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HISTORIC PRESERVATION BOARD
CITY OF PORTLAND, MAINE

PUBLIC HEARING
164 MIDDLE STREET

TO: Chair Benson and Members of the Historic Preservation Board

FROM: Rob Wiener, Preservation Compliance Coordinator

DATE: January 27, 2017

RE: February 1, 2017 **Public Hearing** – Amendment to Approved Plans (Entry canopies and signage program)

Address: 164 Middle Street (corner of Middle & Market)

Applicant: NDA Middle LLC

Architect: Lita Semrau, Port City Architecture

Introduction

At the Board's January 4 meeting, Board members reviewed a request from architect Lita Semrau of Port City Architecture to modify several aspects of previously-approved plans for the rehabilitation/renovation of 164 Middle Street – primarily the divisions of windows on the Market Street façade. Ms. Semrau was representing retailer West Elm, which will occupy the entire building and which is seeking design modifications pursuant to their merchandising and branding goals. At the January 4 meeting, Ms. Semrau indicated that West Elm was considering additional potential changes and that another return to the Board was likely in the near future. Ms. Semrau is requesting another hearing to present West Elm's latest requests, including the introduction of a canopy over the Market Street entrance, a revised signage program, and a color change for the tile to be set into the false openings in the second floor parapets on Middle and Market Streets.

All of the new signs proposed show a common motif of white lettering, consistent with existing branding used by the national chain. Some of the drawings and photos provided were created for other stores; at this time these are presented to seek approval of the concepts. New signs will also require a separate sign permit application, which will be reviewed by HP staff.

Enclosed for the Board's review are Ms. Semrau's summary of the proposed amendments, supported by materials supplied by an out-of-state architect hired by West Elm, the national retailer that will occupy the space. In addition to a new rendering of the property, an elevation and plan page and a detail page are included, as well as sign details provided by a sign

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ıes they will be sized for the two locations yet consistent on the size of the letters ;elves.

olor of the background panels should be a match for the color of the iron ront.

Blade sign at northwest corner – Middle Street façade: This vertically oriented blade sign would replace the awkwardly shaped White Cap Grill sign that projected at a 45 degree angle from the corner of the building. As proposed, the sign is at a right angle to the Middle Street face and the street.

- Individual white letters are proposed to stand out from the black box of the sign, and the letters would be internally illuminated. Staff suggests that if the Board finds this form of illumination appropriate for the context, there might be limits placed on the brightness of the letters.
- The proposed location of the sign is higher than the previous sign – the architect suggests this will avoid straddling the cornice at the top of the storefront, which might compete with or partially obscure the iron details of the ground floor.
- While the proposed location is higher than the generally accepted level for blade signs which would normally specify that the sign be attached below second floor window sills, the Sign Guidelines allow for exceptions:

Market Street Banners: Two canvas West Elm signs are proposed for Market Street, with a third canvas sign possible when the lower retail space at the far, lower end of the building has a tenant.

- Staff questions whether two canvas signs are justified (see Standards Section F., below.)
- The previous owner of the property displayed a number of banners on Market Street, which the Board urged be removed. While the current proposal recalls those banners, this proposal is to be reviewed as a new sign application.

Sign Guidelines – Applicable Standards, Excerpts

Section C. Placement and Location

v. Generally, the placement of signage should occur below the sill of the second story windows. Placement elsewhere on a building may be considered under the following circumstances: a) where the design of the base portion of the building establishes some higher point as an appropriate location; b) where unusual site characteristics exist; or c) where the proposed signage exhibits exceptional design merit and is integrated into the design vocabulary of the subject building.

Section E. Illumination

iv. *Acceptable forms of internal illumination may include halo-lit signs and dye-cut metal sign panels that illuminate individual letters and symbols only. Neon signs may be acceptable as well where they are custom-designed to be compatible with the building's historic and/or architectural character. As a general rule, standard internally-illuminated box-type signs and individual letters that are internally illuminated are prohibited.*

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ımber of Signs

proliferation of signs within a dense urban environment can lead to visual r. The number of signs for each tenant or building should be kept to a ıum while recognizing the need for identification and visibility.

ii. *Ground floor tenants shall generally be limited to one wall sign and one projecting sign per tenant. Where tenants have frontage on more than one street, additional signs may be allowed.*

Applicable Standards for Review

(1) Every reasonable effort shall be made to provide a compatible use for the property which requires minimal alteration to the character-defining features of the structure, object or site and its environment or to use a property for its originally intended purpose.

(4) Changes which may have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the history and development of a structure, object or site and its environment. Changes that have acquired significance in their own right, shall not be destroyed.

(6) Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced wherever feasible. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature should match the feature being replaced in composition, design, texture and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Repair or replacement of missing historic features should be based on accurate duplications of features, substantiated by documentary, physical or pictorial evidence rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural elements from other structures or objects.

(10) Wherever possible, new additions or alterations to structures and objects shall be undertaken in such a manner that, if such additions or alterations were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property would be unimpaired.

Motion for Consideration

On the basis of plans and specifications submitted by the applicant for the February 1, 2017 public hearing and information included in the accompanying staff report, the Board finds that the proposed amendments to the approved plans for the renovation of 164 Middle Street **meet (fail to meet)** the historic preservation ordinance review standards for review of new construction (subject to the following conditions.....)

Attachments:

1. Application summary of amendments provided by local architect L. Semrau
2. CallisonRTKL (West Elm's corporate architect) rendering of amended elevations
3. CallisonRTKL's Market Street elevations, plans, and details
4. Port City Architecture's approved renderings - September 7, 2016 public hearing
5. Representative sign details provided by West Elm sign contractor, with photos
6. Light fixture and lamp specifications provided by CallisonRTKL