

**SALT LAKE CITY
HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION**

**REQUEST BY VECTRA MANAGEMENT GROUP TO PLACE THE WALKER
BANK BUILDING LOCATED AT 175 SOUTH MAIN STREET ON THE SALT
LAKE CITY REGISTER OF CULTURAL RESOURCES AND ALLOW THE
PLACEMENT OF A ROOF-TOP SIGN
CASE NOS. 470-06-36 AND 470-06-37
(PETITION 400-06-20)
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2006**

OVERVIEW

Vectra Management Group, represented by Cooper Roberts Simonsen Architects, is requesting approval to rebuild the Walker Bank signage in the historic configuration and, install a new sixty-four foot (64') frame tower on which to attach individual neon letters spelling out "Walker" on each of the four sides. As outlined in Section 21A.46.070(J)(8) of the Zoning Ordinance, the height of the sign face of a roof sign cannot exceed twenty percent (20%) of the height of the building or ten feet (10'), whichever is less. A request to exceed the general sign standards of the ordinance involving a **Landmark Site**, however, can be considered as a special exception requiring review and approval by the Board of Adjustment with a positive recommendation of the Historic Landmark Commission.

Thus, the applicant is also requesting consideration by the Historic Landmark Commission to place the Walker Bank Building on the Salt Lake City Register of Cultural Resources as a Landmark Site. Adding a site to the Salt Lake City Register of Cultural Resources is a Zoning Map amendment under the purview of the City Council. The Zoning Ordinance requires a recommendation by the Historic Landmark Commission that is then submitted to the Planning Commission for consideration with recommendation to the City Council.

The property is zoned D-1, Central Business District, the purpose of which is "to foster an environment consistent with the area's function as the business, retail and cultural center of the community and the region.

BACKGROUND

Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places

The applicant is currently pursuing listing on the National Register of Historic Places. As part of their review, the Utah State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) requires comments from the local government of the municipality in which the property is located. The nomination is presented to the Board of State History for review. With the Boards recommendation and approval by the SHPO officer, the nomination is then reviewed by the National Park Service. On August 2, 2006, the Historic Landmark Commission reviewed the nomination, and forwarded a positive recommendation to nominate the

Walker Bank Building to the National Register of Historic Places. The nomination is attached to this staff report as Exhibit 2.

The building is currently undergoing rehabilitation for federal tax credits. The majority of the proposed work is to interior areas of the building. Exterior work includes removal of the wrap-around canopy from the 1956 remodel and construction of a small canopy over the main entry. In addition, cleaning will be done on the exterior granite and terra cotta on the first three stories.

The three-story recessed tower of the Walker Bank has historically been used for the purpose of signage, going through three configurations prior to the current one. The most well known of the sign configurations came in the early 1950's. A ninety foot (90') radio tower was erected on top of the recessed tower in 1947 for use by the KDYL radio and television station, the first television station in Utah. After a few years the station moved the television transmitters, but the tower remained and letters to spell out "Walker" were hung on each of the four sides. "Bank" was attached to the perimeter of the building's three-story tower. It was this configuration that was identified as a weather beacon because it changed color to reflect weather conditions. When the building was sold in 1983 and its use as a bank ended, the radio tower and sign were removed.

ANALYSIS

REQUIREMENTS OF THE ZONING ORDINANCE

1. Zoning Map Amendment for Landmark Site Designation

The City Council has final decision authority with respect to Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map amendments. Chapter 21A.50 of the Salt Lake City Code, entitled "Amendments and Special Approvals" addresses changes to the text of the zoning code and associated maps. Section 21A.50.050 outlines standards the City Council should consider when making a decision regarding a Zoning Map amendment. These standards will be evaluated by the Planning Commission during their deliberations and ultimate recommendation to the City Council. The standards for general amendments are as follows:

- A. *Whether the proposed amendment is consistent with the purposes, goals, objectives, and policies of the adopted general plan of Salt Lake City.*
- B. *Whether the proposed amendment is harmonious with the overall character of existing development in the immediate vicinity of the subject property.*
- C. *The extent to which the proposed amendment will adversely affect adjacent properties.*
- D. *Whether the proposed amendment is consistent with the provisions of any applicable overlay zoning districts, which may impose additional standards.*
- E. *The adequacy of public facilities and services intended to serve the subject property, including but not limited to roadways, parks and recreational facilities, police and fire protection, schools, storm water drainage systems, water supplies, and waste water and refuse collection.*

Historic Landmark Commission Review

Section 21A.34.020(C)(2) *Criteria for the Selection of an H Historic Preservation Overlay District or Landmark Site* specifies the criteria under which Landmark Sites shall be evaluated. The ordinance cites three criteria for selection of a Landmark Site: historical or architectural significance, physical integrity and the age of the site. The reference to this section of the Zoning Ordinance is reinforced in the definition of a Landmark Site in Section 21A.34.020(B)(4):

A landmark site is any site included on the Salt Lake City Register of Cultural Resources that meets the criteria outlined in subsection C2 of this section. Such sites are of exceptional importance to the city, state, region or nation and impart high artistic, historic or cultural values. A landmark site clearly conveys a sense of time and place and enables the public to interpret the historic character of the site.

DISCUSSION: As discussed below and in the attached nomination form, upon its completion in 1912, the Walker Bank Building was the tallest building in Salt Lake City and is historically significant for its association with the growth and progress of downtown Salt Lake City in the early twentieth century. The building is physical evidence of the important contributions made by the Walker brothers to the banking and mercantile history of Utah. The Walker Bank Building is also significant as an example of a Chicago School skyscraper. The steel frame building is organized using the basic tripartite formula, with a stack of office floors above a ground-floor level with large windows and elaborate terminating cornice, and retains much of its original detailing and character.

FINDING: The Walker Bank Building meets the definition of a Landmark Site.

The specific language for the selection of a Landmark Site outlined in Section 21A.34.020(C)(2) is as follows:

The historic landmark commission shall evaluate each parcel of property within a proposed H historic preservation overlay district or the parcel of property associated with a landmark site. Individual parcels within a proposed district, the district as a whole, and landmark sites shall be evaluated according to the following:

- a. Significance in a local, regional, state or national history, architecture, engineering or culture, associated with at least one of the following;***
 - i. Events that have made significant contributions to the broad patterns of history, or*
 - ii. Lives of persons significant in the history of the city, region, state of Utah, or nation or*
 - iii. The distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction; or the work of a notable architect or master craftsman, or*
 - iv. Information important in the understanding of the prehistory or history of Salt Lake City.*

DISCUSSION:

Historical Significance of the Site – Located on Main Street, in the core of downtown Salt Lake City, the building occupies the northeast corner of Main Street and 200 South Street. Constructed for the Walker Brothers Bank in 1911-1912, the building is significant because of its association with the early twentieth century development of Salt Lake City’s downtown business district. As Salt Lake City became a transportation hub, commerce became important and business grew along the Main Street corridor. The building is associated with the Walker brothers, prominent businessmen whose merchandising and banking activities contributed to Salt Lake City’s transformation from an agrarian landscape to an urbanized American city.

Architectural Significance of the Site - Designed by the firm of Eames and Young, the Chicago School building illustrates the basic tripartite formula for a commercial high-rise of its era. The steel-frame skyscraper is divided into three parts: a base with large display windows, a shaft housing floors of offices and an elaborate cornice. The base of the building is rectangular in shape with the portion of the building above the fifth-story forming an L-shape. At the top is a three-story tower recessed from the main block that houses the elevator shaft, an observation platform and the neon Walker Center sign. Faced with granite, terra cotta and tan brick, the façade incorporates classical motifs borrowing elements of Second Renaissance Revival ornament.

FINDING: The Walker Bank Building is significant for inclusion on the Salt Lake City Register of Cultural Resources under criteria (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) outlined in Section 21A.34.020(2) of the Zoning Ordinance.

- b. Physical integrity in terms of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association as defined by the National Park Service for the National Register of Historic Places;*

DISCUSSION: The Zoning Ordinance references the definition of “physical integrity” as described by the National Park Service for the National Register of Historic Places. An explanation of physical integrity is addressed extensively in *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*. As stated in the Bulletin, “integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance.”

The Zoning Ordinance also references seven qualities described in Bulletin 15 that, in various combinations, define integrity. These seven aspects are location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. To retain historic integrity a property will always possess several, and usually most of the aspects. Properties must not only retain their essential physical features, but the features must be visible enough to convey their significance. The physical integrity of the Walker Bank Building is addressed below:

Location: The location of the subject property is a key element in defining its integrity because it is associated with the development of the commercial character of Main Street and the downtown business core. The building is in its original location.

Design: Design is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure and style of a property. The Walker Bank Building is a sixteen-story steel frame commercial high-rise characteristic of a Chicago School skyscraper, with classical motifs. The property continues to reflect the massing, pattern of fenestration, texture of surface materials, and type and style of ornamental detailing as originally designed.

Setting: The architectural character of the area has changed since the construction of the building, but it continues to serve as the “business center” of the community.

Materials: The key exterior materials, dating from the period of significance have been retained.

Workmanship: The physical evidence of workmanship needed to convey the typical methods of construction and finishes of the period, such as key historic materials and form, continue to contribute to the overall integrity of the building. The most prominent example of workmanship is evident in the steel frame construction, which is intact and will be preserved.

Feeling: The fact that the architectural details, including massing, materials and fenestration pattern are still evident contribute to the structure’s portrayal as an example of early twentieth century commercial high-rise design in a downtown area.

Association: The building reflects the historic and aesthetic sense of its period of significance. Its character-defining features are sufficiently intact to convey its association with the transition in economic structure that occurred in Salt Lake City at the time, as well as the commercial architecture built during this era.

Commercial architecture in downtown Salt Lake City represents a continuation of broader American patterns.

FINDING: The building maintains its physical integrity as established in Section 21A.34.020(C)(2)(b) of the Zoning Ordinance. It conveys physical integrity in terms of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association, as defined by the National Park Service for the National Register of Historic Places.

- c. ***The age of the site. Sites must be at least fifty years old, or have achieved significance within the past fifty years if the properties are of exceptional importance.***

DISCUSSION: Constructed in 1911-12, the building is over fifty years old, and thus meets this standard.

FINDING: The building is consistent with this standard, as it is over fifty years old.

RECOMMENDATION OF DESIGNATION REQUEST

Based upon the comments, analysis and findings of fact noted above, Planning Staff concludes that the Walker Bank Building exhibits sufficient historic and architectural significance, and physical integrity to merit listing on the Salt Lake City Register of Cultural Resources. Furthermore, the site clearly conveys a sense of time and place and enables the public to interpret the historic character of the site. As such the site is of exceptional importance to the city, state, region and nation and imparts high artistic, historic or cultural values. Therefore, Planning Staff recommends that the Historic Landmark Commission forward a positive recommendation to the Planning Commission to list the property located at 175 South Main Street as a Landmark Site on the Salt Lake City Register of Cultural Resources.

2. Signage Proposal

Section 21A.46.070(V) addresses historic district signs and reads, “The Board of Adjustment may authorize, as a special exception, the modification of the size or placement of a new sign on a landmark site if the applicant can demonstrate that the location, size and/or design of the proposed sign is compatible with the design period or theme of the historic structure or district, and/or will cause less physical damage to the historically significant structure.” In order to make its decision, the Board of Adjustment must use the following standards:

Standard A: Compliance with Ordinance and District Purposes

Standard B: No Substantial Impairment of Property Value

Standard C: No Undue Adverse Impact

Standard D: Compatible with Surrounding Development

Standard E: No Destruction of Significant Features

Standard F: No Material Pollution of the Environment

Standard G: Compliance with Standards

Historic Landmark Commission Review

The applicant proposes to install a sixty-four foot tall, four sided angled iron support structure that would be attached to the roof of the building using the steel plates that remain from the original structure. Eight foot tall box channel letters spelling out “Walker” with neon illumination would be mounted on the metal framework. Similar letters spelling out “Center” would then replace the existing signage on all four sides of the existing recessed tower. The proposed sign would continue the tradition of changing colors to indicate the weather forecast – blue for clear skies; flashing blue for cloudy skies; red for rain; and flashing red for snow.

In 1984, the Historic Landmark Commission adopted a signage policy that provides three (3) criteria for determining whether a sign is consistent with the historic character of a building or strict. The standards are addressed below with a discussion and finding for each standard.

1. **A sign is an integral part of the building façade in both design and function and should complement the building in terms of location, size, illumination, style and color. The Historic Landmark Commission considers the entire principal façade as the “sign” (i.e. in context). Signs should relate to the architecture of the building and not have a negative impact on neighboring properties and the streetscape.**

DISCUSSION: The design of the proposed signage follows historic design antecedents for the building and uses materials similar to those that were used historically. The proposed neon illumination also follows historic antecedents, and has been approved by the Commission on other commercial projects (Trolley Square and Union Pacific Depot).

FINDING: The proposed signage complements the building in terms of location, illumination, materials style and color. The sign relates to the architecture of the historic building and should not have a negative impact on neighboring properties nor the streetscape.

2. **In commercial areas of historic districts (such as South Temple), the Historic Landmark Commission encourages the use of low-key, sophisticated signage such as brass lettering, painted signs in an historical character etc. The Historic Landmark Commission encourages the spot-lighting of buildings rather than plastic and animated signs are discouraged. Indirect lighting is preferred.**

DISCUSSION: The nomination to the National Register of Historic Places includes documentation that shows that historically, there was roof-mounted signage on the building. Since following a course of historic accuracy and matching original materials is preferred, staff finds the proposed signage compatible with the character of the building. The applicant is proposing a design for the signage that creates a degree of ornamentation that documentation indicates existed historically.

FINDING: There is historic precedent for the amount of signage and the design of the signage is substantiated by pictorial evidence.

3. **The Historic Landmark Commission considers the request for a sign in the context of the owner’s comprehensive (total) signage plan for the building. For office/commercial uses, only one building identification sign will be approved by the Historic Landmark Commission. Tenants should be identified in an interior building directory.**

DISCUSSION: Current signage on the Walker Center Building includes:

1. “Walker Center” in small black lettering on the gold trim of the main level canopy; located over the Main Street entrance.
2. A sign consisting of eight-foot neon letters on the perimeter of the three-story recessed tower located on top of the building. “Walker” and “Center” are spelled out on alternating sides of the tower. The neon lights of the letters change to

indicate the weather conditions: blue for clear skies, flashing blue for cloudy skies, red for rain, and flashing red for snow.

Information has not been provided at this time regarding potential signage needs for future tenants of the building. A signage master plan for the building is desirable in order to provide for consistent review of any future signage proposals, and to assist potential tenants in determining restrictions and expectations of the Historic Landmark Commission.

FINDING: The property owner should provide a comprehensive signage plan before approval of any further applications for signage on the building.

RECOMMENDATION FOR SIGNAGE PROPOSAL

Based on the discussion and finding of fact as noted in this staff report, Planning Staff recommends that the Historic Landmark Commission forward a positive recommendation to the Board of Adjustment to approve a special exception for the proposed sign, subject to the following condition:

1. The property owner shall provide a comprehensive signage plan before approval of any further applications for signage on the building.

Janice Lew
Principal Planner
September 27, 2006

Attachments: Exhibit 1: Signage Submittal
Exhibit 2: Designation Form

Exhibit 1

Signage Submittal

Exhibit 2 Designation Form

