would be attached with a rubber gasket. The applicant is proposing to use aluminum for the letter backs because it is rustproof. With this proposal, the size, shape, design, and color of the letters will be identical to the existing letters and are proposed to be attached to the existing steel structure to match the original design. Approximately 50 percent of the original steel letter material will be salvaged. The rehabilitation and new construction work will require the letters to be removed from the sign structure and completed in the sign manufacturer's shop. The sign structure will only require minimal rehabilitation work, which includes scuffing and repainting.

The applicant is proposing to replace the neon lighting with light emitting diode (LED) lights to match the original red neon lighting as closely as possible (see comparison attachments). The applicant is proposing to use Sloan red flexbrite, which will stay in line with the original color and design of the existing sign. The applicant is proposing to install the lighting tubes in the same layout as the neon. The lighting tubes will be on the same plane as the letter face returns as is the case with the existing sign. The applicant is also proposing to create light breaks in the LED tubes to mimic the neon look. The applicant is proposing to convert the neon lighting to LED lighting because of the substantial savings in maintaining and operating the lit sign. The applicant estimates that with the conversion to LED, they will save over \$14,000 a year in energy costs in the first five years alone. The applicant provides the following benefits of converting the lighting from neon to LED:

- LED lights use between 5-10 times less power than neon, resulting in lower operating costs;
- LED offers little to no maintenance as they burn for approximately 100,000 hours;

- LED does not contain any glass tubes of gas, so there is no chance of gas leaking out.

PUBLIC COMMENTS. Staff received a letter of support from the Marcy Holmes Neighborhood Association for the project. Any additional correspondence received prior to the public meeting will be forwarded on to the Heritage Preservation Commission for consideration.

ANALYSIS

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development has analyzed the application to allow a rehabilitation of the Pillsbury's Best Flour sign based on the following findings:

1. *The alteration is compatible with and continues to support the criteria of significance and period of significance for which the landmark or historic district was designated.*

The proposed rehabilitation of the Pillsbury's Best Flour sign is compatible with and continues to support the criteria of significance and period of significance for which the landmark was designated. The Saint Anthony Falls Historic District is significant for its architecture, commerce, industry and transportation. The District's period of significance is from 1848-1941. The Pillsbury's Best Flour sign has played an important role in the district's commercial and industrial history dating back to 1920. The existing sign, installed in 1940, is a contributing resource to the Saint Anthony Falls Historic District. The Pillsbury's Best Flour and Washburn Crosby Company Gold Medal Flour signs are important artifacts of the days when Minneapolis was the milling capital of the world, 1880-1930. The applicant's proposal will rehabilitate this important feature of the Pillsbury "A" Mill complex and the Saint Anthony Falls Historic District.

2. *The alteration is compatible with and supports the interior and/or exterior designation in which the property was designated.*

The proposed rehabilitation of the Pillsbury's Best Flour sign is compatible with and supports the criteria of significance and period of significance for which the historic district was designated. The Saint Anthony Falls Historic District is significant for its architecture, commerce, industry, and transportation. The Pillsbury's Best Flour sign is a contributing feature to the historic district's designation that help convey the commerce and industrial history of the district. Originally installed in 1920, the Pillsbury's Best Flour sign helped advertise one of the country's most prominent flour mills. The sign also helps illustrate the competition that took place between Pillsbury and the Washburn Crosby Company across the river. The applicant's proposed rehabilitation and relighting of the sign will help retain this important historic feature.

3. *The alteration is compatible with and will ensure continued integrity of the landmark or historic district for which the district was designated.*

The Minneapolis Code of Ordinances, Title 23, Heritage Preservation, Chapter 599 Heritage Preservation Regulations recognizes a property's integrity through seven aspects or qualities: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Based upon the evidence provided below, the proposed work is compatible with and will ensure continued integrity of the historic district.

Location: The applicant is not proposing to change the location of the sign or sign structure, thus the project will not impair the landmark's integrity of location.

Design: Design is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property. The applicant's proposed rehabilitation project will retain the original design of the sign and the appearance of the sign since 1940.

Setting: Setting is the physical environment of a historic property. The proposed rehabilitation project of the sign will help preserve one of the most prominent features of the Saint Anthony Falls Historic District.

Materials: Materials are the physical elements that were combined during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property. The applicant is proposing a rehabilitation project that will preserve as much of the original sign material as possible. The applicant estimates that as part of the project they will be able to preserve 50 percent of the sign's original material.

Workmanship: Workmanship is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history. The applicant's proposed sign rehabilitation will help protect the workmanship of the sign. The applicant is proposing to preserve as much of the original material as possible. New sections of metal (aluminum) will match the original design.

Feeling: Feeling is a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time. The applicant's proposed sign rehabilitation will help preserve the feeling of the Pillsbury "A" Mill and Saint Anthony Falls Historic District by retaining the Pillsbury's Best Flour sign, one of the most prominent features of the historic district.

Association: Association is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property. The proposed sign rehabilitation will help retain that link between when the Pillsbury Company installed the original Best Flour Sign in 1920 until they sold the mill in 1992.

4. *The alteration will not materially impair the significance and integrity of the landmark, historic district or nominated property under interim protection as evidenced by the consistency of alterations with the applicable design guidelines adopted by the commission.*

The proposed rehabilitation of the Pillsbury's Best Flour sign will not materially impair the significance and integrity of the historic district evidenced by the consistency with the *Saint Anthony Falls Historic District Guidelines*. The district guidelines encourage the preservation of historic signs. In particular, District Guideline 7.15:

7.15: Historic signs should be maintained and preserved. This includes freestanding signs, roof top signs, painted wall signs, signs integrated into buildings.

5. *The alteration will not materially impair the significance and integrity of the landmark, historic district or nominated property under interim protection as evidenced by the consistency of alterations with the recommendations contained in The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.*

The proposed rehabilitation project will be consistent with the following *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*:

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.
 2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
 5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.
 6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.
6. *The certificate of appropriateness conforms to all applicable regulations of this preservation ordinance and is consistent with the applicable policies of the comprehensive plan and applicable preservation policies in small area plans adopted by the city council.*

As stated in Findings #1 through #5, CPED is supportive of the sign rehabilitation project. The certificate of appropriateness will conform to all applicable regulations of this preservation ordinance and would be consistent with the following policies of the comprehensive plan.

- Preservation policy 8.1: Preserve, maintain, and designate districts, landmarks, and historic resources which serve as reminders of the city's architecture, history, and culture. The proposed work will help preserve the historic building by allowing for adaptive reuse. These actions will not impair the building's integrity of design. (Implementation Step 8.1.1) City shall protect historic resources from modifications that are not sensitive to their historic significance.
 - Preservation policy 8.8: Preserve neighborhood character by preserving the quality of the built environment. (Implementation Step 8.8.1) Preserve and maintain the character and quality of residential neighborhoods with regulatory tools such as the zoning code and housing maintenance code.
7. *Destruction of any property. Before approving a certificate of appropriateness that involves the destruction, in whole or in part, of any landmark, property in an historic district or nominated property under interim protection, the commission shall make findings that the destruction is necessary to correct an unsafe or dangerous condition on the property, or that there are no reasonable alternatives to the destruction. In determining whether reasonable alternatives exist, the commission shall consider, but not be limited to, the significance of the property, the integrity of the property and the economic value or usefulness of the existing structure, including its current use, costs of renovation and feasible alternative uses. The commission may delay a final decision for a reasonable period of time to allow parties interested in preserving the property a reasonable opportunity to act to protect it.*

The project does not involve the destruction of the property.

Before approving a Certificate of Appropriateness, and based upon the evidence presented in each application submitted, the Commission shall make findings that alterations are proposed in a manner that demonstrates that the Applicant has made adequate consideration of the following documents and regulations:

8. *The description and statement of significance in the original nomination upon which designation of the landmark or historic district was based.*

The proposed alterations demonstrate that the applicant has made adequate consideration of the original nomination in rehabilitating the prominent Pillsbury's Best Flour sign, an important part of the Saint Anthony Falls Historic District. The Pillsbury "A" Mill is one of 15 sites that were identified of major importance when the district was locally designated in 1971 (source: National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form). The rooftop sign is an important part of the Pillsbury "A" Mill Complex and the Saint Anthony Falls Historic District's commercial and industrial history. Dating back to 1920, rooftop signs were a common way for the businesses along the riverfront to advertise. Today, only the Pillsbury's Best Flour, Gold Medal Flour, and North Star Blanket rooftop signs remain along the Minneapolis riverfront.

9. *Where applicable, Adequate consideration of Title 20 of the Minneapolis Code of Ordinances, Zoning Code, Chapter 530, Site Plan Review.*

The proposed project will not require a site plan review application. If the proposed signs are relit they would comply with the zoning code requirements for lighting. Per Section 543.60 of the zoning code, the signs are not proposed to be backlit and are more than 20 feet from a residence or ORI zoning district; the subject property and the neighboring properties are zoned C3A. To be in compliance with the Minneapolis zoning code, CPED is recommending as a condition of approval that the maximum luminance level between sunrise and sunset for the sign not exceed 5,000 nits and between sunset and sunrise the maximum luminance not exceed 500 nits. In addition, the sign shall be equipped with an automatic dimmer control or other mechanism that automatically controls the sign's brightness to comply with this requirement.

10. *The typology of treatments delineated in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and the associated guidelines for preserving, rehabilitating, reconstructing, and restoring historic buildings.*

The proposed alterations demonstrate that the applicant has made adequate consideration of the Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for Rehabilitation. The applicant is using the recommended approaches to rehabilitating the architectural metal of the sign. The applicant will first identify, retain, and preserve the metal that is able to be rehabilitated. The applicant estimates that the percentage of the original metal that will be able to be preserved as part of the project is approximately 50 percent. For the original steel that will be rehabilitated as part of the project, the applicant is proposing protective and maintenance measures to ensure that it will last indefinitely. The applicant will be removing rust and corrosion prior to the sign and sign structure being repainted.

Before approving a Certificate of Appropriateness that involves alterations to a property within an historic district, the Commission shall make findings based upon, but not limited to, the following:

11. *The alteration is compatible with and will ensure continued significance and integrity of all contributing properties in the historic district based on the period of significance for which the district was designated.*

The proposed sign rehabilitation project is compatible with and will ensure continued significance and integrity of all contributing buildings in the historic district based on the period of significance for which the district was designated. Please see Findings #1 and #2 for analysis.

12. *Granting the certificate of appropriateness will be in keeping with the spirit and intent of the ordinance and will not negatively alter the essential character of the historic district.*

Granting the certificate of appropriateness will be in keeping with the spirit and intent of the ordinance and will not negatively alter the essential character of the historic district. The

proposed sign rehabilitation will be in keeping with the spirit and intent of the ordinance and will not negatively alter the essential character of the historic district. Please see Findings #1 through #4 for analysis.

13. *The certificate of appropriateness will not be injurious to the significance and integrity of other resources in the historic district and will not impede the normal and orderly preservation of surrounding resources as allowed by regulations in the preservation ordinance.*

Granting of the certificate of appropriateness to allow for the proposed sign rehabilitation will not be injurious to the significance and integrity of other resources in the historic district and will not impede the normal and orderly preservation of surrounding resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation of the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development for the Certificate of Appropriateness:

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development recommends that the Heritage Preservation Commission adopt the above findings and **approve** the certificate of appropriateness to allow for the rehabilitation of the Pillsbury's Best Flour sign, subject to the following conditions:

1. By ordinance, approvals are valid for a period of two years from the date of the decision unless required permits are obtained and the action approval is substantially begun and proceeds in a continuous basis toward completion. Upon written request and for good cause, the planning director may grant up to a one year extension if the request is made in writing no later than April 1, 2016.
2. By ordinance, all approvals granted in this certificate of appropriateness shall remain in effect as long as all of the conditions and guarantees of such approvals are observed. Failure to comply with such conditions and guarantees shall constitute a violation of this certificate of appropriateness and may result in termination of the approval.
3. The maximum luminance level between sunrise and sunset for the sign shall not exceed 5,000 nits and between sunset and sunrise the maximum luminance shall not exceed 500 nits. In addition, the signs shall be equipped with an automatic dimmer control or other mechanism that automatically controls the sign's brightness to comply with this requirement.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Zoning map
2. Project description
3. Ward and neighborhood notification
4. Certificate of appropriateness findings
5. Site plan
6. Plan set
7. Images
8. Neon/LED cost comparison