

2. COA-069101-2020

PUBLIC HEARING DATE

February 25, 2020

PROPERTY ADDRESS

1500 North Lombardy Street

DISTRICT

Belgian Building

APPLICANT

Virginia Union University

STAFF CONTACT

C. Jones

Commission of Architectural Review

STAFF REPORT

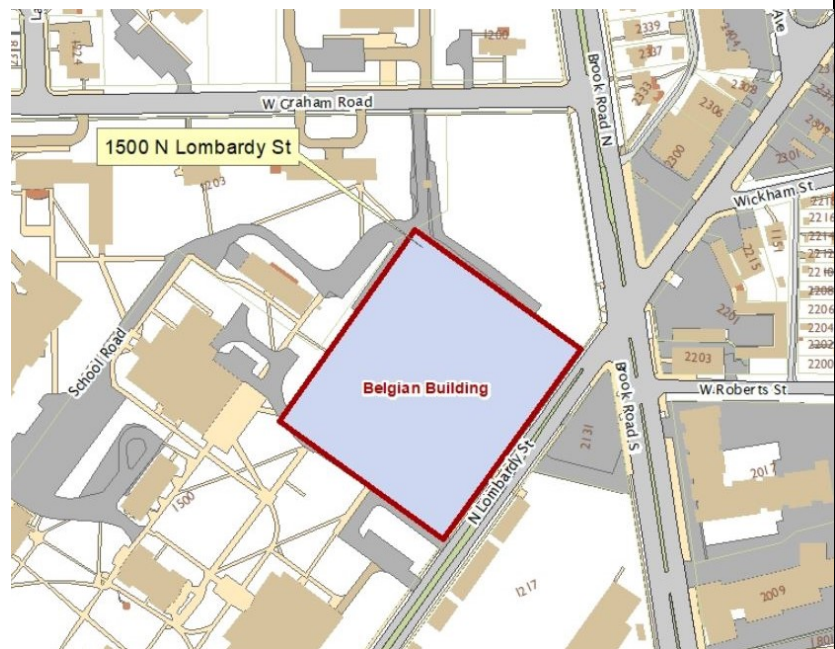


PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Retain four internally illuminated wall signs on the Belgian Building Tower.

PROJECT DETAILS

- The applicant requests permission to retain one internally illuminated sign on each of the four faces of the Belgian Building tower.
- Each sign has the letters "VUU" in maroon. The "V" is 17'-7 3/4" by 17' and projects past the two "U"s. Each "U" is 7'-11 7/8" in height. Each sign is approximately 300 square feet.
- The signs are mounted on the louvers at the top of the Belgian Building bell tower.
- This application is the result of an enforcement action, as the applicant has already installed the signs without receiving a Certificate of Appropriateness.



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BUILDING DETAILS

The Belgian Building, originally a pavilion designed by Henry Van de Velde in the International style for Belgium's entry into the 1939 New York World's Fair, is an individual City and Old Historic District and is individually listed on the State (1969) and National Registers (1970). The approximately 165-foot tower originally held bells, which were donated to President Herbert Hoover for his Stanford University library. Representative of the International Style, the complex has minimal ornamentation and colors, uses modular forms and flat surfaces, and has an emphasis on volumes. The belfry section of the prominent tower is defined by a distinctive use of louvers.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

DENY

PREVIOUS REVIEWS

The Commission has not previously reviewed this application. The applicant applied for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the November 26, 2019 meeting. On the afternoon of November 26, 2019, the applicant requested that staff withdraw the application from the agenda. On January 2, 2020, staff observed the installation of the signs and issued a notice of violation the same day. The applicants met with staff on January 31, 2019 and indicated they were going to recommend to the Virginia Union University Board of Trustees to remove the signs and to use lighting, not attached to the building, to highlight the history and significance of the University. In an email dated February 11, 2020 the applicant stated that they would like to apply to the Commission of Architectural Review to be able to retain the signs.

Staff notes that representatives for the applicants applied for a sign permit on October 8, 2019, and Zoning staff denied the application as the size of the signs exceeds what is allowed for an institutional use. Zoning staff issued a violation notice on January 2, 2020 for installing a sign without approval. The Bureau of Permits and Inspections issued a stop work order for performing the sign installation without a permit.

STAFF ANALYSIS

Standards for Signage, pg. 73	<i>Designs for signs in City Old and Historic Districts should reflect the pedestrian scale of the District. Signs within a District should be modest in size and addressed to pedestrians and slower vehicular traffic. Large signs designed with heavy, high speed vehicular traffic in mind are not appropriate. Please note: sign size restrictions are imposed by the Zoning Ordinance, and cannot be modified by the Commission.</i>	Staff finds that the four wall signs do not meet the Commission's standards for signage. The signs are not modest in size nor are they designed to address pedestrians, but rather drivers on the surrounding streets and highway. Staff also notes that the Zoning Division denied the sign application because it exceeds the permitted sign area in an institutional zoning district. Staff further notes that signs with this total area are not permitted in general.
Flat Wall Signs, pg. 74	<i>Flat wall signs are wooden or metal sign panels applied directly to a building façade when a storefront cornice is not present. Generally, these signs are intended to be viewed from a moderate distance. Flat wall signs should be designed to enhance the façade by blending with the architectural features of the building. They should not be merely applied to the surface of the building, nor should they cover or obscure important architectural elements.</i>	Staff finds that the signs do not meet the <i>Guidelines</i> for flat wall signs. Staff finds that the signs are not designed to be viewed from a moderate distance as required by the <i>Guidelines</i> . Staff also finds that they obscure important architectural elements of the building, namely the louvered belfry. Staff finds that the signs are applied directly to a character-defining feature of the building, which will obscure and likely damage this feature, and greatly detract from the overall architectural character of the building.
General Signage Guidelines, pg. 75	<i>7. Signs should not be internally illuminated.</i>	The applicant seeks approval for internally illuminated signs. Internally illuminated signs are not permitted under the general signage <i>Guidelines</i> .

FIGURES



Figure 1. Belgian Building complex, November 2019.



Figure 2. Belgian Building belfry, November 2019.



Figure 3. Belgian Building complex, current conditions.



Figure 4. Belgian Building belfry, current conditions.