On June 7, 2023, the Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission (“Commission”) conducted, in the above referenced matter, a public hearing in accordance with the statutes and case law pertaining to quasi-judicial proceedings for the issuance of historic sign classifications. During the hearing, Michelle McCullough, Historic Resources Officer, presented the staff report, findings, and recommendation. Christy Cox Spencer, applicant, and William Spencer appeared to present testimony and evidence in support of the application. No one appeared to present testimony and evidence in opposition to the application.

After presentation of all testimony and evidence, the Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission, based upon the evidence presented in the application and during the hearing, finds that, pursuant to Section 6.5.1(F)(5) of the Unified Development Ordinances (“UDO”), the Arby’s sign to be located at 1355 North Martin Luther King Jr. Drive meets all three (3) required findings of fact, as follows:

1) The sign bears a close resemblance to the original sign.

2) The sign was installed in 1968, fifty-five (55) years ago, therefore was erected twenty-five (25) years prior to application for classification.

3) The sign meets six (6) of the criteria for classification:

   a. The sign bears a national logo that is unique to the establishment and is a remnant of an advertising program that is no longer used by the parent company. The Arby’s sign was installed ca. 1968 at the corner of Knollwood Street and South Stratford Road as part of Arby’s national ad campaign using their trademark cowboy hat as the logo, which became the restaurant’s trademark when it was established in 1964 due to the popularity of westerns at that time and was updated to a more modern looking cowboy hat in 1969.

   b. The sign possesses unique characteristics that incorporates materials, design, and craftsmanship not commonly found in newer signs. The Arby’s sign was constructed of metal with fluorescent bulbs surrounding the perimeter, as well as neon that surrounds the interior letters. The large neon lite cowboy hat was iconic and one of the last major neon sign campaigns by a major fast-food corporation. Neon was first introduced in 1910 by George Claude, a French engineer, at the Paris Motor Show. In 1923, Claude brought neon signs to the United States. The popularity of neon signs in the United States was from the 1920s until the 1960s, waning in popularity and use due to safety concerns, inefficiency, and expense.
c. The sign is unique, notably aesthetic, and creative and makes a significant contribution as a work of art. This is one of the last known signs remaining of this design and style. It is a unique and actually aesthetic sign because of its design, size, scale, and materials.

d. The sign is recognized as a popular focal point within the community. The sign stood at its original location until May 1, 2023, when it was removed due to the closure of the restaurant. Neither the new owner nor any party associated with the restaurant chain and/or franchise wanted the sign. The owner had planned to dispose of it as scrap metal and wanted the sign removed immediately. There was an immediate public outcry to save this iconic sign proving that it was an important contribution to the community’s history.

e. The sign is characteristic of a specific time period. As mentioned above this large, neon sign demonstrates the last era of popularity for signs of this design. In the 1970s there was a movement towards signs that were more affordable to maintain and light.

f. The sign exhibits unique and rare characteristics that enhance the streetscape and the community at large. The public outcry and comments, at the time of removal, show that this iconic sign played a large part history of the community, especially in the days of “cruising” on Stratford Road. Nationally, this original cowboy hat sign campaign is known to be one of the best logos and signs for fast food campaigns that ever existed, leaving a trail of memories in the path of brightly lit neon bulbs.

Based on the preceding findings, the Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission hereby approves application number HS2023-001 and grants the classification of the Arby’s sign to be located at 1355 North Martin Luther King Jr. Drive as a Historic Sign.

This the seventh day of June, 2023.

Mary Catherine Berry, Chair
Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission