


Yovani Baez-Rose
Assistant City Manager/DPD Director

Camilo Espitia
Deputy Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Thomas A. Golden, Jr., City Manager 

FROM: Yovani Baez-Rose, Assistant City Manager/DPD Director

CC: Stephen Stowell, Historic Board Administrator

DATE: June 20, 2023

SUBJECT: MOTION RESPONSE: 5/30/2023 – C. Robinson Req. City Mgr. Work With the Community and the Proper Channels to Restore the Iconic Lowell Sun Sign

Referred to by many as Lowell's Citgo sign, the Lowell Sun sign has been a downtown fixture since at least the early 1940s, sitting atop the ten-story Lowell Sun Building in Kearney Square. Upon leaving the building around 1979, the newspaper entered into a 99-year lease with the new property owner to access and maintain the sign. In recent years though, the sign has tended to go dark without proper maintenance.

Just prior to the start of the pandemic, the newspaper reached out to the Historic Board Administrator to discuss options for the sign. Not wanting to see the sign removed and recognizing its special, iconic place in the community, the Administrator proceeded to reach out to individuals including the current property owner and a company experienced in maintaining the sign over the years. Discussions began regarding potential transfer of ownership to the current property owner and securing funds for the sign's restoration.

More recently an updated estimate for the restoration of the sign has been obtained by the Historic Board. The work would include converting the sign from neon to LED which would result in lower energy and maintenance costs. LED components use about 15% of the electricity of neon or fluorescent lighting, are solid state and operate at low voltage of 12 to 24 volts instead of 9,000 to 15,000 volts for neon tubes, resulting in less failure due to shorting and moisture corrosion. Repair of LEDs or the power supplies is a swap out of parts, not the manufacturing of custom glass shapes filled with neon gas with vacuum and pressure-controlled machines and pumps. For these and other reasons, LEDs are

considered 'Green' solutions compared to neon. The cost of this work is currently estimated to be \$59,580 with sources of funding to be determined.

Recent meetings between the Historic Board Administrator and representatives of the Lowell Sun, property owner, and Lowell Waterways Vitality Initiative have been positive. Upcoming discussions will focus on establishing the legal framework for transferring ownership of the sign, then addressing sources of funding to undertake the work and the establishment of a maintenance endowment fund.

SS/ybr