

COUNCIL COMMUNICATION

	Number:	21-375	Meeting:	August 23, 2021
	Agenda Item:	46	Roll Call:	21-1375
	Submitted by:	Erin Olson-Douglas, Development Services Department Director		

AGENDA HEADING:

Hearing on the designation of the Snookies Neon Sign at 1810 Beaver Avenue as a local landmark.

SYNOPSIS:

James Hunter and Connie Conrad Hunter (owners) are seeking landmark status for the Snookies Neon Sign in accordance with Chapter 58 of the City Code. The Landmark Review Board and the Plan and Zoning Commission recommend approval of the nomination. Staff recommends approval of designating the subject sign as a local landmark.

FISCAL IMPACT: NONE

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- The subject property is located on the west side of the intersection at Beaver Avenue and 41st Street. The property includes a 1-story commercial building constructed in 1955, which is home to the popular Snookies Malt Shop. The 1950's-era neon sign was acquired by the owners in 1986 – likely from a former Dairy Queen – and was installed on site after being repainted and rebranded.
- The Snookies Neon Sign is eligible for designation under two criteria. The neon sign “is significant in American history, architecture, archaeology and culture,” and “embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction.”
- Though not original to the property, the sign is an authentic 1950s-era neon advertisement and comparative visual evidence suggests it was originally a Dairy Queen sign. Archival research reveals the Snookies building was originally constructed and operated as a Dairy Queen in the 1950s, thus the sign correlates with the building's first commercial function.
- The Snookies Neon Sign has become a signature visual landmark in the Beaverdale neighborhood and the City of Des Moines. Its iconographic status is evidenced by the tradition of locals and visitors taking photographs in front of the sign or “selfies” with the sign featured in the background. A quick social media internet search provides many examples of this cultural practice.

- The Snookies Neon Sign is also significant in its ability to visually and physically connect with the historical period at which this intersection transitioned to commercial use – the 1940s and 1950s. Not only is it authentically of the era, but it conveys an appropriate authenticity of the mid-century (sub)urban landscape of Beavertdale.
- The Snookies Neon Sign is one of few authentic remaining neon signs in the City of Des Moines. Introduced to the United States in 1923 by French businessman Georges Claude, neon signs quickly caught on as a popular fixture in outdoor advertising in the United States. Neon became symbolic of America’s inventiveness and creativity, with large neon signs dominating downtowns across the country. Neon signs reached their heyday in the 1950s, strongly connected with this country’s growing car culture, suburbanization, and diners/fast food. By the 1960s, sign technologies and public tastes changed. Cheaper alternatives like LED bulbs and plastics became the preferred choice for commercial advertising. Today, few companies retain the appropriate tools and expertise with which to craft new neon signs or repair vintage signs. Neon can be expensive to repair and may not be allowed in newer zoning codes throughout the country. The Snookies sign thus represents a particularly unique era in the craft of commercial sign design.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION(S):

Date: August 9, 2021

Roll Call Number: [21-1208](#)

Action: [On](#) request from James Hunter and Connie Conrad-Hunter (Owners) for designation of the “Snookies Neon Sign” located at 1810 Beaver Avenue as a Local Landmark, (8-23-21). Moved by Gatto to adopt. Motion Carried 7-0.

BOARD/COMMISSION ACTION(S):

Board: Plan and Zoning Commission

Date: July 15, 2021

Resolution Number: 20-2021-4.01

Action: Recommend approval of designating the Snookies Neon Sign a local landmark.

Board: Landmark Review Board

Date: June 22, 2021

Resolution Number: 20-2021-4.01

Action: Recommend approval of designating the Snookies Neon Sign a local landmark.

ANTICIPATED ACTIONS AND FUTURE COMMITMENTS:

Hearing on the designation of the Snookies Neon Sign at 1810 Beaver Avenue as a local landmark.

For more information on this and other agenda items, please call the City Clerk's Office at 515-283-4209 or visit the Clerk's Office on the first floor of City Hall, 400 Robert D Ray Drive. Council agendas are available to the public at the City Clerk's Office on Thursday afternoon preceding Monday's Council meeting. Citizens can also request to receive meeting notices and agendas by email by calling the Clerk's Office or sending their request via email to cityclerk@dmgov.org.