

File Number: 1-F-26-DT

Meeting: 1/21/2026
Applicant: Logan Higgins Heyoh Design & Development
Owner: DWD-MEK Investors GP
Project: Jacks

Property Information

Location: 133 S. Gay St. **Parcel ID:** 94 E J 02701
Zoning: DK-G (Downtown Knoxville, Grid Subdistrict)
Description: c. 1900, Vernacular Commercial

Two story, brick, single bay, front elevation has divided storefront with small-paned transoms and a separate entrance to upstairs. Altered twelve paned fixed windows with brick sills, decorative vertical corbeling forms frieze below pressed tin cornice with decorative brackets. Flat roof. Contributing structure in the Southern Terminal and Warehouse (National Register) Historic District.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends approval of Certificate 1-F-26-DT subject to the following conditions.

1. Revising the projecting sign to be a maximum of 9 sqft with revisions to be reviewed and approved by Planning staff. The elements of the sign shall be scaled proportionally smaller based on the proposed sign.
 2. Increasing the awning's sidewalk clearance to a minimum of 9 ft per Article 10.3.F.2.a (Awnings and Marquees) of the zoning ordinance, or obtaining a variance from the Board of Zoning Appeals for the proposed 8'-10" sidewalk clearance.
 3. Removing the neon lighting around the outside edge of the awning. The neon letters on the canopy can remain.
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Description of Work

Level I - Board Review

Minor Alteration of an Existing Building/Structure, Sign

Installation of a projecting sign with neon illumination, and a metal awning (canopy) with neon lettering on the front edge and neon striping that wraps around the three sides of the awning, at the top and bottom edges.

Projecting sign: The projecting sign is T-shaped, with the top of the sign being 5'-9" wide, and the lower portion being 1'-11" wide. The lower portion of the sign is attached to the southern (left) edge of the awning, with the upper portion attached to the brick façade. The sign will have neon letters, and neon striping on the street-facing side of the sign.

Awning (Canopy) sign: There are three neon words on the front of the awning, facing Gay Street, and located near the projecting sign. The height of the letters are not specified but they fit within the bounds of the 10" tall, flat front of the awning, and the words are between 2'-3" and 2'-5" long.

Awning (Canopy): The metal awning (canopy) measures 4'-6" deep by 24'-5" wide and 10" high, with an 8'-10" clearance from the sidewalk, level with the trim below the storefront transoms, and supported by tie rods connected to the building below the second-story windows. Neon striping is proposed on the front and sides, with neon letters on the front.

Comments

Projecting sign: The design guidelines recommend that projection signs be no more than 9 sq ft. Larger signs are usually more appropriate higher on a building. In staff's opinion, the sign is not proportional to the height of this two-story building, and is recommending the sign be reduced to 9 sqft, as recommended by the design guidelines. The board should discuss the proposed size, and, if necessary, whether a revised sign design should be brought back to the board for consideration of approval.

Awning (Canopy): The guidelines recommend awnings in traditional shapes, forms, and materials, and note that canvas is usually the appropriate material. The proposed awning type, a flat metal canopy, is not addressed by the guidelines. The board has approved similar awnings on a case-by-case basis when it is determined appropriate for the building and location. The applicant provided historic images of a similar awning on this building in the late 1940's. While the neon striping was on the older awning, which is the precedent for this proposal, staff recommends removing the neon striping because illumination of awnings is not addressed by the guidelines, and other types of illumination, such as for signs, are not recommended by the historic resources section of the design guidelines, and the neon illumination is proposed on the projecting sign and the letters on the face of the awning, which staff supports. In addition, the zoning ordinance prohibits neon or LED lighting that outlines doors, windows, architectural features, and building facades (Article 10.2.D).

It is unknown whether the awning's proposed sidewalk clearance of 8'-10" is the minimum or maximum, as the sidewalk slopes from right to left (north to south). The clearance on the left side of the canopy may be a couple of inches shorter. The zoning ordinance requires a 9'-0" sidewalk clearance, which the board does not have the authority to waive. If the canopy must be raised, it will likely cover the bottom of the transom windows, and the applicant should ensure that moisture does not become trapped between the canopy and the transoms. An overlap of a few inches with the transom will not be very noticeable from street level, since the awning extends beyond the transoms to the brick pilasters on either side of the building.

Applicable Design Guidelines

Downtown Design Guidelines

C. Historic Resources

7. Recommended Signs

Commercial establishments need to advertise. However, advertising signs should be effective and appropriate to historic areas without contributing to visual clutter. Primary concerns are a sign's location, size, material, and illumination.

7a. Locate signs above storefront windows, below second-story windows on the sign board, or on the storefront windows themselves (30% is maximum coverage), or off the front of the building as a projecting sign (maximum size: 9 square feet).

7b. Create signs that are proportional to the building where they are located.

7c. Do not light signs internally.

8. Awnings

Awnings are allowed on historic buildings when they are appropriate to the building and are designed with traditional shapes, forms, and materials. If awnings are used, their overall size, shape, and projection from the building must be in proper proportion and scale to the building and contained within the window or door they shelter, and not cover adjacent wall surfaces. Canvas is usually the appropriate material for awnings.

- 8a. Allow awnings in traditional shapes and materials.
- 8b. Contain signs or advertising only within the valence of the awning.



1-F-26-DT

APPLICATION FOR CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS

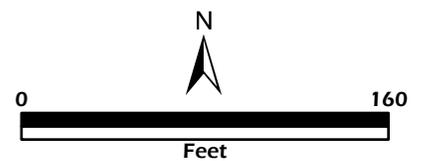


133 S. Gay St.
Level 1: Sign

Petitioner: Logan Higgins Heyoh Design & Development

**DESIGN
REVIEW
BOARD**

Original Print Date: 1/5/2026 Revised:
Knoxville/Knox County Planning · Design Review Board





JACKS SIGN

133 S GAY STREET
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD



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PROJECT OVERVIEW

133 S. Gay Street was once a bustling restaurant deeply embedded in the Knoxville scene even serving local Kern's bread and JFG coffee. This restaurant featured a unique neon sign proudly displaying "Mitchell Grill".

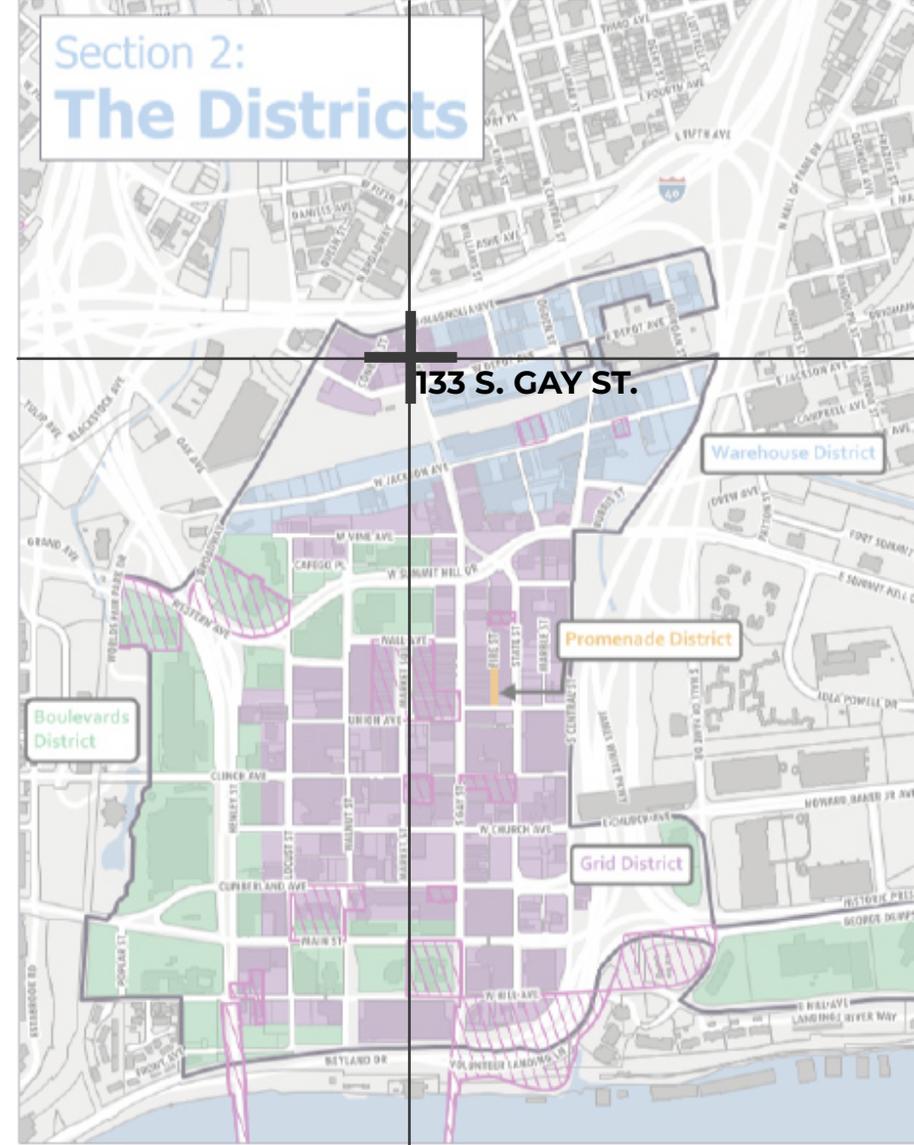
Over the years, the building has changed from commercial to residential to other uses over the last century. Now, it is an established coffee shop that also carries plants and local makers' goods - just like Mitchell's did when it opened in 1948. We want to propose bringing back that sign to return some of that unique design to the 100 block of Gay Street.

This application has been prepared to seek approval from the Design Review Board under the City of Knoxville's Downtown Design Guidelines.



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PROJECT LOCATION IN DESIGN GUIDELINE BOUNDARIES





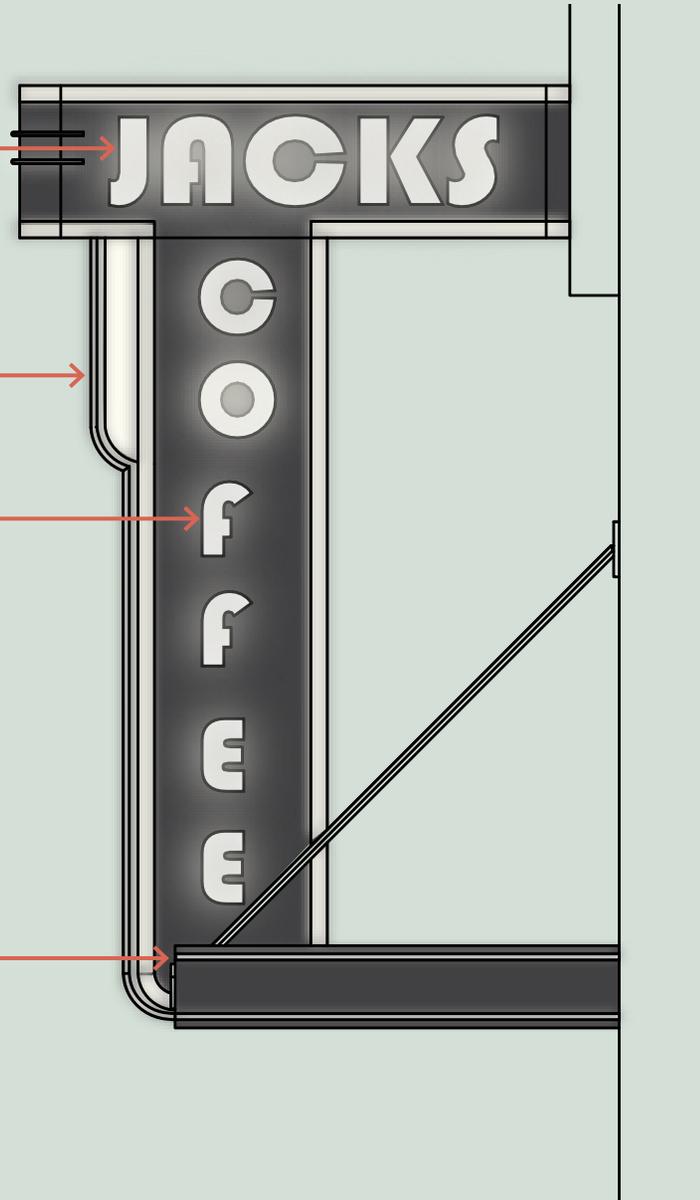
ELEVATIONS

NEON LETTERING

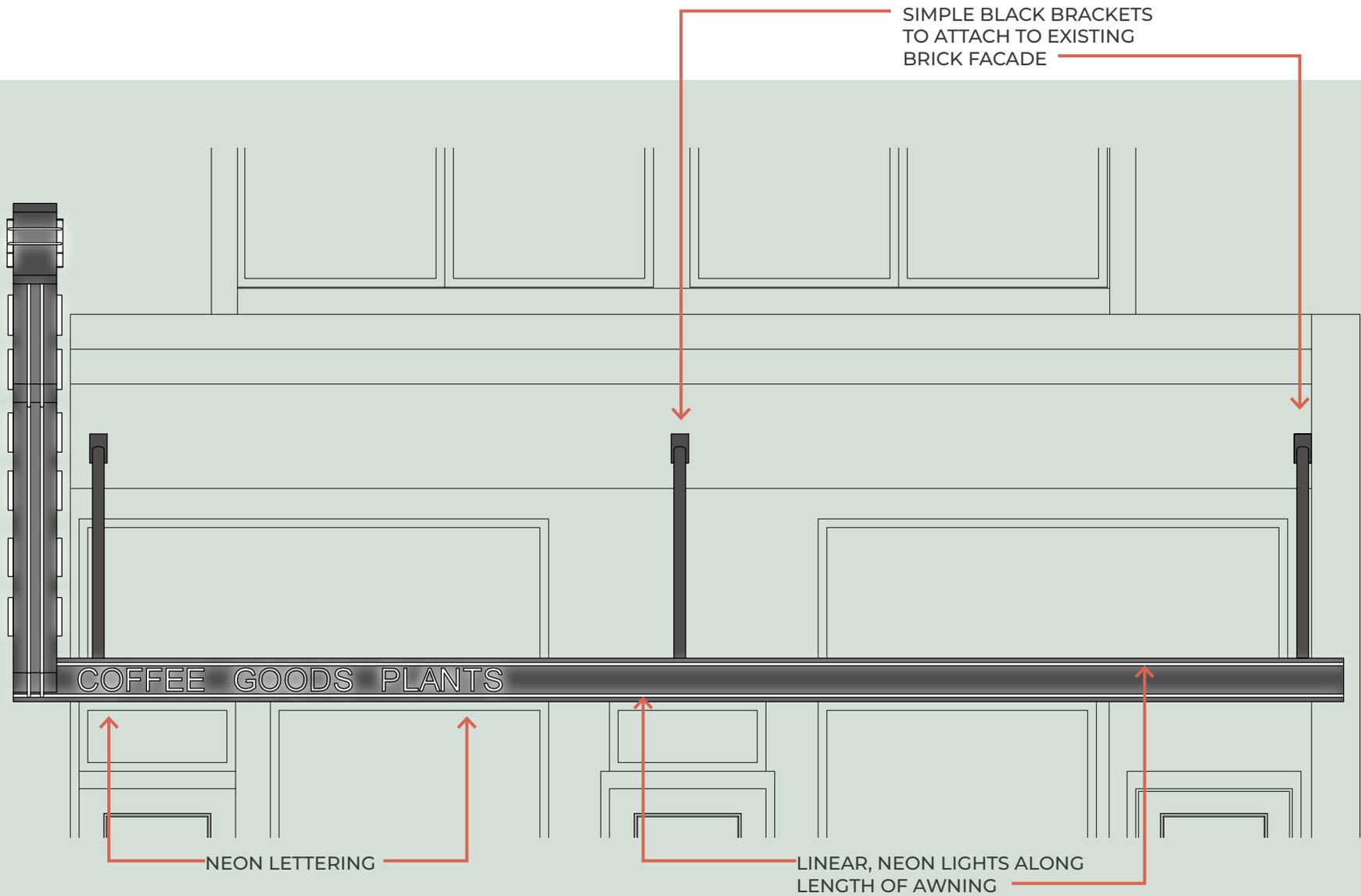
NEON STRIPING
ALONG STREET-FACING
ELEVATION

NEON LETTERING

NEON STRIPING TO
WRAP AROUND
AWNING



ELEVATIONS



JACKS NEON SIGN

SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"
 DATE: 11.04.2025
 LOCATION: 133 S GAY ST.
 KNOXVILLE, TN 37902

