



CITY OF GLENDALE, CALIFORNIA REPORT TO THE PLANNING HEARING OFFICER

AGENDA ITEM

Report: Standards Variance to allow one new projecting sign for a new cultural arts center and museum as a subterranean-level occupant without ground-floor occupancy.

Location: 201 North Brand Boulevard, Unit B100

Legal Description: Glendale Boulevard Tract, Block 6, Lots 11 and 12,
in the City of Glendale, County of Los Angeles

Case Number: PVAR-003201-2024

Applicant: Michael J. Gonzalez-Matsuda, Martial Arts History Museum

Owner: Jason Wong for Brand Wilson LLC

Approved for	September 25, 2024
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ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION

Prepared by:
Alan Lamberg, Planner

Reviewed by:
Roger Kiesel, Senior Planner

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The applicant requests a standards variance to allow a new projecting sign for a recently relocated cultural art center and museum (the Martial Arts History Museum) in a subterranean tenant space at an existing historic commercial building. The sign is planned on the east elevation facing Brand Boulevard, about 30 feet from the interior property line, more than 10 feet away from other projecting signs, projecting above the

entrance to the subterranean level and corridor that leads to the establishment. The variance request is to allow a projecting sign for a subterranean-level occupant, where code only allows a projecting sign for ground-level occupancy.

CODE REQUIRES:

1. For each ground-floor occupancy of a building, one (1) projecting sign shall be permitted, not to exceed 12 SF area and 12 inches thickness in the DSP zone, minimum clearance of 8 feet height, and a minimum of 10 feet from any interior property line and any other projecting sign (GMC 30.33.180).

APPLICANT REQUESTS:

1. To allow a new projecting sign over the Brand Boulevard entrance to a subterranean-level occupant without ground-floor occupancy.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

The project is categorically exempt from California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review as a Class 11 "Accessory Structures," per Section 15311(a) of the CEQA Guidelines, because the project proposes construction of one new on-premises projecting sign.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends approval of the Standards Variance having reviewed Draft Findings, subject to Conditions, both included as Exhibit 1.

SITE CONTEXT

General Plan: Glendale Downtown Specific Plan, Alex Theatre Land Use District

Zone: Downtown Specific Plan, Alex Theatre Zone District (DSP/AT)

Description of Existing Property and Uses: The project site is the Woolworth Building, listed as No. 38 on the Glendale Register of Historic Places, constructed of masonry and concrete in 1942 in the late Streamline Moderne style, and a second-story addition with new entries and alterations to the facade in 1999. Office uses occupy the second story, retail, recreation, and service uses occupy the first-floor storefronts, and retail and public assembly uses in the subterranean level. Certain wall and projecting signs, while permitted, deviate from the sign program adopted in 2000. The Martial Arts History Museum, a cultural arts center and museum, relocated to Glendale in April 2024 to a larger 7,600-SF tenant space in the subterranean level of the subject property. The primary entrance to the museum is from Brand Boulevard with downstairs access

through a long corridor. A secondary entrance from Wilson Avenue includes an elevator.

Neighboring Zones and Uses:

	Zoning	Existing Uses
North	DSP/AT, DSP/MO (Downtown Specific Plan, Alex Theatre, Mid-Orange)	Retail, office, service, and public assembly uses in one-and-two-story buildings
South	DSP/BC, DSP/AE (Downtown Specific Plan, Broadway Center, Art & Entertainment)	Retail, office, service, residential and transportation uses in one-to-four-story and high-rise buildings
East	DSP/AT, DSP/CC, DSP/TD, DSP/AE, (Downtown Specific Plan, Alex Theatre, Civic Center, Transitional District, Art & Entertainment)	Public assembly, retail, service, office, transportation, and residential uses in one-to-five-story buildings
West	DSP/MO, DSP/OC, DSP/BC (Downtown Specific Plan, Mid-Orange, Orange Central, Broadway Center)	Transportation, office, service, and retail uses in one-to-seven-story buildings
Project Site	DSP/AT (Downtown Specific Plan, Alex Theatre)	Office, retail, and service in a two-story building with a subterranean level

Previous Permits for the Site:

1. On April 3, 2024, a Business Registration Certificate, BRC-002078-2024, was issued for the Martial Arts History Museum, Inc.
2. On June 14, 2000, a Sign Program, 99-3 (as corrected and revised), was approved by the Director of Planning for the existing building.

COMMENTS FROM OTHER CITY DEPARTMENTS

The Public Works Traffic Division reviewed the applicant's proposal, and no concerns were cited as it relates to traffic or safety hazards. The Current Planning Division found that several permitted signs, including the proposed projecting sign, deviate from the specifications in a sign program adopted in 2000. A new or revised sign program will be required to maintain compliance with zoning code. The Glendale Principal Planner for Historic Preservation commented that the installation location, as proposed, would have a negative impact on the design of the historic building. As a condition of approval, the

projecting sign shall be installed at the flat stucco portion of the facade, above the decorative horizontal band course. This will prevent it from obscuring one of the building's character-defining historic features. No other city departments had comments regarding this application. Suggested conditions made by the Building and Safety Division, Public Works Department, Historic Preservation, and Planning Division are included in the draft conditions of approval.

REQUIRED FINDINGS OF FACT FOR A STANDARDS VARIANCE

Pursuant to Section 30.43.030 of the Glendale Municipal Code, a Variance shall be granted only if all of the following findings of fact can be made:

- A. The strict application of the provisions of any such ordinance would result in practical difficulties or unnecessary hardship inconsistent with the general purposes and intent of the ordinance.
- B. There are exceptional circumstances or conditions applicable to the property involved or to the intended use or development of the property that do not apply generally to other property in the same zone or neighborhood.
- C. The granting of the variance will not be materially detrimental to the public welfare or injurious to the property or improvements in such zone or neighborhood in which the property is located.
- D. The granting of the variance will not be contrary to the objectives of the ordinances.

ANALYSIS OF REQUEST

The applicant requests a variance to install a projecting sign over the Brand Boulevard entrance to their establishment's subterranean-level occupancy, where code allows a projecting sign for ground-floor occupancy. The establishment occupies the largest subterranean space. The primary entrance is from Brand Boulevard, with a secondary entrance from Wilson Avenue. The establishment's tenant space is not visible from the street, requiring patrons to navigate a corridor. The applicant plans to expand and improve access if their establishment grows. The proposed sign will comply with size and clearance regulations. The variance is requested because the tenant space lacks visibility, impacting patron access and the establishment's potential retention and growth. The sign will enhance visibility and align with the zoning code's intent to improve community appearance and business climate.

Downtown Glendale continues to grow as a cultural destination with the Armenian American Museum, the Neon Art Museum, and now the Martial Arts History Museum. The latter is a cultural arts center and museum, founded in 1999 and established in Burbank in 2008. It relocated to Glendale in April, 2024 to a larger 7,600-SF tenant

space in the subterranean level of the subject property, the Woolworth Building, a locally designated historic place, which houses various uses.

The subject property has unique conditions not common to most properties in the area. Unlike nearby public assembly venues on the ground floor, this establishment is on the subterranean level. The building has multiple tenant spaces with storefront access, with the subject establishment's entrance from Brand Boulevard being a non-descript door; it opens to a stairway to the subterranean level and an elaborate corridor to the establishment. Public assembly uses rely on signage for visibility, making a projecting sign over the Brand Boulevard entrance essential for attracting patrons, thus justifying the request.

Granting the variance request for a projecting sign without ground-floor occupancy will not harm public welfare or nearby properties. Similar requests have been approved in the Downtown Specific Plan zone district and other commercial areas of the city since 2009, such as at 221 N Glendale Ave and 240 N Brand Blvd, the Glendale Fashion Center and Glendale Career College, respectively. Both received variances for signage on subterranean levels, with affirmative findings that cited a lack of deleterious impacts. These signs have now been installed and have not caused concerns related to over-signage, physical appearance, or safety. The applicant seeks a similar variance for visibility and wayfinding to their establishment.

A site inspection revealed two pedestrian signs directing patrons to the Wilson Avenue entrance. The applicant was informed that these signs must be removed, immediately, and that only one pedestrian sign may be permitted in the public right-of-way by the Public Works Director. The Public Works Traffic Division found no traffic or safety hazards with the variance. Proper permits and inspections will ensure safe installation. The Current Planning Division noted deviations from a sign program. The owner's representative will be required to submit a new or revised sign program so that the subject property will comply with the zoning code for signs. No other city departments have raised concerns. Suggested conditions of approval will mitigate any potential negative impacts.

Granting the variance request for the establishment of the cultural arts center and museum aligns with sign regulations while adjusting for exceptional circumstances and meets the establishment's operational needs. The proposed signage will enhance visibility for the subterranean location, fostering a more attractive business climate and providing patrons with visual cues to its location. The sign will require building permit approvals to ensure it is safely installed.

EXHIBITS

1. Draft Findings of Fact and Conditions of Approval
2. Location and Zoning Maps
3. Photos
4. Reduced Plans
5. Departmental Comments