

**HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION
APPLICATION FOR A PERMIT WITHIN A NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICT
DECEMBER 14, 2020
506 CONGRESS AVENUE
CONGRESS AVENUE NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICT**

PROPOSAL

Paint a mural on the face of the building.

PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS

The applicant proposes painting a mural on the face of the building on Congress Avenue. This building was the former Yaring's store, but was architecturally modified in 2002 with the installation of additional tall fixed sash windows in the second story and a new steel and glass storefront, so that it may no longer be contributing to the Congress Avenue National Register Historic District. The changes were reviewed and approved by the Commission in 2002.



506 Congress Avenue prior to 2002 remodeling



506 Congress Avenue after renovations



Current photograph, December, 2020 (by staff)

The proposed mural is large and colorful with a soccer motif. It was designed by renowned Spanish artist Ruben Sanchez; Here is his website <https://www.iamrubensanchez.com>



STANDARDS FOR REVIEW

The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation do not apply to artwork applied to buildings in historic districts, and the Commission has no specific guidelines or standards for proposed artwork. The mural could be removed in the future without damage to the structure.

In her paper, “Historic Preservation Considerations for Murals,” Leigh Burns, the director of the Fox Theater Institute recommends that historic buildings should convey the historic message of the building and to take into consideration that murals affect the historic feel of the city and all the architecture within the district.

The City of Milwaukee, Wisconsin’s Historic Preservation Commission in 2019 reviewed the following draft guidelines for murals on historic buildings:

DRAFT – NOT AN APPROVED DOCUMENT

Mural Guidelines for Historic Properties in the City of Milwaukee

For the purposes of these guidelines, a “mural” shall be defined as an artistic work applied to an exterior surface of a pre-existing structure and that does not constitute a sign under 200-08-84 of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

I. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

In addition to those materials usually required for Certificates of Appropriateness (CoA), applicants seeking a CoA for a mural on an historic property shall submit:

- a. Written approval from the property owner for the mural, provided the applicant is not the owner of the property.
- b. A record of ownership of the mural.
- c. A maintenance plan specifying care and the parties responsible for the maintenance of the mural. Maintenance includes, but is not limited to, graffiti removal, removal of

surface dirt, reapplication of coatings, touching up damaged areas, and ensuring vegetation does not harm the mural or the supporting building.

d. An agreement between the artist and the property owner identifying who is responsible for removal of a mural.

e. Photo documentation of the completed mural shall be supplied to the Historic Preservation Commission to provide a base line for future maintenance, conservation and restoration.

II. DESIGN STANDARDS

a. Except as provided below, no mural may be located on elevations that directly face or are parallel to sidewalks and public rights-of-way.

b. Murals shall be permitted for side or rear walls or alley walls (but not the primary facades) that have been refaced with non-historic materials such as replacing wood with parging.

c. Murals shall be permitted for side or rear walls or alley walls that lack historic details (cornices, windows, entrances, etc.), are of painted common brick, includes no decorative masonry work, and that are not street-facing or adjacent to a sidewalk.

d. No mural shall exceed 50% of the wall on which it is placed or twice the maximum size allowed by the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances for wall signage in the area, whichever is smaller.

e. Murals shall be confined to one wall of a building and not wrap around to other sides, nor may any building have more than one mural

f. No mural shall be permitted on an unpainted masonry wall such as brick, stone, or stucco. Murals should instead be painted on removable materials such as plywood or other suitable outdoor material. Anchoring shall be placed into masonry joints or other non-damaging areas of the walls. Framing shall be done so as not to trap water between the mural and the wall. Hanging or anchoring shall be reversible.

g. No mural shall be permitted on wood sidings with surface detail such as, but not limited to bevel siding, board and batten siding.

h. No mural shall be permitted on a building that has had masonry cleaning or major repointing, nor may a mural be used in lieu of cleaning or repointing on a building in need of it.

i. No mural shall be permitted on a fence.

j. Except as provided below, murals shall not cover over windows, doors, cornices, or other architectural elements.

i. Murals may be permitted on windows and doors temporarily boarded due to vandalism. They shall be permitted for no more than 90 days or the time permitted for repairs by the Department of Neighborhood Services, whichever is greater.

ii. No mural shall be permitted on preventative boarding.

k. Lighting of a mural shall require a CoA.

l. Artists shall sign and date their work in a discreet location.

III. REMOVAL

a. A CoA shall be required for removal of a mural.

b. Upon removal, any materials used to adhere the mural shall be removed at the time the mural is removed. This includes, but is not limited to brackets, mounting hardware, caulk or grout, and adhesive glues. The surface shall be returned to its original condition.

For more considerations on murals in historic districts, see Margaret Back's 2019 Master's thesis from the University of Pennsylvania:

Back, Margaret. 2019. "Managing Community Murals in an Urban Preservation Framework." Thesis (Historic Preservation). University of Pennsylvania. https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1669&context=hp_theses

COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

Not reviewed.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends denial of the application for the mural at 506 Congress Avenue. Although the building has a non-historic façade and may not be contributing to the historic district, it is between two historic landmarks: the Robinson-Rosner Building at 504 Congress Avenue to the south, and the Scarbrough Building to the north.

Austin does not have specific guidelines for murals within historic districts. Previous murals downtown have not faced Congress Avenue, but have been located on building sides.

This proposed mural covers the entire elevation of the Congress Avenue façade of the building. The Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission's draft guidelines recommend against murals that face the primary street, and recommend that the mural not exceed 50% of the wall area. Leigh Burns' paper also expresses concern that murals affects the context of the two adjacent historic landmark buildings as well as the context of the Congress Avenue Historic District.