



The City of Seattle

## Pioneer Square Preservation Board

Mailing Address: PO Box 94649, Seattle WA 98124-4649

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PSB45/25

### Staff Report

Board meeting March 5, 2025

Board Members Please Note: The citations from the District Ordinance, Rules for the Pioneer Square Preservation District, and Secretary of the Interior's Standards listed below are for your consideration in addition to any other citations you find relevant in considering each application.

030525.51     **Smith Tower**  
**506 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave**  
**Applicant CJ Williams Western Neon**

**Proposed: Installation lighted decorative elements to the building and two blade signs**

Staff report: Smith Tower was constructed with a simple granite two story base with columns topped with capitals and a leaded glass band, and a decorative terracotta middle and top. This application remains incomplete but the applicant requested a briefing while they continue to finalize their application.

The briefing proposes a new lighted decorative feature installed covering the granite panels separating the first the first and second stories horizontally and between the vertical granite columns of the architectural base of Smith Tower. One proposal is for the entire façade of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave and Yesler, the other option is just at the corner above the Café Vita storefront.

The Board should discuss:

Does the new lighted feature obscure or compete with the historic architectural features of the building or otherwise affect the composition of the building?

Are plastic and vinyl compatible materials compatible with materials of the building especially the authentic leaded glass

Is a faux feature appropriate for a historic building?

**Administered by The Historic Preservation Program**  
**The Seattle Department of Neighborhoods**

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Is it demonstrated that the lighted feature provides light for pedestrian safety or does it appear to draw attention to the feature and to the business.

Does the feature a distraction from the historical features of the building?

Does the Board have recommendations for alternative lighting public safety goal? The existing light fixtures are not original but were reviewed and approved, I believe in the 1980's.

The application is presented as Café Vita at Smith Tower, does the Board consider the amber lighted feature representative of the company brand and therefor a sign? Internally lit signs are prohibited because they are not considered compatible with the character of the historic district.

If the Board does not consider the lit feature as a sign, is a lighted glowing box similar in appearance to an internally lit sign but with vinyl design instead of words, and therefore also not compatible with the historic district.

The Board has not previously approved the use of colored lighting to decorate buildings because they have not thought colored lighting was compatible with the historic character of the building, the lighting proposed is an amber led, Does the Board consider this different as proposed.

The application says that the lighted decorative feature will be attached at existing holes but considering the existing conditions photos only show that one granite panel has holes and the plans indicate that the feature would have to be attached no further than 4 feet apart, it appears the 6 foot panels would have to have a minimum of 6 penetrations for attachments and an additional penetration for the electrical wiring.

The blades signs appear to comply with the code for size and letter size. Though the plans say they will be installed in existing holes it does not appear that existing holes correspond to the bracket location at the corner and the existing condition photos show no holes at the other proposed location. New penetrations are expected to be needed for these signs.

The building has awnings but the Board has previously made exception to the one projecting item rule when the awnings are retractable.

#### **Code Citations:**

##### **Seattle Municipal Code**

##### **23.66.030 Certificates of Approval required**

Certificate of approval required. No person shall alter, demolish, construct, reconstruct, restore, remodel, make any visible change to the exterior appearance of any structure, or to the public rights-of-way or other public spaces in a special review district, and no one shall remove or substantially alter any existing sign or erect or place any new sign or change the principal use of any building, or any portion of a building, structure or lot in a special review district, and no permit for such activity

shall be issued unless a certificate of approval has been issued by the Department of Neighborhoods Director.

### **Rules for the Pioneer Square Preservation District**

#### **III. GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR REHABILITATION AND NEW CONSTRUCTION**

Rehabilitation is defined as the act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values.

#### **XX. RULES FOR TRANSPARENCY, SIGNS, AWNINGS AND CANOPIES**

The Pioneer Square Preservation Ordinance reflects a policy to focus on structures, individually and collectively, so that they can be seen and appreciated. Sign proliferation or inconsistent paint colors, for example, are incompatible with this focus, and are expressly to be avoided. (8/93)

##### **B. General Signage Regulations**

All signs on or hanging from buildings, in windows, or applied to windows, are subject to review and approval by the Pioneer Square Preservation Board. (8/93)  
Locations for signs shall be in accordance with all other regulations for signage. (12/94)

The intent of sign regulations is to ensure that signs relate physically and visually to their location; that signs not hide, damage or obscure the architectural elements of the building; that signs be oriented toward and promote a pedestrian environment; and that the products or services offered be the focus, rather than signs. (8/93)

##### **C. Specific Signage Regulations**

1. Letter Size. Letter size in windows, awnings and hanging signs shall be consistent with the scale of the architectural elements of the building (as per SMC 23.66.160), but shall not exceed a maximum height of 10 inches unless an exception has been approved as set forth in this paragraph. Exceptions to the 10-inch height limitation will be considered for individual letters in the business name (subject to a limit of no more than three letters) only if both of the following conditions are satisfied: a) the exception is sought as part of a reduced overall sign package or plan for the business; and b) the size of the letters for which an exception is requested is consistent with the scale and character of the building, the frontage of the business, the transparency requirements of the regulations, and all other conditions under SMC 23.66.160. An overall sign package or plan will be considered reduced for purposes of the exception if it calls for approval of signage that is

substantially less than what would otherwise be allowable under the regulations. (12/94)

3. Projecting Elements (e.g. blade signs, banners, flags and awnings). There shall be a limit of one projecting element, e.g. a blade sign, banner, or awning per address. If a business chooses awnings for its projecting element, it may not also have a blade sign, flag, or banner, and no additional signage may be hung below awnings. (6/03) Exceptions may be made for businesses on corners, in which case one projecting element per facade may be permitted. (12/94)
4. Blade signs (signs hanging perpendicular to the building). Blade signs shall be installed below the intermediate cornice or second floor of the building, and in such a manner that they do not hide, damage, or obscure the architectural elements of the building. Typically, non-illuminated blade signs will be limited to eight (8) square feet. (12/94)

Blade signs incorporating neon of any kind shall not be permitted unless all of the following conditions are met: a) the neon blade sign is sought as part of a reduced overall sign package or plan for the business; b) neon blade signs shall be limited to six (6) square feet in dimension with letters not to exceed eight (8) inches in height; c) the sign meets the requirements of Neon Signs - Paragraph 3 for the number and type of colors of neon; d) the sign meets the requirements of Signs - Paragraph 5 (above) for installation of a blade sign; e) electrical connection from exterior walls to the blade sign shall be made using rigid, paintable electrical tubing painted to match the building facade and all bends shall closely follow the support structure; f) all signage supports shall be fastened to the exterior wall by the use of metal anchors at existing grout joints only; and g) the sign taken as a whole is consistent with the scale and character of the building, the transparency requirements of the regulations, and all other conditions under SMC 23.66.160. An overall sign package or plan will be considered reduced for purposes of the exception. if it calls for approval of signage that is substantially less than what would otherwise be allowable under regulations. (5/96)

7. Internally Lit Signs. Internally lit or backlit signs are prohibited. (8/93)

### **Secretary of Interior 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.

**3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.**

4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.

**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.

7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.

8. Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.

**9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.**

**10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.**

Recommended	Not Recommended
Identifying, retaining and preserving masonry features that are important in defining the overall historic character of the building (such as walls, brackets, railings, cornices, window and door surrounds, steps, and columns) and decorative ornament and other details, such as tooling and bonding patterns, coatings, and color.	Removing or substantially changing masonry features which are important in defining the overall historic character of the building so that, as a result, the character is diminished

Issued: Feb 26, 2025  
Genna Nashem  
Pioneer Square Preservation Board Coordinator