

**Date** April 18, 2022

**RESOLUTION SETTING HEARING ON REQUEST FROM KG STORE 543, LLC FOR DESIGNATION OF THE “CRESCENT CHEVROLET INTERNALLY-LIT ACRYLIC SIGN” LOCATED AT 555 17<sup>TH</sup> STREET AS A LOCAL LANDMARK**

**WHEREAS**, KG Store 543, LLC, Owner of real property formerly known as Crescent Chevrolet or Bill Jensen’s Crescent Chevrolet, located at 555 17<sup>th</sup> St., (the “Property”) have made application to designate the “Crescent Chevrolet Internally-Lit Acrylic Sign” thereon as a local landmark; and

**WHEREAS**, the Property is legally described as follows:

Sign is located on Lot 8 within the following larger parcel:

A PORTION OF AREA "B" IN THE CRESCENT CHEVROLET ALTA/ACSM LAND TITLE SURVEY FILED IN BOOK 12622, PAGE 65 BEING MORE PARTICULARLY DESCRIBED AS FOLLOWS: THE EAST 1/2 OF LOT TWO (2) AND ALL LOTS THREE (3), FOUR (4), FIVE (5), SIX (6), SEVEN, (7) AND EIGHT (8); AND ALL THE EAST AND WEST ALLEY LYING BETWEEN LINDEN STREET AND HIGH STREET EXTENDING FROM THE WEST LINE OF 16TH STREET TO THE EAST LINE OF 17TH STREET; ALL IN BLOCK "B" IN SUBDIVISION OF LOT NO. 6 OF THE PURSLEY ESTATE CONTAINING 13.06 ACRES, AN OFFICIAL PLAT, NOW INCLUDED IN AND FORMING A PART OF THE CITY OF DES MOINES, POLK COUNTY, IOWA.

A PORTION OF AREA "B" IN THE CRESCENT CHEVROLET ALTA/ACSM LAND TITLE SURVEY FILED IN BOOK 12622, PAGE 65 BEING MORE PARTICULARLY DESCRIBED AS FOLLOWS: LOT ONE (1) AND THE WEST 1/2 OF LOT TWO (2) IN BLOCK "B" IN SUBDIVISION OF LOT NO. 6 OF THE PURSLEY ESTATE CONTAINING 13.06 ACRES, AN OFFICIAL PLAT, NOW INCLUDED IN AND FORMING A PART OF THE CITY OF DES MOINES, POLK COUNTY, IOWA.

AREA "A" IN THE CRESCENT CHEVROLET ALTA/ACSM LAND TITLE SURVEY FILED IN BOOK 12622, PAGE 65 BEING MORE PARTICULARLY DESCRIBED AS FOLLOWS: THE NORTH 72 FEET OF LOT ONE (1) AND THE WEST HALF OF LOT TWO (2) IN BLOCK "D" IN SUBDIVISION OF LOT NO. 6 OF THE PURSLEY ESTATE CONTAINING 13.06 ACRES, AN OFFICIAL PLAT (EXCEPT THAT PART DEEDED TO THE CITY OF DES MOINES RECORDED IN BOOK 2583 AT PAGE 87), NOW INCLUDED IN AND FORMING A PART OF THE CITY OF DES MOINES, POLK COUNTY, IOWA.

AND

THAT PART OF 16TH STREET RIGHT OF WAY LYING BETWEEN BLOCKS B AND C, THAT PART OF LINDEN STREET RIGHT OF WAY LYING BETWEEN BLOCKS B, C AND D, AND THAT PART OF LOTS 2, 3, 8 AND 9, OF BLOCK D, ALL IN SUBDIVISION OF LOT NO. 6 OF THE PURSLEY ESTATE, AN OFFICIAL PLAT, AND A PART OF LINDEN STREET LYING SOUTH OF



**Roll Call Number**

**Agenda Item Number**

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**Date** April 18, 2022

BLOCK 3 OF GRIFFITHS SUBDIVISON, AN OFFICIAL PLAT, NOW INCLUDED IN AND FORMING A PART OF THE CITY OF DES MOINES, POLK COUNTY, IOWA; THAT PART OF 16TH STREET RIGHT OF WAY LYING BETWEEN LOTS 2 AND 3 AND THAT PART OF LOTS 1, 2 AND 3, ALL IN LINDEN, AN OFFICIAL PLAT NOW INCLUDED IN AND FORMING A PART OF THE CITY OF DES MOINES, POLK COUNTY, IOWA.

**WHEREAS**, on April 5, 2022, the Landmark Review Board met to consider the Owner’s application and the Board’s consensus was to recommend that the “Crescent Chevrolet Internally-Lit Acrylic Sign” be designated a local Landmark; and

**WHEREAS**, the City Plan and Zoning Commission has advised that at a public hearing held on April 7 2021, its members voted 13-0 in support of a motion to recommend **APPROVAL** of a request from KG Store 543, LLC (Owner), to designate as a Local Landmark the “Crescent Chevrolet Internally-Lit Acrylic Sign”; and

**WHEREAS**, the Des Moines Municipal Code Section 58-60 requires a public hearing be held before the City Council to consider this application.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, by the City Council of the City of Des Moines, Iowa, as follows:

1. That the attached communication from the Plan and Zoning Commission is hereby received and filed.
2. That the meeting of the City Council at which the proposed landmark designation application is to be considered, and at which time the City Council will hear both those who oppose and those who favor the proposal, shall be held at the Council Chambers, City Hall, 400 Robert D. Ray Drive, Des Moines, Iowa, at 5:00 p.m. on May 9, 2022.
3. That the City Clerk is hereby authorized and directed to cause notice of said proposal in the accompanying form to be given by publication once, not less than seven (7) days and not more than twenty (20) days before the date of hearing, all as specified in Section 362.3 of the Iowa Code. The City Clerk is instructed to provide this notice including information about participation in the electronic meeting as indicated above.

(Council Communication No. 22- )

Moved by \_\_\_\_\_ to adopt. Second by \_\_\_\_\_.



**Roll Call Number**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Agenda Item Number**

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**Date** April 18, 2022

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

/s/ Gary D. Goudelock  
Gary D. Goudelock  
Assistant City Attorney

COUNCIL ACTION	YEAS	NAYS	PASS	ABSENT
COWNIE				
BOESEN				
GATTO				
MANDELBAUM				
SHEUMAKER				
VOSS				
WESTERGAARD				
TOTAL				

MOTION CARRIED

APPROVED

\_\_\_\_\_ Mayor

**CERTIFICATE**

I, P. KAY CMELIK, City Clerk of said City hereby certify that at a meeting of the City Council of said City of Des Moines, held on the above date, among other proceedings the above was adopted.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my seal the day and year first above written.

\_\_\_\_\_ City Clerk



April 12, 2022

Communication from the City Plan and Zoning Commission advising that at their April 7, 2022 meeting, the following action was taken regarding a request from KG Store 543, LLC (owner), represented by Aubrie Gould, for designation of the Crescent Chevrolet Rooftop Sign at 555 17<sup>th</sup> Street as a local Landmark.

**COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:**

After public hearing, the members voted 9-0 as follows:

Commission Action:	Yes	Nays	Pass	Absent
Francis Boggus	X			
Dan Drendel				X
Leah Rudolphi	X			
Dory Briles	X			
Abby Chungath	X			
Kayla Berkson	X			
Chris Draper	X			
Jann Freed	X			
Todd Garner				X
Johnny Alcivar				X
Justyn Lewis	X			
Carolyn Jenison				X
William Page				X
Andrew Lorentzen				X
Emily Webb	X			

**APPROVAL** of the "Crescent Chevrolet Internally Lit Acrylic Sign" property to be designated as a local Landmark.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION TO THE P&Z COMMISSION**

Staff recommends that the "Crescent Chevrolet Internally Lit Acrylic Sign" property be designated as a local Landmark.

## STAFF REPORT TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION

### I. GENERAL INFORMATION

1. **Case Overview:** The subject property is located along 17<sup>th</sup> Street between Ingersoll Avenue and High Street. The sign is located on the roof top, at the southwest corner of the former Crescent Chevrolet dealership building and faces Ingersoll Avenue. The building is currently under renovation and will include the future location of Big Grove Brewery on the east side. The sign was constructed and mounted in 1968.

On April 5, 2022, the Landmark Review Board shall review the recommendation that the "Crescent Chevrolet" sign be designated a local Landmark. The Board is comprised of the Historic Preservation Commission and the Urban Design Review Board. The Board meets as needed to review nominations and proposed alternations to landmarks not located within a local historic district. An update on the LRB's decision will be provided at the P&Z meeting.

The Landmark Review Board and the Plan and Zoning Commission recommendations will be forwarded to the City Council for review in accordance with Chapter 58-60 and Chapter 82-40 of the City Code. If the sign is designated as a Landmark then any alteration, new construction, or demolition would be subject to review by the Landmark Review Board and require approval by the City Council.

2. **Size of Site:** 1.377 acres.
3. **Existing Zoning (site):** "MX2" Mixed Use District.
4. **Adjacent Land Use and Zoning:**
  - North** – "RX1"; Uses is commercial.
  - South** – "MX2"; Use is commercial.
  - East** – "MX2"; Use is commercial.
  - West** – "MX2"; Use is commercial.
5. **Applicable Recognized Neighborhood(s):** The subject building is located in Sherman Hill Neighborhood. All recognized neighborhoods were notified of the meeting by mailing of the Final Agenda on April 1, 2022. All agendas are mailed to the primary contact(s) designated by the recognized neighborhood association to the City of Des Moines Neighborhood Development Division. The Sherman Hill Neighborhood Association mailings were sent to Angela Broughton-Romain, 1620 Pleasant Street, Suite 204, Des Moines, IA 50314.
6. **PlanDSM Land Use Plan Designation:** Downtown Mixed Use.
7. **Applicable Regulations:** Pursuant to Chapter 82-40(a) of the City Code, the Plan and Zoning Commission is an advisory body to the City Council and is a key factor in the growth and development of the city. Therefore, the Commission reviews all local Landmark and Historic District nominations in accordance with the Historic

Preservation Ordinance and for compliance with the City's Comprehensive Plan and forwards a recommendation to the City Council.

## II. APPLICABLE SECTIONS OF THE CITY CODE

Section 58-56 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance contains the landmark purpose statement. Section 58-58 contains the criteria for the designation of a landmark and Section 58-60 establishes the nomination process.

### **Sec. 58-56. Purpose.**

It is declared as a matter of public policy that the protection, enhancement, perpetuation and use of improvements of special character or special historical or aesthetic interest or value is a public necessity and is required in the interest of health, prosperity, safety and welfare of the people. The purpose of this article is to:

- (1) Effect and accomplish the protection, enhancement and perpetuation of such improvements which represent or reflect elements of the city's cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history;
- (2) Safeguard the city's historic, aesthetic and cultural heritage, as embodied and reflected in such improvements;
- (3) Stabilize and improve property values;
- (4) Foster civic pride in the beauty and accomplishments of the past;
- (5) Protect and enhance the city's attractions to residents, tourists, and visitors and serve as a support and stimulus to business and industry;
- (6) Strengthen the economy of the city; and
- (7) Promote the use of landmarks for the education, pleasure and welfare of the people of the city.

### **Sec. 58-58. Designation criteria.**

- (a) For purpose of this article, a landmark or landmark site designation may be placed on any site, natural or improved, including any building, improvement or structure located thereon that possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association and that:
  - (1) Is significant in American history, architecture, archaeology and culture;
  - (2) Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;
  - (3) Is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;
  - (4) Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents

a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or

- (5) Has yielded or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.
- (b) Ordinarily cemeteries, birthplaces, or graves of historical figures; properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes; structures that have been moved from their original locations; reconstructed historic buildings; properties primarily commemorative in nature; and properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years shall not be considered eligible for the landmark designation. However, such properties will qualify if they fall within the following categories:
  - (1) A religious property deriving primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance.
  - (2) A building or structure removed from its original location which is significant primarily for architectural value, or which is the surviving structure most importantly associated with a historic person or event.
  - (3) A birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance, if there is no appropriate site or building directly associated with his or her productive life.
  - (4) A cemetery which derives its primary significance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events.
  - (5) A reconstructed building when accurately executed in a suitable environment and presented in a dignified manner as part of a restoration master plan, and when no other building or structure with the same association has survived.
  - (6) A property primarily commemorative in nature, if design, age, tradition or symbolic value has invested it with its own historical significance.
  - (7) A property achieving significance within the past 50 years, if it is of exceptional importance.

#### **Sec. 58-60. Procedures.**

- (a) The historic preservation commission shall consider the nomination of landmarks and landmark sites located within historic districts, and make a report and recommendation on such nomination to the city plan and zoning commission and city council as provided below. The landmark review board shall consider the nomination of landmarks and landmark sites located outside historic districts and make a report and recommendation on such nomination to the city plan and zoning commission and city council as provided below.
- (b) Notice that an application for designation of a landmark or landmark site is being considered shall be given to the owner of the parcel on which the proposed landmark is situated or which is part of the proposed landmark site in accordance with the following:
  - (1) Such notice shall be served by certified mail, addressed to the owner at his or her last known address as such appears in the records of the county treasurer's office, or if there is no name on such records, such notice may be served by regular mail addressed to "owner" at the street address of the property in question.

- (2) Such owner shall have the right to confer with the historic preservation commission or landmark review board, as applicable, prior to final action by the commission or board on the application.
  - (3) The historic preservation commission or landmark review board, as applicable, may, in addition, hold the public hearing of the proposed designation by giving notice as required by law.
- (c) After such investigation by the historic preservation commission or landmark review board as is deemed necessary, but in no case more than 60 days after the receipt of the complete application, the application for designation shall be recommended for approval or disapproval. Such recommendation shall be in writing and signed by the chair of the historic preservation commission or landmark review board, as applicable, and shall state the reasons for recommending approval or disapproval. The recommendation may limit itself to the proposed landmark or landmark site as described in the application or may include modifications thereof. Such recommendation shall be forwarded to and filed with the plan and zoning commission, within five days after making such recommendation.
- (d) Upon receipt of such recommendation, the plan and zoning commission shall schedule a public hearing at a specific place, date and time, not more than 30 days after such receipt, by giving notice as required by law.
- (e) Within 30 days after the public hearing, the plan and zoning commission shall forward such application to the city council, together with the recommendation of the historic preservation commission or landmark review board. The plan and zoning commission may adopt the recommendation of the historic preservation commission or landmark review board as its own or may prepare a written recommendation of its own. The plan and zoning commission may limit itself to the proposed landmark or landmark site or may include modifications thereof. If the modification requires an additional public hearing, the plan and zoning commission shall hold such hearing before forwarding the application to the city council.
- (f) Upon receipt of such recommendation, the council shall schedule a public hearing to consider the recommendation at a specific place, date and time, not more than 30 days after such receipt, by giving notice as required by law.
- (g) The city council, after public hearing, may approve, approve with modification, or disapprove the recommendation of the plan and zoning commission by a majority vote of its membership. If the plan and zoning commission shall have failed to act within the time limit set forth in this section, the city council may, nevertheless, approve, approve with modification, or disapprove the proposed landmark or landmark site as originally proposed or modified by a majority vote of its membership.

## II. ANALYSIS

1. **Landmark Nomination Criteria:** A nomination must demonstrate that the subject building or site possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association and meets one or more of the following criterion.



- (1) Is significant in American history, architecture, archaeology and culture;
- (2) Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;
- (3) Is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;
- (4) Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- (5) Has yielded or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

The nomination suggests the building meets Criteria 1 and 4. The following points from the submitted form make the case for how the sign “is significant in American history, architecture, archaeology and culture” and “embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction.”

- The sign is an authentic post-war era internally lit acrylic panel advertisement original to the site and was installed in 1968.
- The sign location is a one of the last remaining structures from the 39-year long location of Crescent Chevrolet, which closed this location in 2007 as the last remaining ‘new vehicle’ dealership operating in the downtown Des Moines “Auto Row.”
- Crescent Chevrolet operated from approximately 1931 to approximately 2007, a length of about 76 years, and was an early Chevy dealership in Polk County, eventually advertising themselves as Polk County’s oldest Chevy dealership.
- This sign is of a common design and mounting for the 1950’s and 1960’s era of development in cities. Des Moines featured multiple such signs throughout downtown and nearby areas. However, as of today, this sign is one of the few remaining commercial rooftop designs, along with the 1963 Travelers Insurance neon sign and the Colonial Bread neon sign remain.

2. **PlanDSM Creating Our Tomorrow:** The PlanDSM Comprehensive Plan was approved on April 25, 2016. The nomination is supported by numerous PlanDSM Goals and Policies including:

**Land Use Goal 6**

**Recognize the value of Des Moines’ historic building stock and landscapes and ensure their preservation**

LU 35: Encourage expansion and establishment of National Historic Districts, local historic districts, and local landmarks.

**Community Character and Neighborhood Goal 1**

**Embrace the distinct character offered in each of Des Moines’ neighborhoods.**

CCN1: Celebrate the City’s culture and diversity through the creation of vibrant

neighborhood nodes and corridors.

**Community Character and Neighborhood Goal 4**

**Protect Des Moines' historic and cultural assets that contribute to neighborhood and community identity.**

CCN25: Partner with the historic preservation community to promote Des Moines' rich history through education and outreach on historic structures, districts, and landscapes.

**SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION**

Emily Webb asked if any member of the public or commission desired to speak on the item. No one requested to speak.

**COMMISSION ACTION:**

Dory Briles made motion to recommend that the "Crescent Chevrolet Internally Lit Acrylic Sign" property to be designated as a local Landmark.

Motion passed: 9-0

Respectfully submitted,



Bert Drost, AICP  
Deputy Planning & Urban Design Administrator

BAD:tjh

**IDENTIFICATION:**

**SITE NAME** Crescent Chevrolet Rooftop Sign, 555 17<sup>th</sup> Street

**LEGAL DESCRIPTION** Sign is located on Lot 8 within the following larger parcel:

A portion of Area "B" in the Crescent Chevrolet ALTA/ACSM Land Title Survey filed in Book 12622, Page 65 being more particularly described as follows: The East 1/2 of Lot two (2) and all Lots Three (3), Four (4), Five (5), Six (6), Seven, (7) and Eight (8); and all the east and west alley lying between Linden Street and High Street extending from the west line of 16th Street to the east line of 17th Street; all in Block "B" in Subdivision of Lot No. 6 of the Pursley Estate containing 13.06 acres, an Official Plat, now included in and forming a part of the City of Des Moines, Polk County, Iowa.

A portion of Area "B" in the Crescent Chevrolet ALTA/ACSM Land Title Survey filed in Book 12622, Page 65 being more particularly described as follows: Lot One (1) and the West 1/2 of Lot Two (2) in Block "B" in Subdivision of Lot No. 6 of the Pursley Estate containing 13.06 acres, an Official Plat, now included in and forming a part of the City of Des Moines, Polk County, Iowa.

Area "A" in the Crescent Chevrolet ALTA/ACSM Land Title Survey filed in Book 12622, Page 65 being more particularly described as follows: The North 72 feet of Lot One (1) and the West Half of Lot Two (2) in Block "D" in Subdivision of Lot No. 6 of the Pursley Estate containing 13.06 acres, an Official Plat (Except that part deeded to the City of Des Moines recorded in Book 2583 at Page 87), now included in and forming a part of the City of Des Moines, Polk County, Iowa.

AND

That part of 16th Street Right of Way lying between Blocks B and C, that part of Linden Street Right of Way lying between Blocks B, C and D, and that part of Lots 2, 3, 8 and 9, of Block D, all in Subdivision of Lot No. 6 of the Pursley Estate, an Official Plat, and a part of Linden Street lying south of Block 3 of Griffiths Subdivison, an Official Plat, now included in and forming a part of the City of Des Moines, Polk County, Iowa; that part of 16th Street Right of Way lying between Lots 2 and 3 and that part of Lots 1, 2 and 3, all in Linden, an Official Plat now included in and forming a part of the City of Des Moines, Polk County, Iowa.

**OWNER(S) NAME** KG Store 543, LLC

**OWNER(S) SIGNATURE** \_\_\_\_\_  
(signed owner's letter of support or petition can be attached in lieu of signature here)

**OWNER(S) ADDRESS** Krause+, 1459 Grand Avenue, Des Moines, IA 50309-3005  
(street address) (city) (state) (zip)

**CATEGORY:**

**STRUCTURAL/ARCHITECTURAL**  **LANDSCAPE**   
**ARCHEOLOGICAL**  **CULTURAL**

**COMPONENTS.** This single-faced projecting rooftop sign features metal-framed internally illuminated acrylic-faced sign cabinets with adhered plastic bump-out letters in two rows. The sign is comprised of two main elements: 1) The word "CRESCENT" spelled out in large letters located within contiguous horizontally aligned light boxes in a rectangular shape (measuring roughly 28 feet wide by 5.5 feet high), and 2) the smaller word "CHEVROLET" affixed to a polygonal lighted sign cabinet in the shape of the slanted bowtie logo nameplate design used by the auto maker (measuring at its greatest 17 feet wide by 5 feet high). Larger red letters spelling out "CRESCENT," and smaller blue letters spell out "CHEVROLET. (The second letter E in "CHEVROLET" has broken and part of the letter is missing.) The sign faces are white translucent acrylic, and "bowtie" frame has three sections of acrylic. The dimensional plastic capital letters in two different sans serif fonts are individually mounted, each letter centered and cemented to the sign face. The frames are painted to match the color of the letters: red for the larger "CRESCENT" frame and blue for the smaller "CHEVROLET" frame. The sides and backs of the cabinets are painted white, and the cabinets are affixed to white painted steel scaffolding. White painted metal conduit provides power connection for the interior fluorescent lighting.

**USE** (present) Local landmark (past) Crescent Chevrolet auto dealership, operating here 1968-2007, with sign installed in 1968.

**DESCRIPTION:**

**DATE OF CONSTRUCTION** 1968

**ARCHITECT/BUILDER** The sign manufacturer is unknown, but likely was one of the several Des Moines sign companies active at the time.

**BUILDING TYPE:**

Single-family dwelling  Industrial  Other institutional  Religious   
Multiple-family dwelling  Educational  Public  Agricultural   
Commercial  Commercial Sign

**EXTERIOR WALLS:** clapboard  stone  brick  board and batten   
shingles  stucco  other  Sign is of metal and acrylic

**STRUCTURAL SYSTEM:** wood frame with interlocking joints  masonry load-bearing walls  wood frame with light members (balloon frame)  iron frame   
steel frame with curtain walls  reinforced concrete  other Steel frame

**CONDITION:** excellent \_\_\_ good X fair X deteriorated \_\_\_

**INTEGRITY:** original site X moved--if so, when \_\_\_\_\_ from where \_\_\_

Information on alterations, additions (with dates & architect, if known) and any other notable features of building/site: This sign was designed as an on-premise rooftop internally lit sign for the 1968 two-story Crescent Chevrolet auto dealership, noted by former owner Bill Jensen as the last two-story dealership building constructed in downtown Des Moines. Crescent Chevrolet, established in 1931 and noted as Polk County's oldest Chevrolet dealer, was one of 30-some dealers selling new vehicles downtown at the post-war height of Des Moines's "auto row." The dealership with its prominent sign was the last new auto dealer in downtown and the sign remained lit at night throughout the dealership's tenure. The dealership was sold in 2007 and the business relocated to a new suburban location. The sign has been unused since circa 2007, and as such has some evidence of deferred maintenance including faded paint, rust, older electrical components, and a damaged letter E in the smaller font spelling out "CHEVROLET."

**RELATED OUTBUILDINGS AND PROPERTY:** barn \_\_\_ other farm structures \_\_\_ carriage house \_\_\_ garage \_\_\_ privy \_\_\_ other N/A

**SURROUNDINGS OF THE SITE:** open land \_\_\_ woodland \_\_\_ scattered outbuildings \_\_\_ commercial X industrial \_\_\_ residential \_\_\_ densely built-up X other \_\_\_\_\_

Prepared by Jennifer Irsfeld James, MAHP Date 10/21-1/22

Address 4209 Kingman Blvd., Des Moines, IA 50311

Telephone (515) 250-7196 Email jenjames123@gmail.com

Organization on behalf of Krause+

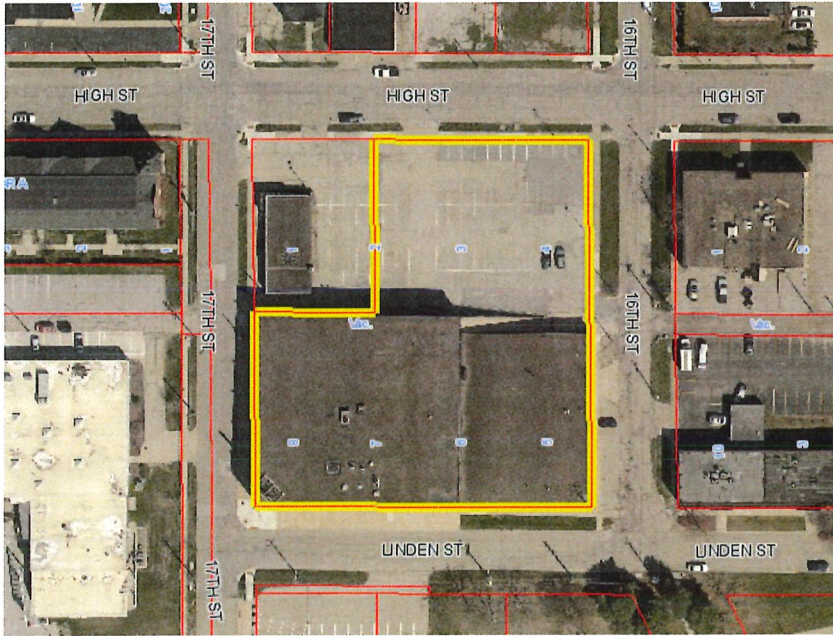


Figure: Polk County Assessor map showing location of sign at southwest corner of the property (on Lot 8 within the former Crescent Chevrolet parcel). Top of page is north. (Polk County Assessor, 2021)



Figure: The Crescent Chevrolet sign seen looking northeast from 17<sup>th</sup> Street. (All photos by Jennifer Irsfeld James, 2021, unless other noted)



*Figure: The sign as viewed looking east from 17<sup>th</sup> Street.*



*Figure: View of the Crescent Chevrolet rooftop sign looking north from Linden Street.*

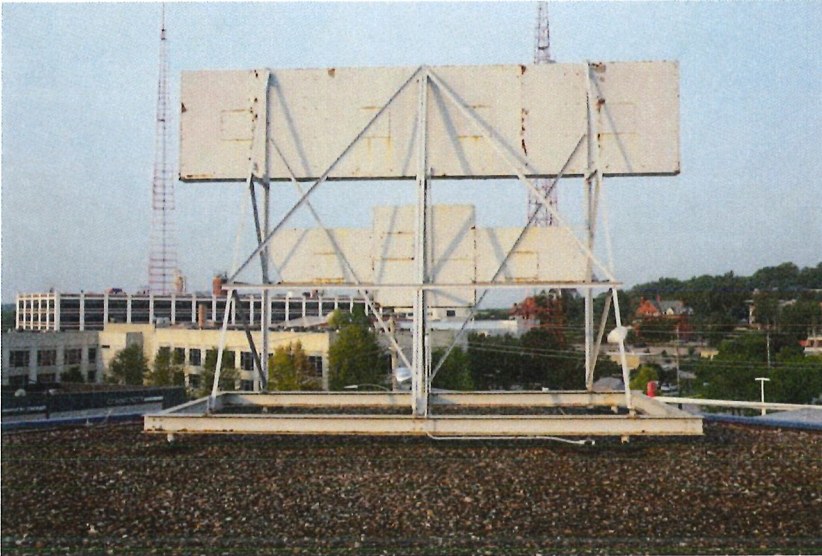


*Figure: The Crescent Chevrolet sign is located at the southwest corner of the former dealership building, looking north from Linden Street.*

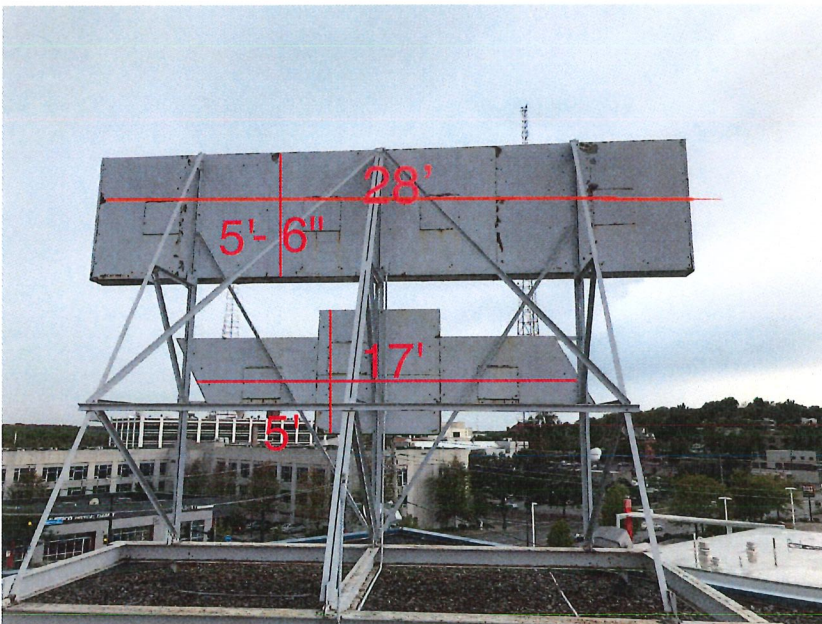


*Figure: Detail of the sign face looking northeast from the rooftop.*





*Figure: The view from the rooftop looking southwest at the rear of the sign shows the metal structure.*



*Figure: The two-tier Crescent Chevrolet sign dimensions vary, as measured by Beal Derkenne Construction. (BDC, 2021)*

**SIGNIFICANCE:** (Indicate all sources of information for all statements)

The internally lit Crescent Chevrolet commercial rooftop sign is mounted on the southeast corner of the former Crescent Chevrolet dealership building, 555 17<sup>th</sup> Street, Des Moines. The modular rooftop sign was installed in 1968, the same year that the two-story masonry and concrete auto dealership building opened.<sup>1</sup> The Crescent Chevrolet sign is a rare-surviving rooftop sign in the Des Moines central business district, which once boasted a plethora of rooftop commercial signs advertising automobiles, hotels, insurance, grocery stores, gasoline, bread, and ice cream, to name but a few.<sup>2</sup> Many rooftop signs in Des Moines have been lost over time due to sign restrictions, weather events, business changes, and loss of business buildings. The Crescent Chevrolet rooftop sign is representative of post-war internally lit acrylic panel sign technology, which replaced neon signs. The two-tiered sign crowning the roof remained lit at night until at least the 2007 closure of the 75-some-year-old dealership, which the *Des Moines Register* identified as the last new vehicle dealership operating in the downtown Des Moines auto row.<sup>3</sup> The Crescent Chevrolet rooftop sign remains as a potent reminder of downtown Des Moines's commercial auto row heritage.



Figure: The August 1968 opening of the new Crescent Chevrolet dealership, with its rooftop "Crescent" sign, was highlighted in with this photograph in the *Des Moines Register*.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jensen, William "Bill". informant interview, 2013..

<sup>2</sup> Commercial signs are defined here as generally being communication devices located on-premises (at the business locations being advertised), with the purpose of said signs to identify, orient, inform, and/or persuade—in contrast to off-premises commercial billboards that advertise without direct connection to the business location, as noted by cultural geographer John A. Jakle and historian Keith A. Sculle in *Signs in America's Auto Age: Signatures of Landscape and Place*, pp 32-35, 162.

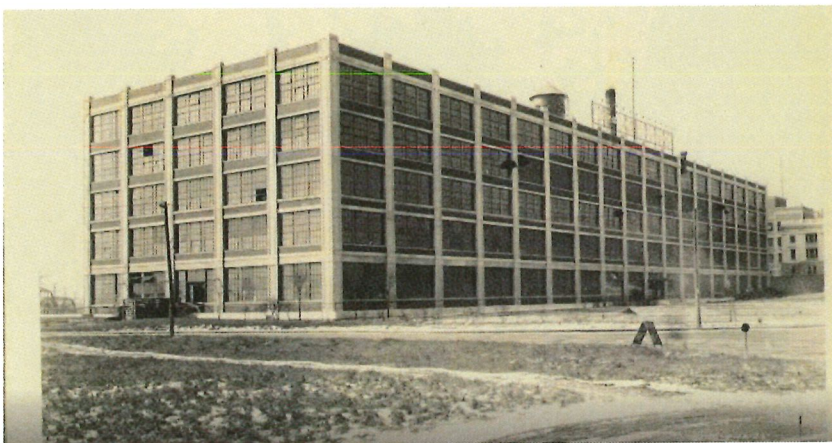
<sup>3</sup> *Des Moines Register*, "Crescent Chevrolet closing doors," August 23, 2007: D1.

<sup>4</sup> *Des Moines Register*, December 8, 1968: Commerce.

### ***Rooftop Commercial Signs: Historical Summary***

The 20<sup>th</sup> century need for eye-catching commercial signage was tied in with the very objects sold at Crescent Chevrolet—cars and trucks, which moved at a faster pace than pedestrians and horse-driven traffic, as noted in *Signs in America's Auto Age: Signatures of Landscape and Place* by cultural geographer John A. Jakle and historian Keith A. Sculle and architect Martin Treu's *Signs, Streets, and Storefronts: A history of American commercial art and architecture*.<sup>5</sup>

Signage visible from behind the windshield of a traveling vehicle required easy readability and contrast without glare, in both daylight and nighttime and all-weather conditions. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Des Moines sign companies advertised metal roof signs and electric signs by the 1910s.<sup>6</sup> Within a four-block radius of the Crescent Chevrolet 17<sup>th</sup> Street location in downtown Des Moines, there stood interwar-era roof-top signs including one atop the large Ford assembly plant (sign now nonextant) and another atop the Meadow Gold ice cream plant (plant and sign now nonextant), both on Grand Avenue between 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> streets. (See figures below.) By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, neon and internally lit signs competed for attention in Des Moines as well as other U.S. communities. Eventually, internally lit signs prevailed: They relied on break-resistant lightweight translucent plastic panels, which produced a softer, diffused light as compared to the harsher light of neon signs, which translated to easier readability, among other benefits.<sup>7</sup>



*Figure: A 1925 view of the Ford assembly plant shows an early rooftop sign visible at the south roof edge, view looking southwest from Grand Avenue. This was a typical sign type found throughout downtown including the auto row district. The building remains extant, but the sign is nonextant. This location is now Des Moines schools Central Campus, located about three blocks southwest of the Crescent Chevrolet sign.<sup>8</sup>*

<sup>5</sup> Jakle and Sculle: 19; also Treu, Chapter 3: "Visions and Velocity," 80+.

<sup>6</sup> Such as *Des Moines Register*, Acme Sign ad, April 15, 1914: 12

<sup>7</sup> American Sign Museum; Rohm & Haas Co.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Ford Museum.



*Figure: This 1939 view is taken with the photographer's back to the Ford factory looking east down Grand Avenue, with a rooftop sign for Meadow Gold ice cream visible on the left. This location is about two blocks southwest of the Crescent Chevrolet sign; the Meadow Gold building and sign are now both nonextant.<sup>9</sup>*



*Figure: Rooftop signage in the downtown Des Moines central business district once included internally lit acrylic examples employed by auto dealerships such as seen in this circa-1969 photograph of the George Walker Ford dealership, located west of the Crescent Chevrolet Building and Rooftop Sign; these signs are non-extant.<sup>10</sup>*

By the 1960s, commercial buildings in the City of Des Moines bristled with signs, mounted on roofs, walls, poles, and monuments. Some citizens, city leaders, and business representatives debated strengthening sign regulations in the late 1960s to limit signs by height, dimension, location, and other such aspects. A controversial 1969 ordinance “intended to reduce unsightly sign clutter in the city,” as noted by the *Des Moines Register*, regulated new signs and established an amortization schedule for phasing out non-conforming existing signs.<sup>11</sup> Eight local sign companies and two sign owners challenged the sign ordinance, which the

<sup>9</sup> State Historical Society of Iowa.

<sup>10</sup> Photography courtesy of Jim McCormick, posted to Lost Des Moines.

<sup>11</sup> *The Des Moines Register*, “Propose New Sign Removal Policy in D.M.,” August 3, 1967: 1; “Loop Area Shops Fight Sign Control,” February 23, 1968: 1; “Sign, Housing Ordinances Clear 2<sup>nd</sup> City Council Hurdle,” June 3, 1969: 7.

district court upheld in 1972.<sup>12</sup> After the court ruling, signs were removed over time to conform to the ordinance; in addition, other signs were lost due to weather-related damage, businesses moving, changing sign design tastes, and demolition of older buildings in the post-interstate freeway era. Within a decade, most of the non-conforming older commercial signs in Des Moines had been removed, along with many billboards and other types of signs, according to a 1982 *Des Moines Tribune* newspaper story about proposed state legislation intended to weaken the city's sign regulations.<sup>13</sup>

Today, commercial rooftop signs of 50 years or older in the Des Moines central business district are rare survivors. A review of historic photographs located numerous rooftop signs prior to 1990, while a windshield survey of downtown rooftops located only one extant commercial rooftop sign 50 years of age or older, the 1963 Travelers Insurance Companies neon sign, which combines the words "The Travelers" with an umbrella image, mounted on top of the Insurance Exchange Building, 505 Fifth Avenue at Grand Avenue, the one-time location of the Travelers Insurance Co. Des Moines office.<sup>14</sup> A downtown-adjacent rooftop sign that is locally landmarked is the Colonial Bread neon sign, which spells out the tagline, "Colonial / is good Bread / Try it!"; it is located on top of former bakery building, 1225 Second Avenue.

### ***Crescent Chevrolet: Historical Summary***

Founded in 1911 with manufacturing in Michigan, the Chevrolet Motor Co. automobiles quickly built a following. In 1918, Chevy trucks were first offered and the company became a division of General Motors<sup>15</sup> In a crowded field of early autos, Chevrolet literally made its mark with a distinct branding logo—a bowtie-shaped nameplate in use by 1913.<sup>16</sup> Crescent Chevrolet began in Des Moines in 1931 as the first Chevrolet dealership in Polk County. By the midcentury, there were at least two other new car Chevrolet dealerships operating within the downtown Des Moines commercial business district on both sides of the river. Early on, Crescent Chevrolet operated from a location on Keosauqua Way at Fifth Avenue.

The 1960s central Iowa interstate freeway construction (Interstates 235, 35, and 80), which was completed in 1968 through the Des Moines metropolitan area, accelerated the relocation of car dealerships and other downtown businesses to the outer fringes of the city and adjoining suburbs. In 1967, Des Moines-based Bob Brown Chevrolet relocated from the vicinity of Ingersoll Avenue and 16<sup>th</sup> Street to Merle Hay Road's emerging suburban "auto mile."<sup>17</sup> This move created an opportunity for Crescent Chevrolet: In June 1967, Crescent leadership announced plans to build a new \$1 million two-story dealership building located on nearly a full block at the northern edge of the downtown auto row, 555 17<sup>th</sup> Street. Crescent owner J.R. Piggott consolidated the parcel at 555 17<sup>th</sup> Street, removing more than a dozen houses and apartment buildings. Crescent Chevrolet advertised in August 1968 that after 37 years at Fifth and Keo avenues, the business had moved its new car sales, parts, and service departments, plus added a large parking lot—to north of Ingersoll at 555 17<sup>th</sup> Street (sometimes referred to as 17<sup>th</sup> and Ingersoll), as will be discussed further in the next section.<sup>18</sup> The new Crescent dealership building represented the northward expansion of the downtown Des Moines main auto row and was notable as the last two-story auto dealership building built in downtown Des Moines' auto row, according to the late Bill Jensen (1931-2016),

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<sup>12</sup> *Des Moines Tribune*, "D.M. Ordinance Upheld: Rules Sign Law Is Legal," July 7, 1972: 19.

<sup>13</sup> *Des Moines Tribune*, "Billboard, housing bills make D.M. edgy," February 26, 1982: 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Des Moines Register*, "D.M. landmark again needs repairs," April 16, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> General Motors Co.

<sup>16</sup> GM.

<sup>17</sup> *Des Moines Register*, Bob Brown Chevrolet advertisement (moving to Merle Hay Road in Urbandale with acres of parking), April 13, 1967: 21.

<sup>18</sup> *Des Moines Register*, Crescent Chevrolet moving classified ad, August 25, 1968.

longtime Crescent employee and then owner. Jensen, who began working for Crescent in 1949, recalled the excitement surrounding the 1968 opening of the new dealership building.<sup>19</sup>

Welcome to  
**CRESCENT CHEVROLET'S  
NEW HOME**

North of  
Ingersoll

at 555  
17th Street  
Downtown  
Des Moines



J. R. Figgott,  
Pres.




Showroom Entrance on 17th or Linden Streets  
Service Entrance south side of building  
Parts Entrance on 16th Street  
Body & Paint Shop on High Street  
Enter Customer Parking lot from 16th or High Street

*Meet the  
Management  
Team . . .*

 Ralph Shay Sales Department	 Al Meyer Plant Department	 William Hachtler Service Department	
 Shi Uliss Parts & Sales	 James E. David Finance & Insurance	 Golf Griffith Body & Paint Shop	 William R. Jansen Used Cars & Trucks

Shop In  
Comfort  
Rain or  
Shine . . .

**90**  
new Chevrolets displayed  
under roof at all times

**500 NEW & USED CARS & TRUCKS  
TO CHOOSE FROM**  
Many Brand New 1968's for  
immediate clearance

New and Used Car Departments open evenings until 9:00 p.m.

**CRESCENT CHEVROLET CO.**  
17th and Ingersoll Phone 288-7041

**The Sales Technicians  
of  
CRESCENT CHEVROLET CO.**

Wish All Their Customers a  
**VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS**



**COME SEE THEM IN THEIR NEW FACILITY AT  
555 17TH - 17TH & INGERSOLL**

 Harold Koethe	 Joe Newman	 John Wood	 Dennis Wilson
 Charles Greig	 Al Norland	 Jim Haggerty	 Mike Melatich

**COME BROWSE IN HEATED COMFORT AMONG 90 NEW CHEVROLETS  
DISPLAYED UNDER ROOF — OVER 200 NEW CHEVROLET  
CARS AND TRUCKS IN STOCK — READY FOR IMMEDIATE DELIVERY**

**CRESCENT CHEVROLET CO.**  
17th and Ingersoll

Figures: Crescent Chevrolet Co. advertised its new dealership building with a series of newspaper advertisements that featured images of the building crowned by the rooftop sign.<sup>20</sup>

Jensen maintained the dealership's downtown presence when he became the owner of the dealership in 1980. Jensen and his predecessor also over saw used-car businesses in the downtown auto row area. Jensen noted that the large indoor Crescent showroom offered a competitive advantage over surface parking lot dealerships—no matter the weather, it was always comfortable indoors, where patrons and autos were protected from the elements. He operated Crescent Chevrolet, Inc., also known as Bill Jensen Crescent Chevrolet, until his 2007 retirement and subsequent sale/closure of the dealership. At its 2007 closure, Crescent Chevrolet was noted as the last new car auto dealership in downtown Des Moines.<sup>21</sup>

**Crescent Chevrolet Rooftop Sign: Historical Summary**

In 1968 grand opening advertisements, Crescent Chevrolet portrayed photographs and sketches of its new dealership crowned by a new rooftop sign—the same sign that stands today. Des Moines architects Dougher-Frevert-Ramsey designed the Crescent Chevrolet dealership building of red brick and glass with exposed concrete columns, built to the

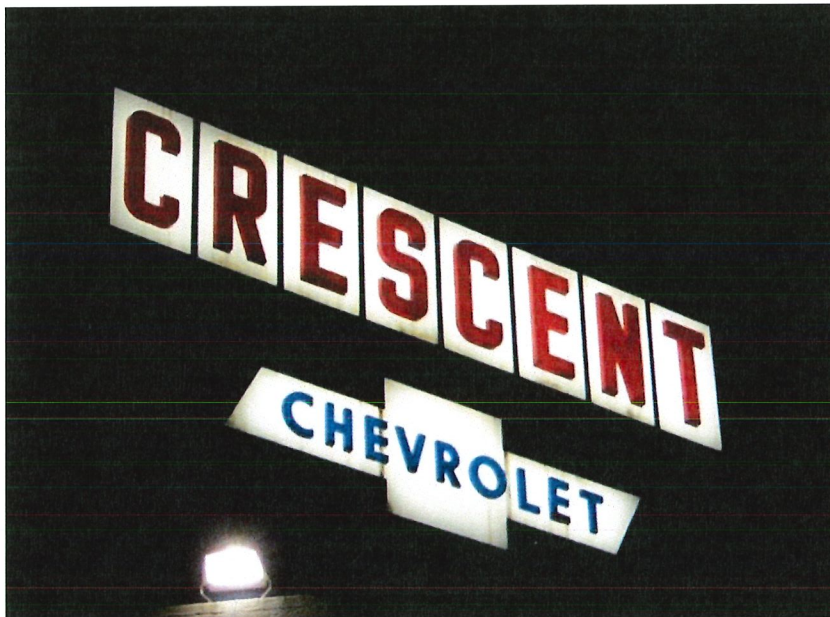
<sup>19</sup> Jensen.

<sup>20</sup> *Des Moines Tribune*, Crescent Chevrolet ads, November 26, 1968: 5; December 19, 1968: 3.

<sup>21</sup> Jensen.

northeast corner of 17<sup>th</sup> and Linden streets, overlooking Ingersoll Avenue to the south.<sup>22</sup> The Crescent Chevrolet sign was considered an “on premise” sign, advertising the specific location of the auto dealer. The corner rooftop sign served as a beacon, drawing customers to the northern edge of downtown Des Moines’s west side auto row where Crescent was one of some thirty new car dealerships. The Crescent Chevrolet sign was angled to face southwest to catch the eyes of motorists entering downtown from Ingersoll Avenue and Grand Avenue, two well-traveled arterials leading from the west and bringing eastbound traffic into downtown Des Moines. The rooftop sign was located directly above the corner showroom windows, which offered floor-to-ceiling views of the autos (80-some could be accommodated) within the 66,000-square-foot auto showroom.<sup>23</sup>

The Crescent Chevrolet single-faced projecting rooftop sign features metal-framed internally illuminated plastic-faced sign cabinets with adhered plastic bump-out letters. The use of red, white, and blue colors within the sign patriotically advertised the American-made automobiles manufactured by the Chevrolet Division of General Motors Company. The sign is comprised of two main elements: the word “CRESCENT” spelled out in eight large capital red letters mounted horizontally within a red-painted metal frame, and the word “CHEVROLET” spelled out in smaller blue letters (one of which is broken). The sign faces are white translucent acrylic, and the dimensional plastic lettering for both the larger CRESCENT and smaller CHEVROLET sans-serif typefaces, with individual letters centered and cemented to the sign face. The word “CRESCENT” dominates due to its location at the top of the sign, letter size, visual weight of the font, and bright red letter color. A second element to the sign is the lower polygonal lighted sign cabinet wherein the word “CHEVROLET” is affixed; framed in blue-painted metal in the shape of a slanted bowtie, the illuminated sign cabinet emulates the nameplate used by the auto maker. All of the metal-framed light cabinets are affixed to steel scaffolding, with metal conduit providing power connection for the interior fluorescent lighting.



*Figure: The Crescent Chevrolet sign was illuminated at night, as seen in this 2007 photograph taken before the dealership closed.<sup>24</sup>*

<sup>22</sup> *Des Moines Register*, “New Building for Crescent,” June 25, 1967: 11.

<sup>23</sup> *Des Moines Tribune*, “Crescent to New Home,” December 8, 1968: 10T.

<sup>24</sup> Nighttime illumination photograph circa 2007, courtesy of John David Larson, posted to Lost Des Moines Facebook group.

### **Commercial Rooftop Signs: Historical Significance Summary**

Commercial rooftop signs from the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as the prominently located Crescent Chevrolet rooftop sign, can be significant for their association with local commercial growth and prosperity, as well as the development of advertising, consumption, and transportation, as noted by the SurveyLA (Los Angeles) Citywide Historic Context Statement for Commercial Signs—Rooftop.<sup>25</sup> Although detailed in a Los Angeles historic context, the information pertains generally when identifying character-defining sign features including letters, internal lighting, images mounted to rooftop scaffolding, and post-war sign materials such as plastics and fluorescent lighting that created new sign design options.

National Park Service historian Michael J. Auer sets the significance of historic signage in the 1991 *Preservation Brief #25: The Preservation of Historic Signs*:

Signs are everywhere. And everywhere they play an important role in human activity. They identify. They direct and decorate. They promote, inform, and advertise. Signs are essentially social. They name a human activity, and often identify who is doing it. Signs allow the owner to communicate with the reader, and the people inside a building to communicate with those outside of it.

Signs speak of the people who run the businesses, shops, and firms. Signs are signatures. They reflect the owner's tastes and personality....

Signs often become so important to a community that they are valued long after their role as commercial markers has ceased. They become landmarks, loved because they have been visible at certain street corners—or from many vantage points across the city—for a long time. Such signs are valued for their familiarity, their beauty, their humor, their size, or even their grotesqueness. In these cases, signs transcend their conventional role as vehicles of information, as identifiers of something else. When signs reach this stage, they accumulate rich layers of meaning. They no longer merely advertise, but are valued in and of themselves. They become icons.<sup>26</sup>

Auer defines signs that have reached local landmark status as those that are “recognized as popular focal points in a community.”<sup>27</sup>

In summary, within the Des Moines central business district, the Crescent Chevrolet rooftop sign remains as a rare surviving late postwar-era rooftop sign example, and specifically an internally lit on-premise type. The prominent size and location of the Crescent Chevrolet sign, its longevity in advertising the long-standing Crescent Chevrolet business, and the sign's distinction as a rare-surviving rooftop version all elevate it to landmark status as a distinct emblem within the central business district.

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<sup>25</sup> Guidis, SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement, Commercial Development/Commercial Signs—Rooftop.

<sup>26</sup> Auer, “Preservation Brief #25: The Preservation of Historic Signs.”

<sup>27</sup> Auer.





*Figure: The Crescent Chevrolet sign was augmented by other signage by the time of this 1996 photograph included in a newspaper special section celebrating the dealership's 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Additional lighting is visible at the roof edge.<sup>28</sup>*

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<sup>28</sup> *Des Moines Register*, "Bill Jensen's Crescent Chevrolet • Geo 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration," October 2, 1996.

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