



Department of Community Planning and Economic Development  
BZH-27970

<b>CLASSIFICATION:</b>	
Local Historic District	Saint Anthony Falls
Period of Significance	1848-1941
Criteria of Significance	Architecture and social significance
Date of Local District Designation	1971
Date of Individual Listing on the National Register	1977
Applicable Design Guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saint Anthony Falls Historic District Guidelines</li> <li>• Secretary of Interior Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties</li> </ul>
<b>PROPERTY INFORMATION</b>	
Current Name	North Star Lofts
Historic Name	North Star Woolen Mills
Current Address	117 Portland Avenue South
Historic Address	117 Portland Avenue South
Original Construction Date	1864
Original Architect	Unknown
Original Contractor	Unknown
Historic Use	Mill
Current Use	Multi-family residence
Proposed Use	Multi-family residence

**BACKGROUND:** The North Star Woolen Mills Company was founded in 1864 by Eastman, Gibson, and Company (Source: Architecture and Historic Preservation on the Minneapolis Riverfront). North Star Woolen Mills was one of several woolen mills established at Saint Anthony Falls as a result of a Minnesota sheep raising boom in the 1860s (source: National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form). By 1885, North Star Woolen Mills was the last remaining textile mill located in Minneapolis along the Saint Anthony Falls.

The North Star Woolen Mills specialized in the manufacturing of fine woolen blankets. The company produced a complete line of baby blankets, contract blankets for airlines, railroads, hotels, hospitals, schools, and steamship lines as well as woolen fabrics for men, women, and children. Their products

were sold in some 2,500 department, furniture and specialty stores throughout the country. Customers included the Pullman Palace Car Company, the armed forces in which the company provided blankets during the Spanish-American and both world wars (Source: Architecture and Historic Preservation on the Minneapolis Riverfront). North Star Woolen Mills also received a contract for presidential blankets for the White House.

By 1925, North Star Woolen Mills had grown to be the principal woolen blanket mill in the United States, employing 270 persons and using 2,000,000 pounds of wool a year. In 1949, the company, which employed 400 people, closed down its manufacturing operations in Minneapolis, and moved production facilities to Lima, Ohio. Taxes and freight costs were the reasons given by the company for the relocation.

The original building on the subject site was constructed in or around 1864. The current building is the result of an extensive remodel that took place in 1925, when the former five-story mill was virtually replaced by the existing six-story building from top to bottom. A steel frame was constructed around the old structure. Only where the original stonework abutted adjacent buildings were segments of the 19th century masonry left and incorporated into the new wall. The plant building was used as a warehouse for decades after the wool mill production ceased. However, in the 1970s the building was vacated. It sat vacant until 1999 when the North Star Woolen Mills building was converted to condominiums; the first owner-occupied housing in this section of the Minneapolis Riverfront district.

The North Star Blanket wall sign and rooftop sign were installed on the building's tower in 1930 by the Federal Electric Company (H11162). A Federal Electric Company sign is visible above the North Star Blanket wall sign on the south side of the tower. As the applicant points out, both North Star Blanket signs include the company's iconic upside-down five-pointed star and the words 'North Star Blankets'. The three-dimensional star and letters were made of sheet metal and were originally outfitted with neon lighting. The frame for the rooftop sign is composed of steel beams and gusset plates bolted together. Most of the structure is painted, however, the paint is peeling and rust is visible in many locations.

It is not known when the neon tubing was removed from the signs. In the 1990s, when the building was converted into condominiums, the signs were repainted, but no additional rehabilitation work was done to conserve them. The signs are currently illuminated at night by spotlights.

The applicant states that the North Star Blanket signs have deteriorated to the point where sections of the sign are falling off. It is apparent when viewing photos that the letters have rusted and large holes are present. The support system for the sign has also rusted and is in need of repair work.

**SUMMARY OF APPLICANT'S PROPOSAL:** The applicant is proposing to restore both North Star Blanket signs and the support structure for the rooftop sign. The rehabilitation work would require that the signs and rooftop sign support structure be removed and the work completed offsite. If the budget allows, the applicant is proposing to relight the signs in the same figuration as they were historically with lighting tubes projecting from the primary elevation of the letters and running the full length of the letters. The applicant has proposed that this be done with neon or light emitting diode (LED) lights, red in color.

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The rehabilitation of the sign's metal letters and stars includes the following work:

- Remove the signs for shop restoration/repainting.
- Submit shop drawings for CPED staff review and approval before proceeding with the rehabilitation.
- Remove all loose paint and rust via mechanical abrasion. Retain the existing holes where neon tubing ran for future lighting.
- Restore corroded and damaged sheet metal components in accordance with the historic preservation guidelines of the National Park Service Preservation Brief 25: The Preservation of Historic Signs, other relevant NPS publications, and the Sheet Metal Air Conditioning Contractors' National Association (SMACNA) Architectural Sheet Metal Manual, 7th Edition. The applicant states that, "based on a detailed review of photographs of the letters from different angles, our estimate of material replacement, as outlined in the specifications, is 50 percent. This estimate may be slightly conservative, yet we tend to err in that direction to prevent costly adds to the owner during the project."
- Replace damaged sheet metal sections that are beyond repair with new sections that are identical in size as the original. When replacement metal is required and the holes are less than 3/16", the applicant will solder the rehabilitated metal with the new metal. At holes larger than 3/16", the applicant would remove deteriorated/rusted metal at edges of holes to provide a clean square edge and patch with new galvanized sheet metal of equal thickness to existing. Solder patch material in place. Grind down all solder joints to provide a smooth finished surface.
- Provide 3/16" diameter weep holes at lowest point of each letter/star.
- Prime and paint, restored and new metal sections.
- Reinstall signs back in their original location.

The rehabilitation of the sign structural elements includes the following work:

- Remove the structure, via unbolting from roof, for shop restoration/repainting.
- Submit shop drawings for CPED staff review and approval before proceeding with the rehabilitation.
- Replace two deformed gusset plates. Cut existing rivets connecting deformed gusset plate to channel. Remove bolts from three existing steel angles connected to gusset plate, remove existing gusset plate, install new gusset plate and reattach existing structural members as shown in drawings.
- Clean and paint all exposed surfaces of structural members as follows: Remove all existing loose paint, rust scale, etc., clean surfaces, coat all structural steel surfaces with spot primer, full primer, and top coat.
- Prime and paint restored sign structural system.
- Reinstall sign structural system back in its original location.

If the budget allows, the signs are proposed to be relit as they were historically with either neon or LED lights. The proposed relighting includes the following work:

- Install neon or LED lighting to run full length of all letters centered within width of letter, and to run full perimeter of 10 triangular shapes within each star. The Neon or LED lighting would utilize existing holes in sign for entry and exit points. The Neon or LED lighting is proposed to be red in color and would provide a minimum light output of 100 lumens/foot.
- Install new attachment clips for the neon tubing.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** As of the writing of this report, CPED received a letter from the Downtown Neighborhood Association in support of the project. Any additional comments submitted after the publication of this report will be forward to the Heritage Preservation Commissioners at the meeting on November 19, 2013.

**Findings as required by the Minneapolis Preservation Code:**

*The Minneapolis Community Planning and Economic Development Department has analyzed the application based on the findings required by the Minneapolis Preservation Ordinance. Before approving a certificate of appropriateness, and based upon the evidence presented in each application submitted, the commission shall make findings based upon, but not limited to, the following:*

**(1) The alteration is compatible with and continues to support the criteria of significance and period of significance for which the landmark or historic district was designated.**

The proposed North Star Blanket sign rehabilitation is compatible with and continues to support the criteria of significance and period of significance for which the landmark was designated. The Saint Anthony Falls Historic District is significant for its architecture, commerce, industry and transportation. The District's period of significance is from 1848-1941. The North Star Woolen Mills Company played an important role in the district's commercial and industrial history. By 1885, North Star Woolen Mills was the last remaining textile mill located in Minneapolis along the Saint Anthony Falls. By 1925, the company rose to be one of the largest woolen blanket mills in the United States. The North Star Blanket signs, which were installed in 1930, are a contributing and prominent feature of the Saint Anthony Falls Historic District's commercial and industrial history. The applicant's proposal will rehabilitate this important feature of the building and the district.

**(2) The alteration is compatible with and supports the interior and/or exterior designation in which the property was designated.**

The proposed rehabilitation of the North Star Blanket signs is compatible with and supports the criteria of significance and period of significance for which the historic district was designated. The Saint Anthony Falls Historic District is significant for its architecture, commerce, industry, and transportation. The North Star Woolen Mills building and the North Star Blanket signs are contributing features to the historic district's designation that help convey the commerce and industrial history of the district. Installed in 1930, the signs helped advertise one of the country's most prominent woolen mills. The applicant's proposed rehabilitation and possible relighting of the signs will help retain this important historic feature.

**(3) The alteration is compatible with and will ensure continued integrity of the landmark or historic district for which the district was designated.**

Both the City of Minneapolis' Heritage Preservation Regulations and the National Register of Historic Places identify integrity as the authenticity of historic properties and recognize seven aspects that define a property's integrity: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. Based upon the evidence provided below, the proposed work is compatible with and will ensure continued integrity of the historic district.

*Location:* The applicant is not proposing to change the location of the signs or sign structure, thus the project will not impair the landmark's integrity of location.

*Design:* Design is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property. The applicant's proposed rehabilitation project will retain the original design of the signs and the appearance of the building since 1930.

*Setting:* Setting is the physical environment of a historic property. The proposed rehabilitation project of the signs will help preserve one of the most prominent features of the North Star Woolen Mills building and the Saint Anthony Falls Historic District.

*Materials:* Materials are the physical elements that were combined during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property. The applicant is proposing a rehabilitation project that will preserve as much of the original sign material as possible. The applicant estimates that as part of the project they will be able to preserve 50 percent of the sign's original material.

*Workmanship:* Workmanship is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history. The applicant's proposed sign rehabilitation will help protect the workmanship of the signs. The applicant is proposing to preserve as much of the original material as possible. New sections of metal will match the original design.

*Feeling:* Feeling is a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time. The applicant's proposed sign rehabilitation will help preserve the feeling of the North Star Woolen Mills building by retaining the North Star Blanket signs, one of the most prominent features of the building.

*Association:* Association is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property. The proposed sign rehabilitation will help retain that link between when the North Star Woolen Mills installed the signs in 1930 until they closed the mill in 1949.

**(4) The alteration will not materially impair the significance and integrity of the landmark, historic district or nominated property under interim protection as evidenced by the consistency of alterations with the applicable design guidelines adopted by the commission.**

The proposed rehabilitation of the North Star Blanket signs will not materially impair the significance and integrity of the historic district evidenced by the consistency with the Saint Anthony Falls Historic District guidelines. The district guidelines encourage the preservation of historic signs. In particular, District Guideline 7.15:

*7.15: Historic signs should be maintained and preserved. This includes freestanding signs, roof top signs, painted wall signs, signs integrated into buildings.*

**(5) The alteration will not materially impair the significance and integrity of the landmark, historic district or nominated property under interim protection as evidenced by the consistency of alterations with the recommendations contained in The Secretary of the Interior's Standards**

**for the Treatment of Historic Properties.**

The proposed rehabilitation project will be consistent with the following Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation:

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.
2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.

**(6) The certificate of appropriateness conforms to all applicable regulations of this preservation ordinance and is consistent with the applicable policies of the comprehensive plan and applicable preservation policies in small area plans adopted by the city council.**

As stated in Findings #1 through #5, CPED is supportive of the sign rehabilitation project. The certificate of appropriateness will conform to all applicable regulations of this preservation ordinance and would be consistent with the following policies of the comprehensive plan.

- Preservation policy 8.1: Preserve, maintain, and designate districts, landmarks, and historic resources which serve as reminders of the city's architecture, history, and culture. The proposed work will help preserve the historic building by allowing for adaptive reuse. These actions will not impair the building's integrity of design. (Implementation Step 8.1.1) City shall protect historic resources from modifications that are not sensitive to their historic significance.
- Preservation policy 8.8: Preserve neighborhood character by preserving the quality of the built environment. (Implementation Step 8.8.1) Preserve and maintain the character and quality of residential neighborhoods with regulatory tools such as the zoning code and housing maintenance code.

**(7) Destruction of any property. Before approving a certificate of appropriateness that involves the destruction, in whole or in part, of any landmark, property in an historic district or nominated property under interim protection, the commission shall make findings that the destruction is necessary to correct an unsafe or dangerous condition on the property, or that there are no reasonable alternatives to the destruction. In determining whether reasonable alternatives exist, the commission shall consider, but not be limited to, the significance of the property, the integrity of the property and the economic value or usefulness of the existing structure, including its current use, costs of renovation and feasible alternative uses. The commission may delay a final decision for a reasonable period of time to allow parties interested in preserving the property a reasonable opportunity to act to protect it.**

The project does not involve the destruction of the property.

*Before approving a certificate of appropriateness, and based upon the evidence presented in each application submitted, the commission shall make findings that alterations are proposed in a manner that demonstrates that the Applicant has made adequate consideration of the following documents and regulations:*

**(8) Adequate consideration of the description and statement of significance in the original nomination upon which designation of the landmark or historic district was based.**

The proposed alteration demonstrates that the applicant has made adequate consideration of the original nomination in rehabilitating the prominent North Star Blanket signs, an important part of the Saint Anthony Falls Historic District. The North Star Woolen Mills is one of 15 sites that were identified of major importance when the district was locally designated in 1971 (source: National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form). The rooftop and wall signs are an important part of the North Star Woolen Mills building and the Saint Anthony Falls Historic District's commercial and industrial history. Dating back to 1930, rooftop signs were a common way for the businesses along the riverfront to advertise. Today, only the Pillsbury's Best Flour, Gold Medal Flour, and North Star Blanket rooftop signs remain along the Minneapolis riverfront.

**(9) Where applicable, Adequate consideration of Title 20 of the Minneapolis Code of Ordinances, Zoning Code, Chapter 530, Site Plan Review.**

The proposed project will not require a site plan review application. If the proposed signs are relit they would comply with the zoning code requirements for lighting. Per Section 543.60 of the zoning code, the signs are not proposed to be backlit and are more than 20 feet from a residence or OR1 zoning district; the subject property and the neighboring properties are zoned C3A. To be in compliance with the Minneapolis zoning code, CPED is recommending as a condition of approval that the maximum luminance level between sunrise and sunset for the sign not exceed 5,000 nits and between sunset and sunrise the maximum luminance not exceed 500 nits. In addition, the signs shall be equipped with an automatic dimmer control or other mechanism that automatically controls the sign's brightness to comply with this requirement.

**(10) The typology of treatments delineated in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and the associated guidelines for preserving, rehabilitating, reconstructing, and restoring historic buildings.**

The proposed alterations demonstrate that the applicant has made adequate consideration of the Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for Rehabilitation. The applicant is using the recommended approaches to rehabilitating the architectural metal of the signs. The applicant will first identify, retain, and preserve the metal that is able to be rehabilitated. The applicant estimates that the percentage of the original metal that will be able to be preserved as part of the project is approximately 50 percent. For the original metal that will be rehabilitated as part of the project, the applicant is proposing protective and maintenance measures to ensure that it will last indefinitely. The applicant will be removing rust and corrosion prior to the signs and sign structure being repainted.

*Before approving a certificate of appropriateness that involves alterations to a property within an historic district, the commission shall make findings based upon, but not limited to, the following:*

**(11) The alteration is compatible with and will ensure continued significance and integrity of all contributing properties in the historic district based on the period of significance for which the district was designated.**

The proposed sign rehabilitation project is compatible with and will ensure continued significance and integrity of all contributing buildings in the historic district based on the period of significance for which the district was designated. Please see Findings #1 and #2 for analysis.

**(12) Granting the certificate of appropriateness will be in keeping with the spirit and intent of the ordinance and will not negatively alter the essential character of the historic district.**

Granting the certificate of appropriateness will be in keeping with the spirit and intent of the ordinance and will not negatively alter the essential character of the historic district. The proposed sign rehabilitation will be in keeping with the spirit and intent of the ordinance and will not negatively alter the essential character of the historic district. Please see Findings #1 through #4 for analysis.

**(13) The certificate of appropriateness will not be injurious to the significance and integrity of other resources in the historic district and will not impede the normal and orderly preservation of surrounding resources as allowed by regulations in the preservation ordinance.**

Granting of the certificate of appropriateness to allow for the proposed sign rehabilitation will not be injurious to the significance and integrity of other resources in the historic district and will not impede the normal and orderly preservation of surrounding resources.

#### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development recommends that the Heritage Preservation Commission adopt the findings above and **approve** the certificate of appropriateness to allow the rehabilitation of the North Star Blanket signs and the rooftop sign support structure located at 117 Portland Avenue South, subject to the following conditions:

1. By ordinance, approvals are valid for a period of two years from the date of the decision unless required permits are obtained and the action approval is substantially begun and proceeds in a continuous basis toward completion. Upon written request and for good cause, the planning director may grant up to a one year extension if the request is made in writing no later than November 19, 2015.
2. The applicant shall submit shop drawings for the rehabilitation and relighting to CPED staff to review and approve before proceeding with the rehabilitation work.
3. Community Planning and Economic Development staff shall review and approve the final plans and elevations prior to building permit issuance. By ordinance, all approvals granted in this certificate of appropriateness shall remain in effect as long as all of the conditions and guarantees of such

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approvals are observed. Failure to comply with such conditions and guarantees shall constitute a violation of this certificate of appropriateness and may result in termination of the approval.

4. If the signs are relit with LED lighting, the maximum luminance level between sunrise and sunset for the signs shall not exceed 5,000 nits and between sunset and sunrise the maximum luminance shall not exceed 500 nits. In addition, the signs shall be equipped with an automatic dimmer control or other mechanism that automatically controls the sign's brightness to comply with this requirement.
5. The Federal wall sign be retained on the south elevation tower.

**Attachments:**

- Saint Anthony Falls District map and aerals
- Letter to council member and neighborhood
- Letter from Downtown Minneapolis Neighborhood Association
- Project narrative, works scope, photos, drawings, rehabilitation specs, and certificate of appropriateness findings