



Agenda Item

Design Review Committee

Item #: 4.1.

9/3/2025

File #: 25-0507

TO: Chair and Members of the Design Review Committee

THRU: Hayden Beckman, Planning Manager

FROM: Angelo Huang, Assistant Planner

1. SUBJECT

A request to install a new blade sign on a building located in the Old Towne Orange Historic District located at 394 W. Chapman Avenue (Design Review No. 25-0008).

2. SUMMARY

The applicant proposes to install an illuminated blade sign for an existing barber shop at 394 W. Chapman Avenue. The subject property is not a contributor to the Old Towne Historic District. The proposed blade sign has already been installed on the property without permits, and the applicant is seeking retroactive approval.

3. RECOMMENDED ACTION

Approval of Design Review No. 25-0008 with recommended conditions by the Design Review Committee.

4. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Applicant: Jeff Henson

Owner: Ricci Realty

Property Location: 394 W. Chapman Avenue

General Plan Designation: Old Towne Mixed Use 24 (OTMIX24)

Zoning Classification: Old Towne Mixed Use 24; Santa Fe Depot Plan Area (OTMU-24 (SP))

Existing Development: Contemporary post-war development commercial building

Associated Application: None

Previous DRC Project Review: None

5. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project includes:

- Installation of an aluminum blade sign with an LED neon border, wood finished lettering, and interior halo-lit illumination on the north elevation of the building. The sign dimensions are: 2 feet tall, 4 feet-2 inches wide, and a total size of 8.3 square feet. The base of the proposed

sign measures 9 feet from grade, as measured from the curb/sidewalk.

6. EXISTING SITE

The site is currently developed with a one-story commercial building constructed circa 1955. The building has a flat roof with roof tile eaves and a cement board siding. The barber shop tenant shares this building with a pizza parlor denoted with a separate address, 396 W. Chapman Avenue.

7. EXISTING AREA CONTEXT

The building is located at the southeast corner of the intersection at West Chapman Avenue and North Cypress Street. The property is a block away from the Old Towne Plaza District and the surrounding zoning is Old Towne Mixed Use - 15 (SP) and 24 (SP). The property is also within the Santa Fe Depot Specific Plan area, which encourages more pedestrian-oriented signage along the primary and secondary pedestrian pathways such as Chapman Avenue.

8. ANALYSIS OF THE PROJECT

Item 1 - Internal Illumination:

The existing blade sign currently contains LED modules within the primary cabinet box. The Historic Preservation Design Standards (HPDS) for Old Towne prohibits internally illuminated signs; however, it does allow halo-lit channel letters. The applicant proposes a cut through panel between the LED modules and the lettering to create a halo effect that resembles halo-lit channel letters. See Attachment 3 Project Plans for day/night renderings.

Item 2 - LED Neon Strips

The proposed plans show 6mm neon strips which are composed of an LED light strip enveloped in a red plastic/rubber material to reflect a faux neon appearance. The Historic Preservation Design Standards state that exposed neon is encouraged for blade signs and faux neon would not be an appropriate alternative. Therefore, staff recommends approval with a condition to replace the proposed LED neon strip with real exposed neon.

9. ADVISORY BOARD RECOMMENDATION

None.

10. PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice was provided to owners and tenants within 300 feet of the project on or before August 7, 2025, and the site was posted with a notice on or before that date.

11. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The proposed project is categorically exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) per State CEQA Guidelines 15301 (Class 1 - Existing Facilities) because the project consists of adding new signage to an existing commercial property. There is no environmental public review required for a Categorical Exemption.

12. STAFF RECOMMENDATION AND REQUIRED FINDINGS

Based on the following Findings and statements in support of such Findings, staff recommends the DRC approve the proposed project with recommended conditions (Orange Municipal Code 17.10.070.G).

- In the Old Towne Historic District, the proposed work conforms to the prescriptive standards

and design criteria referenced and/or recommended by the DRC or other reviewing body for the project.

The proposed project, as conditioned, is in conformance with the HPDS for Old Towne for commercial signage. The sign size, placement, and materials meet the requirements set forth in the Design Standards and Orange Municipal Code. As such, the new signs shall have no adverse impact on the appearance or character of the Old Towne Historic District.

- In the Old Towne Historic District, the proposed work conforms to the prescriptive standards and design criteria referenced and/or recommended by the DRC or other reviewing body for the project (OMC 17.10.070.G.1).

As conditioned, the proposed project is in conformance with the HPDS for Old Towne for commercial signage. The sign size, placement, and lighting meet the requirements set forth in the Design Standards and Orange Municipal Code. As such, the new signs shall have no adverse impact on the appearance or character of the Old Towne Historic District.

- In any National Register Historic District, the proposed work complies with the Secretary of the Interior's standards and guidelines (OMC 17.10.07.G.2).

Projects found to be in conformance with the HPDS are generally considered to be in conformance with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*. As conditioned, the proposed sign is compatible with the building in its placement, size, design, and materials and will not negatively impact the streetscape of the Old Towne Historic District

- The project design upholds community aesthetics through the use of an internally consistent, integrated design theme and is consistent with all adopted specific plans, applicable design standards, and their required findings (OMC 17.10.07.G.3).

The proposed sign, as conditioned, conforms to the prescriptive standards and design criteria set forth in the HPDS for Old Towne and Orange Municipal Code Section 17.36, as described above. The signage is proposed to be placed in a location appropriate for signage within a historic district and will not detract from the appearance of the property.

13. CONDITIONS

The approval of this project is subject to the following conditions:

1. This project is approved as a precise plan. All work shall conform in substance and be maintained in general conformance with the plans (date stamped approved August 20, 2025, and in the project case file), including modifications required by the conditions of approval, and as recommended for approval by the Design Review Committee. After the application has been approved, if changes are proposed regarding the location or alteration of any use or structure, a changed plan may be submitted to the Community Development Director for approval. If the Community Development Director determines that the proposed change complies with the provisions and the spirit and intent of the approval action, and that the action would have been the same for the changed plan as for the approved plan, the Community

Development Director may approve the changed plan without requiring a new public meeting. If the Community Development Director determines that any proposed change is substantial, he may refer the plans to the Design Review Committee for subsequent review and determination.

2. The applicant agrees, as a condition of City's approval of Design Review No. 25-0008, to indemnify, defend, and hold harmless, at applicant's expense, the City, its officers, agents, and employees ("City") from and against any claim, action or proceeding brought against the City, including, but not limited to, any claim, action or proceeding commenced within the time period provided in Government Code Section 66499.37 to attack, review, set aside, void or annul the City's approval, to challenge the determination made by the City under the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") or to challenge the reasonableness, legality or validity of any condition attached hereto. City shall promptly notify applicant of any such claim, action or proceeding to which the City receives notice and to cooperate fully with the applicant in the defense thereof. Applicant shall reimburse the City for any and all costs and expenses, including, but not limited to, court costs and attorney's fees that the City may be required to pay, including any expenses ordered by a court or expenses incurred through the Office of the City Attorney in connection with said claim, action or proceeding. City may, in its sole discretion, participate in the defense of any claim, action or proceeding but such participation shall not relieve applicant of the obligations of this condition. In the event the applicant is required to defend City in connection with such claim, action or proceeding, City shall have the right to approve counsel to so defend the City, approve all significant decisions concerning the manner in which the defense is conducted and approve any all settlements, which approval(s) shall not be unreasonably withheld. The obligations set forth herein remain in full force and effect throughout all stages of litigation including any and all appeals of any lower court judgment rendered in the proceeding. Further, applicant agrees to indemnify, defend and hold harmless the City for all costs and expenses incurred in enforcing this provision.
3. The applicant shall comply with all federal, state, and local laws, including all City regulations. Violation of any of those laws in connection with the use may be cause for revocation of this permit.
4. The final approved conditions of approval shall be reprinted on the first or second page of the construction documents when submitting to the Building Division for the plan check process.
5. Construction permits shall be obtained for all future construction work, as required by the City of Orange, Building Division. Failure to obtain the required building permits will be cause for revocation of this permit.
6. An encroachment permit from Public Works Department is required if any work during the construction of the sign will obstruct the public right-of-way.

7. If not utilized, project approval expires 24 months from the approval date. Extensions of time may be granted in accordance with OMC Section 17.08.060.
8. The project shall have real exposed neon lighting in replacement of the 6mm LED neon strips, subject to the inspection and approval by the Community Development Department.

14. ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1 Vicinity Map
- Attachment 2 DPR Form
- Attachment 3 Project Plans
- Attachment 4 Site Photo