

Public Hearing
HARB Appeal Hearing
525 Penn Street
Virtual Meeting
Tuesday, January 12, 2020
5 p.m.

Due to the COVID-19 Emergency Declaration, the City was forced to change their meeting format to prohibit the public's ability to physically attend the meeting and for public comment to be provided through alternative methods. Public comment can occur in writing (email message or letter clearly marked for public comment) or via a telephone or internet connection with the virtual app. All attendees are participating remotely by phone or electronically through a computer application. The meetings can be viewed live on the BCTV MAC Channel 99, Facebook Live or on the City's website at <https://www.readingpa.gov/content/city-council-video>.

Mr. Waltman called the public hearing to order at 5:10 pm and stated that the purpose of the HARB appeal hearing is to consider the request of the property owner to appeal the denial of a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA):

Proposal:

1. The proposal for the installation of a 2'-10" x 15'-10" internally illuminated channel lettered sign to read "MoraviaHealth" in green letters, with logo, above the first floor storefront, and the installation of a 34" x 59" vinyl cling sign to read "MoraviaHealth Home Healthcare Services 610-710-8888 www.MoraviaHealth.com", with logo, in the center glass panel at the first floor storefront at 525 Penn Street was presented by the Historic Preservation Specialist.
channel

HARB Decision:

2. The proposal for the installation of a 2'-10" x 15'-10" internally illuminated lettered sign to read "MoraviaHealth" in green letters, with logo, above the first floor storefront, and the installation of a 34" x 59" vinyl cling sign to read "MoraviaHealth Home Healthcare Services 610-710-8888 www.MoraviaHealth.com", with logo, in the center glass panel at the first floor storefront as proposed, presented and shown on the specifications submitted on 9/2/2020 was DENIED based on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings, Standard #2 ("The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided."), Standard #5 ("Distinctive features, finishes, and construction

techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.”), and due to the fact that the proposed signage does not meet the requirements of the HARB Sign Policy.

3. The HARB recommends that the applicant return to the Board with a revised proposal to include a percentage of coverage of the display window glass that meets the requirements of the HARB Sign Policy, and is encouraged to include external, as opposed to internal, illumination of the proposed channel lettered sign in accordance with the HARB Sign Policy.

Building description, period, style, defining features: This 5-story, attached, masonry commercial building is located in the Callowhill Historic District. The upper four stories constitute a 4-story bay window punctuated by belt courses that define the floor levels. The center windows on the fifth floor are grouped under an elliptical arch. At the corners of the fifth floor, the Mansard roof is visible. One-over-one double hung windows are grouped but separated by pilasters with decorative detailing. The first floor retains a historically appropriate storefront with two double door entryways. It was built late in the 19th Century and is a hybridized Classical Revival style. The building received a site quality rating of 118 in the 1979 Historic Sites Survey and is a significant contributing site in the Callowhill Historic District.

Composite Index Rating: 118

SIS 2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided. **SIS 5.** Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved. **HARB Sign Policy**

Attending: City Councilors Waltman, Reed, Goodman-Hinnershitz, Marmarou, Cepeda-Freytiz, Ventura, City Clerk Kelleher, Historic Preservation Specialist Johnson and Assistant Solicitor A. LaMano

I. Testimony from Applicant (No more than 10 minutes)

Property Owner: ISLA, LLC

Applicant: Mark Christman, Drafting Solutions II, LLC for MoraviaHealth

Ms. LaMano entered the PowerPoint presentation from Mr. Christman as Exhibit 1 and the Agenda with attachments as Exhibit 2. Ms. Kelleher administered the oath to Mr. Christman.

Mr. Christman screen shared his PowerPoint presentation. He explained that MoraviaHealth is not appealing the denial of the vinyl window cling; they are only appealing the denial of the LED internally illuminated sign. He explained that due to the bay window above the front entrance to the building it is impossible to use the gooseneck lamps suggested by the HARB Board, to allow their preference for an externally illuminated sign. He noted that the electrical connection existing at this location of the building suggests that there had been

internally illuminated signage in the past, although that type of signage is currently not present.

Mr. Christman stated that when the HARB Executive Board initially reviewed the proposed signage, they were supportive; however, when the project was reviewed by the entire board, the project was denied. He noted that the majority of the businesses in this historic district do not comply with the HARB sign policy as they are internally illuminated and he gave examples like CVS, Wachovia, etc. He added that MoraviaHealth selected historically appropriate colors for the signage.

Ms. Reed questioned if MoraviaHealth sought information about the HARB regulations prior to entering into their lease. Mr. Christman stated that he believes that the realtor MoraviaHealth worked with did inform them about HARB requirements.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz inquired if Mr. Christman made contact with any of the other businesses that have internally illuminated lighting. Mr. Christman expressed the belief that doing that would be outside the parameters of his purview with MoraviaHealth.

II. Testimony from City Staff (No more than 10 minutes)

Ms. Kelleher administered the oath to Ms. Johnson.

Ms. Johnson stated that 525 Penn Street has a high composite rating of 118 and she highlighted the buildings architectural features. She stated that HARB is required to follow the Secretary of the Interior Guidelines and the project violates two of the guidelines as follows and the HARB local sign policy:

SIS 2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.

SIS 5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.

Ms. Johnson stated the Sign Policy encourages the use of externally illuminated lights and discourages the use of internally illuminated lights – note the Policy does not prohibit the use externally illuminated lights. She explained that the Board has previously approved internally illuminated lighting when it previously existed. The use of illuminated signage on the downtown commercial properties existed prior to the creation of the Callowhill historic district. She noted that she does not know if this building previously had internally illuminated signage.

Ms. Johnson explained that the Sign Policy mirrors the zoning regulation that prohibits more than 30% of the window to be covered and the signage proposed by MoraviaHealth covers the entire window.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz inquired if MoraviaHealth is appealing the denial of both the illuminated and vinyl window cling signs or only the illuminated sign. Ms. Johnson and Mr. Christman confirmed that MoraviaHealth is appealing only the HARB denial of the illuminated sign.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz next asked if the denial applied to the size of the sign or the proposed lighting. Ms. Johnson clarified that the HARB decision asked MoraviaHealth to reduce the size of the sign, reconsider the use of internal illumination and return for reconsideration. She stated that MoraviaHealth decided to appeal the decision instead.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if MoraviaHealth is willing to consider reducing the size of the sign. Mr. Christman expressed the belief that the option to reduce the size of the sign would be considered.

In response to a question regarding the enforcement of HARB regulations in the 500 block of Penn Street, Ms. Johnson recounted the businesses that have had violations and received enforcement notices.

III. Public Comment (No More than 3 minutes per speaker)

None

IV. Rebuttal by Applicant (No more than 5 minutes)

Mr. Christman stated that the sign meets the HARB color requirements. He explained that on the rendering the sign is off center due to the positioning of the entrance door. He reminded Council that MoraviaHealth is only seeking relief from the denial of the illuminated sign, not the vinyl window cling.

V. Announcement of expected date of decision

Mr. Waltman stated that Council will adopt their decision via resolution at the January 25th regular meeting and that a copy of the decision will be emailed and mailed to the applicant.

VI. Adjourn – on motion of Mr. Marmarou and Ms. Reed.

Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk