



**Design Review Board (DRB)
Staff Report**

Signage

Case # 20-74: Morgan & Morgan
80 Monroe Ave
Memphis, TN 38103

Applicant: Brian Nason
Morgan & Morgan
1 Commerce Sq 26th Floor
Memphis, TN 38103

Property Owner: Olymbec USA LLC
1004 Brooks Rd
Memphis, TN 38116

Background: This application is for a pair of projecting signs at 80 Monroe Ave, also known as Brinkley Plaza. Although signs in the Central Business Improvement District (CBID) are typically approved by staff administratively, this sign cannot receive administrative approval due to attributes that do not conform to the requirements of the Downtown Sign Code. The applicant is therefore requesting that the board approve a nonconforming sign.

Project Description: The proposed sign package includes two identical 16 ft (h) by 2 ft – 10 in (w) projecting signs. The signs are double-sided, with a total depth of 18 in. The signs are composed of a black aluminum cabinet with pushed-through yellow acrylic channel letters reading “Morgan & Morgan.” The channel letters will be internally illuminated with LEDs, while the sign cabinet itself will be opaque. The signs will be mounted at right angles on the Main and Monroe sides of the building, with the bottom of the signs aligned with the base of the second-floor windows, and the top of the signs aligned with the top of the third-floor windows. The signs will be mounted to the brick using brackets that will be painted to match the façade.

Staff Report: There are two sign code requirements that the proposed sign does not meet: one is related to the location of the sign, and the other to the lack of street frontage for the signed business.

In the Downtown Sign Code, sign allowances are linked to the ground floor frontage of a use. Signs on the ground floor, such as wall signs and projecting signs, are only allowed for businesses with ground floor frontage or entrances:

“Each ground floor leasable unit is considered separately for signage; however, upper floor tenants are not allowed signs at the ground level unless they have a separate entrance at the ground level fronting onto a public right-of-way. Upper floor tenants in all cases are allowed, as established below, window or door graphics on the ground level and window graphics at the floor on which they are located.”

Two additional sign options for upper-floor tenants are also mentioned in the code: a listing in a multi-tenant designation sign, or an above-roof wall sign for the majority tenant of a multi-tenant building. Based on the plainest reading of the code, it does not seem that the code would allow a projecting sign for the upper-floor tenant in this case.

The second code requirement the proposed sign does not meet is a special standard for the Main Street Mall subdistrict:

“Projecting signs on the Mall shall not project more than 5 feet and shall not extend above the second floor windowsills of the building to which they are attached.”

As the proposed sign extends past both the second and third story windows of the building, it clearly does not meet this requirement.

There are no simple adjustments that would bring the sign into compliance with the code. Because of the vertical design of the sign, it would not be feasible to lower the sign’s installed height so that it rests below the second story window – meeting this requirement would require a complete redesign of the sign. And redesigning the sign as a pedestrian-oriented ground floor sign would not change the fact that an upper-floor tenant is not allowed this type of signage to begin with.

In light of these challenges, staff suggests a compromise: to allow the sign, but under the condition that no further signage for the building itself or any other upper-floor tenant will be installed on the building. Although the code does not clearly allow for a projecting sign denoting an upper-floor tenant, multi-tenant office buildings themselves are counted as a ground-floor use, which like

other uses can display identifying signage up to the limit of “two (2) primary signs facing a public right of way.” Staff suggests considering the two proposed signs as filling Brinkley Plaza’s own allotment for primary signage. However, this would not preclude additional signage for additional ground floor uses, for example a new restaurant tenant.

Staff Recommendation: **Staff recommends approval of the proposed signs, with the condition that the property owner agrees that with the addition of these signs, 80 Monroe / Brinkley Plaza has reached its allotment of primary signs, and will not install additional primary signs denoting the building, its management, or additional upper-floor tenants.**