

Lowell Historic Board
Mural Review Standards
(Approved 7/12/2021)

1. APPLICATION

1.1 The Lowell Historic District Act (Chapter 566 of the Acts of 1983) mandates that no person shall perform any development within any districts without having filed an application with the administrator and having received from the board or, where applicable, the administrator, an historic permit or certificate of nonapplicability; nor shall any building or other city permit be issued to such person until an historic permit or certificate of nonapplicability has been so received.

1.2 The Cultural Affairs & Special Events Office (CASE), intakes all mural proposals within the City of Lowell. §222.25 of The City of Lowell Code of Ordinances mandates that in addition to the requirements outlined in the City’s Mural Ordinance, the Lowell Historic Board shall provide additional review on a case by case basis to all proposed projects located in the following building types in order to protect nationally and locally significant historic structures from adverse impact as well as to safeguard prior investment in the District:

- (1) Structures rated “A” (nationally significant) or “B” (locally significant) on the Lowell Historic Preservation Commission (LHPC) Index of Historic Resources in the District;
- (2) Structures located within the National Historical Landmarks Locks & Canals Historic District;
- (3) Structures that have received federal or state historic rehabilitation tax credits as part of their rehabilitation;
- (4) Structures that have an LHPC Interior Department preservation restriction on it and/or that have received a prior grant or loan from the LHPC.

1.3 In addition to the City’s mural application requirements outlined in §222.30, any mural that requires Historic Board approval must submit an additional narrative which addresses the following questions:

- a. How does the proposed mural respect the historic significance of the building and surrounding context?
- b. What is the proposed method of installation? What measures will be taken to ensure the preservation of the existing building materials?
- c. What materials and accessories will be used? How do they relate to the concept of the mural and the historic context?

1.4 Applications for temporary installations shall be consistent with the Board’s Temporary Public Art Policy which is incorporated herein by reference.

2. APPROACH

- 2.1 The Lowell Historic Board will only consider mural proposals which have already been vetted through the CASE Office for compliance with the adopted city-wide standards for mural placement, prohibited mural types, surface preparation, maintenance, and design and safety.
- 2.2 This Historic Board will evaluate permanent mural installations based upon location and scale, method of installation, and materials and accessories. Additional guidelines are included in this policy for the removal of murals and the treatment of existing period murals and ghost advertising signs.
- 2.3 Mural installations on City right-of-ways (ie. sidewalk and road surfaces) must be temporary or easily removed and must have approval from the City's Department of Engineering and Department of Public Works.

3. LOCATON AND SCALE

- 3.1 Per §222.24 (8) of the City Mural Ordinance, murals on the facades of historic mill structures, gatehouses, locks and canals, and canalways are strictly prohibited.
- 3.2 Murals cannot obscure or detract from architectural features, nor detract from the existing historic, architectural, and design context of the site and surrounding area. This includes visual evidence on exterior walls indicating the location of historic roof lines from structures that once stood on adjacent lots.
- 3.3 Murals shall not obscure, cover, or cause damage to existing period ghost advertising signs.
- 3.4 Murals integrated into the design of new construction will be considered on a case by case basis where such installation is integral to, and integrated into, the design of the building.

4. METHOD OF INSTALLATION

- 4.1 Murals shall not damage surfaces. Applicants are strongly encouraged to contact the Historic Board Administrator to schedule a pre-application site visit. The application of paint directly upon historically unpainted masonry building surfaces is typically discouraged as it can trap moisture and lead to deterioration. By scheduling a pre-application site visit, members and administrators can assist in evaluating the condition of a proposed wall and make recommendations for materials and installation.
- 4.2 Murals shall not obscure, cover, or cause damage to existing period ghost advertising signs.

5. MATERIALS AND ACCESSORIES

- 5.1. Accessories to the mural, such as mounting hardware or lighting, shall not distract from the mural or the building, nor cause harm to the building. All accessories shall be durable and low maintenance.
- 5.2. Flashing or moving lights are prohibited. The lighting must not cause any glare that would impact passing drivers or pedestrians.
- 5.3. Any interpretive signage for proposed murals must be included in the mural application and comply with Section 4 of the Downtown Lowell Historic District Design Review Standards for signage.

6. REMOVAL

- 6.1. If the mural is proposed for removal, it must be completely removed from the building and all surfaces must be restored to their previous state.

7. EXISTING PERIOD MURALS

- 7.1. Any murals that exist at the time of the adoption of this policy shall be considered “grandfathered in” and may continue to exist and be maintained in a manner consistent with this policy.

8. EXISTING PERIOD GHOST ADVERTISING SIGNS

- 8.1. A period ghost advertising sign is one that has been painted on an exterior building wall and has been weathered and faded to the extent that it has lost its original color brightness and visibility.

- 8.2. Ghost signs may be treated in one of three ways:

- a. Remain as is with minimal maintenance.
- b. Preserve to halt further fading and encapsulate lead paint which was often used in period signs. A professional architectural conservator would be required to develop a conservation plan for approval by the Historic Board.
- c. In some cases, restoring the ghost sign to its original state may be appropriate; ie. if repairs to a façade could significantly degrade or eliminate a ghost sign. In such cases, a professional architectural conservator would be required to develop a restoration plan for approval by the Historic Board.

- 8.3. Non-invasive evening projections of ghost signs are encouraged.