

DAVID H. GLEASON ASSOCIATES INC. ARCHITECTS

June 9, 2020

Lauren Schiszik
Historic Preservation Planner
Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation
417 East Fayette Street, 8th Floor
Baltimore, MD 21202

RE: 2426 Pennsylvanian Ave. Application for Authorization to Proceed
DHCD Application # 2019-2959

Dear Lauren:

This letter is to request a hearing of the full CHAP board on the above application by the Arch Social Club to construct a marquee on the front façade of their building (a Baltimore Historic Landmark) located at 2426 Pennsylvania Ave. As noted in the Application for Authorization to Proceed:

“The Arch Social Club, founded in 1905 on Arch St., Baltimore, MD, is one of the oldest African American social clubs in the nation. Its purpose was to promote ‘charity, friendship and brotherly love’, among its members, which has been expanded since the 2015 Uprising to ‘become a center for African American culture and heritage for Baltimore, as well as hosting events to instill pride in young people in the neighborhood.’

Over the past century, the building has been modified a number of times including the installation of a movie marquee in early 1942... In 2013, the Club received funds from the state to restore the exterior of the building, removing the wood covering and restoring the main entry. This work was approved by CHAP. In the same year the Club received additional funds to develop a historic structures report with cost estimate to fully restore the building... As a first step in the restoration of the Club, and to raise the profile of the Club and its new focus as a hub for African American arts and culture for Baltimore, (the Club’s Board) decided to pursue funding to reconstructed an historical compatible marquee configured to match the marquee removed prior to the Club’s acquisition of the building.”

It should be noted that the Historic Designation Report prepared for the Arch Social Club’s July 2002 hearing to list the building as a Baltimore City Landmark noted that the property meets Criterion 1) association with significant events, 2) association with persons significant to Baltimore’s past, and 4) yields or likely to yield information in Baltimore’s prehistory or history.¹

The design of the proposed marquee follows the dimensions of the former marquee as best as can be determined from the existing photographs. As noted in the drawings it will be supported on steel armatures cantilevered from the interior mezzanine level. This structural system was determined to do the least harm to the existing historic exterior as the columns that supported the original marquee were determine to be unable to carry the loads imposed by the new marquee under current structural codes. In addition, the overall design is compatible with the exterior of the building and with *Baltimore City Historic Preservation Design Guidelines*,

¹ It should be noted that at the time of nomination, the nomination specified a 5th criteria, namely: “Contributes information of historical, cultural or social importance relating to the heritage of the Community”, which is now incorporated in number 4 to better parallel National and State Register language.

(Adopted December 2015) Chapter 2: Design Guidelines for Additions, New Construction, and Non-Contributing Buildings. While marquees are not specifically identified in the *Design Guidelines*, it is important to note that the proposed marquee is in compliance with:

Section: 1.12 Signage and Awnings. (p 36) “The quality of signage and awnings can have a great impact on the character of a historic neighborhood. Poorly designed signs and awnings can detract from the character of a commercial area. Conversely, well-designed signage and awnings can dramatically improve a historic business area....”

Section 1.18 Alterations and Additions. (p 43) “As owners, occupants, and building uses change, buildings must accommodate new needs. Adaptive reuse is important for historic neighborhoods undergoing growth or revitalization. Adaptive reuse may include major alterations or new additions to meet changing needs. Inappropriate alterations and additions can diminish the integrity of a historic building; however, carefully designed alterations and additions that are sensitive to historic character and building fabric are encouraged.”

In addition, the proposed new design is compliant with the “Guiding Principles” (page 45), “Scale and Form” (p47), “Building Features” (p 48), and “Materials and Detailing” (p 49) sections of Chapter 2.

The Club’s Board, in consultation with a number of public officials and private supporters, have determined that it is vital that the Club incorporate changeable LED screens as well as a sound system into the design to further its historic significance as a center for African American history and culture in Baltimore. (It should be noted that the Club has also secured funding for, and is in the process of, re-designing the building’s lobby as a museum to Baltimore’s African American history and culture.) The primary purpose of the changeable screen, which would adhere to the 8-second rule for changeable message signs, will be to inform the public of important events related to the African American community in Baltimore from commemorating Black History to current events sponsored by the Club, public agencies, and non-profit organizations. Similarly, the proposed sound system would be used to reinforce these messages. Only secondarily would the screens and sound system be used to advertise the Club’s non-public service events.

The Club’s Board is aware that the current zoning for its property (OR-1) will not allow the construction of the proposed marquee. Thus the Club will be applying for an Area of Special Sign Control to allow the marquee to be constructed. In addition, the Club will limit the LED screens to the north and south faces on the marquee (a total of 48 SF for the screens), and relocate the “Arch Social Club” from the top of the building to the east face of the marquee. It will also comply with all current sound regulations regarding exterior sound systems loudness and carrying distance from source.

We request that this Application be placed on the next available agenda and that we are informed of when the meeting will occur so that members of the Club and its supporters and consultants be able to speak at the meeting, either remotely or in person.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,
DAVID H GLEASON ASSOCIATES, INC.



Richard Wagner, AIA
Principal

Cc: Van Anderson, Arch Social Club