



Design Review Board (DRB) Staff Report
Prepared for the February 2, 2022 DRB Meeting

Signage

- Case # 22-06: South Point Grocery Signage
136 Webster Ave
Memphis, TN 38103
- Applicant: Chris Haskins
Frank Balton Sign Company
5385 Pleasant View Rd, Memphis, TN 38134
- Background: South Point Grocery is a new neighborhood grocery store planned for 136 Webster Ave, just a block away from Central Station. Because the project did not receive a DMC incentive, the project only requires DRB approval for its signage, which is typically handled administratively by DRB staff. However, the applicant is requesting an exception from code standards for two of their planned signs, which can only be granted by the Board.
- Project Description: There are two signs included in the current application:
- **Sign 1 – Projecting Sign**
 - **Description:** An 11 ft. (h) by 18.86 in. (w) double-sided aluminum projecting sign, with a depth of 8 inches. The sign will feature painted copy reading “SOUTH POINT” on the side, and “GROCERY” on both faces. The copy will be illuminated externally with neon, and the border of the sign will also be wrapped with neon. The sign will be mounted on the building’s second story facing Webster Ave., and will project a total of 4 ft. from the building’s face. The sign will be mounted using square tubes with 12 in. match plates, which will be bolted to the building’s masonry at the mortar joints.
 - **Code Issues:** The sign code limits the height of projecting signs to no more than 25 percent of the building’s height, if the building is 75 feet tall or less. Since the building height in this case is 34 feet, the code standards do not allow a sign with a total height greater than 8.5 feet. The proposed height is 2.5 feet over this limit.

- **Sign 2 – Neon Carrot**
 - **Description:** A 15 ft. (h) sculptural metal and neon carrot with a maximum width of 54 inches. The carrot will be composed of illuminated neon rings encircling a metal support system. The rings will be able to be illuminated in sequence, creating an animated effect. The carrot will be mounted above the wall at the southeast corner of the site, mounted on a pipe concealed behind the wall.
 - **Code Issues:** The proposed neon carrot sign is a unique sculptural sign that does not conform clearly to the code’s sign categories. However, it may be possible to consider it to be a rooftop sign, which are not allowed in any areas other than the Ballpark District and the Peabody Place Entertainment District. The proposed sign falls outside the boundaries of both these areas.

Staff Report:

The Downtown Sign Code contains the following language regarding the criteria for granting exceptions from code standards:

“All signs in the CBID shall adhere to the following guidelines and size limitations except in cases where outstandingly creative design solutions are offered. In such cases, if a proposal incorporates unique or high quality materials (such as neon, hand painting, some metals, well-crafted wood), exterior lighting (such as floodlighting), unique shapes, and outstanding graphic composition, a sign exceeding the limits stated in this Division 2 may be approved. All signs should, however, be appropriately scaled to fit their context, should complement the building on which they are located, and not intrude upon any architectural detail.”

The proposed signs are both high quality and creative signs that complement their context and the building they will be installed on. Both signs incorporate a large amount of traditional neon-style lighting, characteristic of historic signs in the nearby South Main district. And the proposed sculptural neon carrot is undeniably a creative sign design above and beyond the norm of functional signage.

There are also nearby precedents for both signs. A recent example of a projecting sign taller than code requirements can be found at the Arrive Hotel at 409 S. Main, and historic examples include the Russell Hardware sign at 316 S. Main. Wisacre Brewing at 398 S.

BB King features a sculptural neon sign extending above the roof, which received approval from the DRB Board.

In addition to the quality and creativity of the signs, and nearby precedent, staff also recognizes that the building's location on a street with no other retail businesses makes the presence of highly visible signage even more important than usual to the success of the business.

Staff Recommendation: **Staff recommends approval.**