



## Design Review Board (DRB) Staff Report

*Public art mural, window graphics, and projecting sign*

- Case # 15-78: Facing History and Ourselves  
115 Huling Ave.  
Memphis, TN 38103
- Applicant: Ms. Marti Tippens-Murphy, Memphis Region Director  
Facing History and Ourselves
- Property Owner: EP Ventures  
115 Huling Ave.
- Project Background: Facing History and Ourselves (FHAO) is a national educational nonprofit that has worked in Memphis since 1992. The organization's mission is to engage students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice, and antisemitism in order to promote the development of a more humane and informed citizenry. FHAO has recently moved its local office to 115 Huling Avenue. The new location is a ground-floor commercial space at the southwest corner of Mulberry Street and Huling Avenue, adjacent to the National Civil Rights Museum. In addition to office space for staff, the new location provides room for program managers to conduct multi-day seminars, online and in-person workshops, and training programs for participating teachers and youth. It is also a goal of the organization to provide outreach to the broader community through trolley night activities and open-house events.
- On October 14, 2015, the applicant received a Storefront Improvement Grant from the Center City Development Corporation (CCDC) in an amount up to \$8,478. It should also be noted that the review and approval of the Memphis Landmarks Commission (MLC) is also required for this project given its location in a local historic district.
- Scope of Work: The scope of exterior work includes new signage, window graphics on the storefront windows facing Huling Avenue, and a new public art mural on the east side of the building, facing Mulberry Street.
- One (1) projecting sign will be located on the north building elevation, above the main entrance. The double-sided sign will measure approximately 40 in. x 20 in. and will consist of an aluminum panel with printed graphics applied. As an option, the applicant is also considering a version of this sign that measures

approximately 36 in. x 78 in. In either case, the sign copy will feature the organization's name and logo. If lit, the sign will utilize an external lighting source. Staff opinion is that the projecting sign meets the pertinent requirements of the CBID Sign Code.

The proposed window graphics will feature contemporary and historic imagery that aligns with the mission of the organization. Each window along the storefront measures approximately 58 in. x 84 in. The window graphics will occupy the majority of each window.

The public art mural will face Mulberry Street and measure approximately 12 ft. (h) x 25 ft. (w). FHAO has not yet selected an artist to design and paint the mural. The overall concept of the mural will be to highlight "upstanders," defined as people who are willing to stand up and take action in defense of others, from throughout Memphis history. The applicant will work with a diverse committee of community members to determine whom to feature in the mural.

**Evaluation:**

According to the CBID Sign Code, permanent window signs shall be limited to 25% of the total area of the window in which they are displayed. Temporary window signs shall be limited to 15% of the total window area. Staff is supportive of granting an exception in this case. The proposed window graphics do not contain a commercial message and are being used to screen and provide privacy for the office use and training activities that occur on site. Furthermore, the window graphics are actually perforated and may appear more translucent than purely opaque.

The subject property has sat vacant for several years and is only one block east of South Main Street. The proposed signage and window graphics will add visual interest to the façade and will help improve the pedestrian experience along Huling Avenue. Given the subject property's location on a corner, the proposed mural will be prominently visible to those traveling west on Huling Avenue and from both directions along Mulberry Street. The mural will also improve the appearance of the building as seen by the numerous visitors to the adjacent National Civil Rights Museum. Moreover, high-quality public art at this location is consistent with the DMC's past efforts to utilize public art as a strategy for increasing vibrancy within the South Main neighborhood.

**Recommendation:**

**Staff recommends approval with the condition that the final mural design be administratively reviewed by staff and the DRB Chairman.**