

**PHILADELPHIA HISTORIC COMMISSION**

**HOTEL AKA** | **stanev potts architects**

135 South 18th St  
Philadelphia, PA | April 9, 2024

Table of Contents	1
Cover Letter	2
<u>Proposed :</u>	
Existing Street Conditions	3
Building Signage Site Plan	4
Proposed Roofline Building Signage - East Facade	5
Proposed Roofline Building Signage - West Facade	6
Proposed Foodline Building Signage - North Facade	7
Building Signage - Renderings at West & South Roofline	8
Building Signage - Renderings at East Roofline	9
Building Signage - Renderings at North Roofline	10
Existing Hotel Precedences	11
Historic Hotel Precedences	12

Philadelphia Historic Commission  
1515 Arch St., 13th Floor  
Philadelphia, PA 19102

April 09, 2024

*Modified May 03, 2024*

To the Philadelphia Historic Commission:

The following pages detail proposed building identification signage for the Hotel AKA at Rittenhouse Square, located at 135 S 18th Street. This application is for signage at the top of the building, in compliance with the Philadelphia zoning code, section 14-904 (3) 'Building Identification Signs', that would identify the single-tenant ownership of the high-rise as being a branded high-end hotel. These would be static illuminated wall signs. One would face east, one north and the other west. The overall objective of this signage is to bring a stronger presence of identity to the building and to help with way-finding. While the current proposal before you for signage along the roof line is designed to be meet the by-right elements for building identification signage laid out in 14-904 (3), and meeting all other parameters of the signage section of the zoning code, we want to note that the PHC-approved street level signage (included in this package for reference only) will require a zoning variance for height, due to being above the second floor window sill and well below 150'. We believe that street level signage meets all other aspects of the zoning code. **This cover letter has been modified to include changes made to the proposal in response to comments and feedback from the PHC Architectural Committee.**

#### BACKGROUND

Originally designed as an apartment building by architects McIlvain & Roberts in 1913, the building currently houses boutique hotel suites and amenities on the upper floors, with retail tenants on Walnut Street, and a hotel bar & restaurant flanking the hotel lobby along 18th Street. Korman Communities purchased the building in 2006, when it underwent a conversion from multifamily to long-term stay. At that time, extensive exterior improvements were undertaken with PHC input to bring the street frontage condition and detail back to the original intended design. Working closely with the PHC, windows were replaced with historically accurate wood double hung windows throughout all floors, the masonry was carefully restored, and custom bronze window frame details were painstakingly recreated; recast in bronze and patinated to match the original metal work. In 2016, the building was converted to a hotel through extensive improvements of life safety systems. The building is now fully sprinklered and is an approved R1 building which has been a further investment in the quality, safety and longevity of this centenarian structure. In 2019 we worked with the Art Commission and the PHC to design and implement a canopy and new entrance doors on 18th Street.

#### NEW SIGNAGE

The street level signage, already PHC-approved and included here for reference, is intended for pedestrian level visibility within a block or less of the corner of the building. The installation location was selected due to it being best for pedestrian-level building identity signage for historic preservation purposes - despite its being higher than the by-right minimum of the zoning code, it is a clean section of stonework, with no ornament or crenelations. The by-right zone of potential signage is either taken up entirely by ornamental bronze detailing and rusticated offset stonework, neither of which are ideal locations for new building signage.

The proposed building identification signage we are asking for your review and approval of, just under the roof line, serves a different scale, and related but different purposes to that at street level. While much smaller overall than similar hotel brand and name lettering on nearby examples, the name of the hotel toward the top of the building serves the important purpose of allowing identification of the building by foot or car as one approaches by car looking west, coming from Broad Street, or when

looking for the building from further up Walnut Street, looking back to the east, and from street intersections and foot traffic to the north on 18th St. Clientele have often expressed frustration trying to find the hotel upon first arriving. It also serves the more abstract purpose, framed by the by-right zoning status for building identification signage at the upper portions of building, of presenting the brand and identity of the building on the broader urban scale. As can be seen in the renderings, the intention is for this identification signage to be compatible with the aka brand itself - striving for elegance, but not over-stated or gaudy. Reinforcing this, the logo design is all lower case, and is to be lit only brightly enough to be reasonably visible but not overly so - something one can see when one looks for it, but that is not so bright it catches one's attention aggressively. It is in the same spirit of moderation that we are not proposing building identity signage on the south facade, where it would be directly across from the neighboring building across Walnut, but instead only where the building faces gaps in the adjacent skyline: across two-to-three story half block of low retail to the east and north, and the roughly 100' to the next tall building to the west, past and well over the head of the lovely Van Rensselaer Mansion currently hosting 'Anthropologie.'

The proposed roof line signage will be face illuminated, black metal channel letters. Color temperature to be roughly 3,000 Kelvin (or warmer), and illumination level will be set to be at or below the average brightness of similar signs in a several block radius. We also propose to have dimmers installed on all proposed signage to be able to adjust the light levels if necessary, and a programmable timer, in order to be able to control the hours of illumination. All connection points will be at existing mortar joints.

The Architectural Committee had valuable feedback on two points: to try to create some 'breathing room' above the signs; and that taken with the street level signs, 5 total building identification signs seems like 'too many.' Regarding the first, we have lowered the signs to just below the terracotta coping overhang, and reduced their overall height slightly, within the limits set by the zoning parameters. To address the second, since the street level signs require a zoning variance, and are on a separate approval pathway, we propose conditional approval of this application to state that whether at street level or at the top of the building, there can be no more than one building identification sign per facade. This will limit the total number of signs, and gives us the necessary flexibility to implement a plan once we are through the variance process with the street level signs.

At this time, we are seeking final approval of the proposed trio of building identification signs just below the roof line, with staff to approve final color temp and brightness. We hope you will agree this will be a welcome improvement to the building, one that will be in keeping with similar signage installed on hotels and other buildings from the same time period throughout Center City Philadelphia. We look forward to your feedback and collaboration on moving this forward!

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal,



Stephan Potts, AIA  
Stanev Potts Architects



18th street and Walnut street, looking north, February 2020



18th street, looking north, February 2020



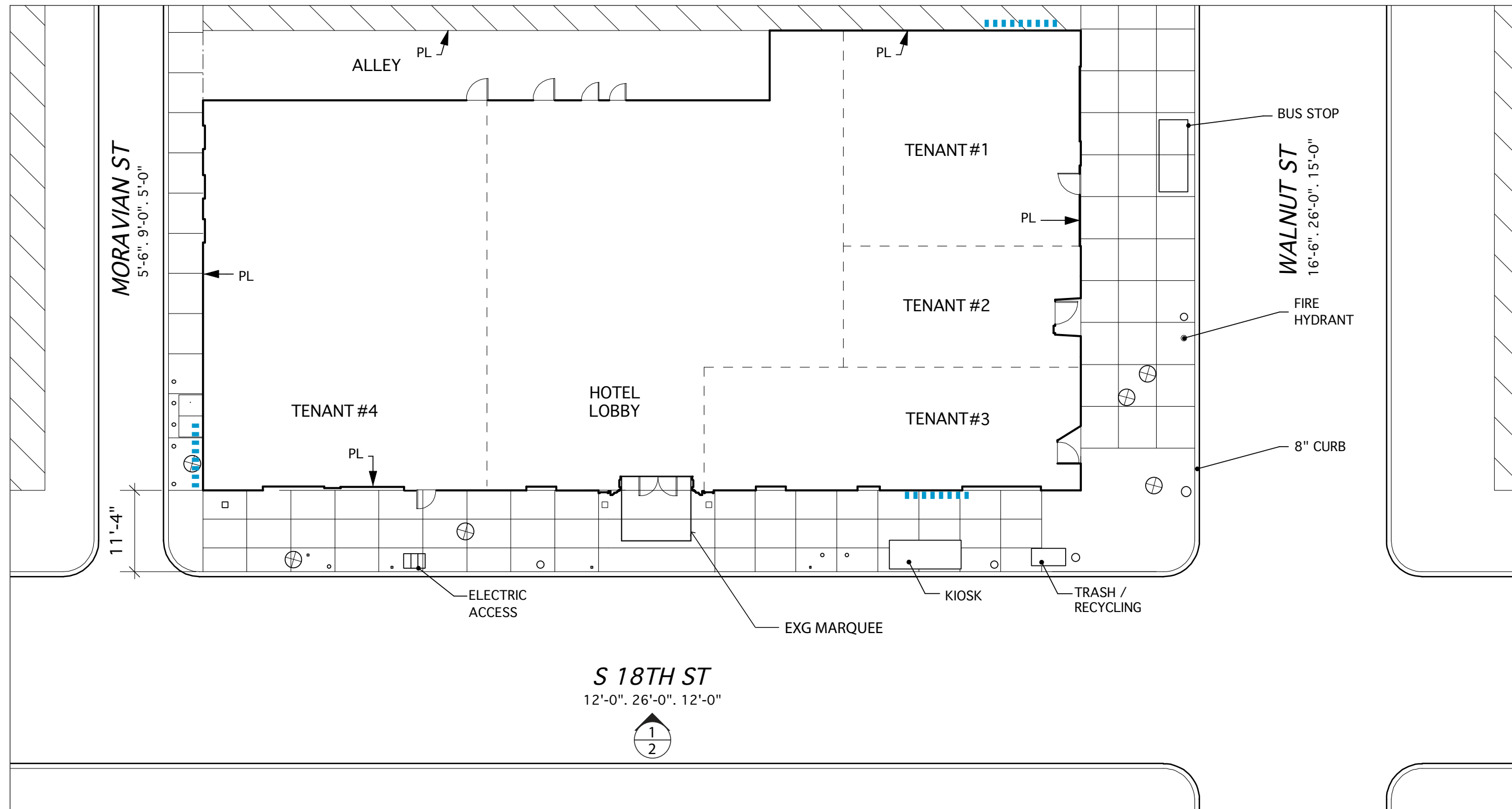
Existing 18th st entry, looking south, February 2020



Looking northeast, February 2020



Looking northeast, February 2020



KEY

- ⊗ EXISTING MANHOLE
- EXISTING PARKING SIGN
- EXISTING LAMP POST
- EXISTING FLUSH LIGHT
- EXISTING TRAFFIC LIGHT POLE
- PROPOSED AKA SIGNAGE AT PARAPET LEVEL

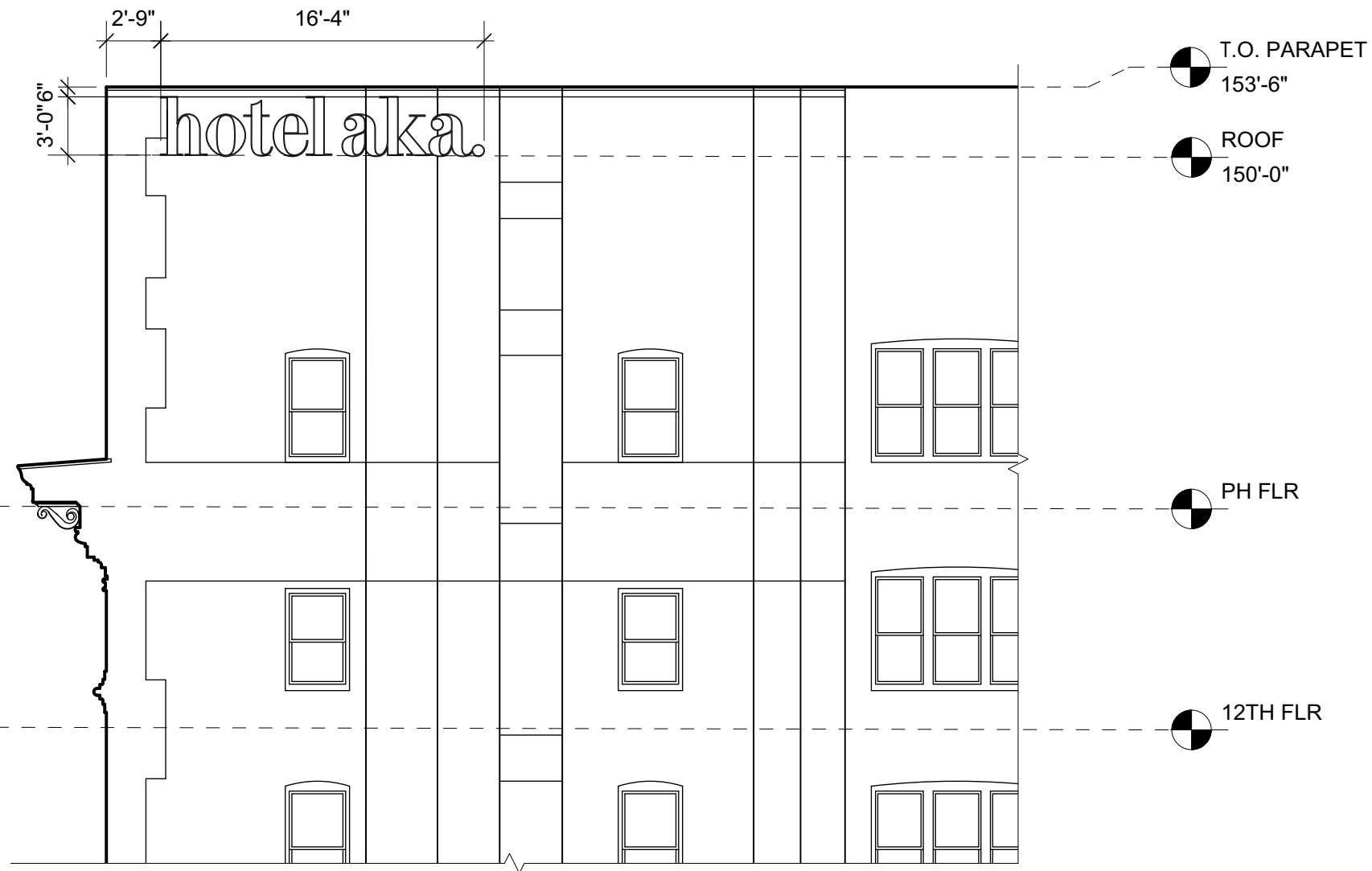
ROOFLINE SIGNAGE SHALL START AT OR ABOVE 150'  
AND NOT EXTEND ABOVE TOP OF PARAPET

LIGHTING TO COMPLY WITH APPLICABLE CODES:  
SHALL NOT EXCEED MAX ALLOWABLE BRIGHTNESS  
NO ANIMATION, NO FLASHING

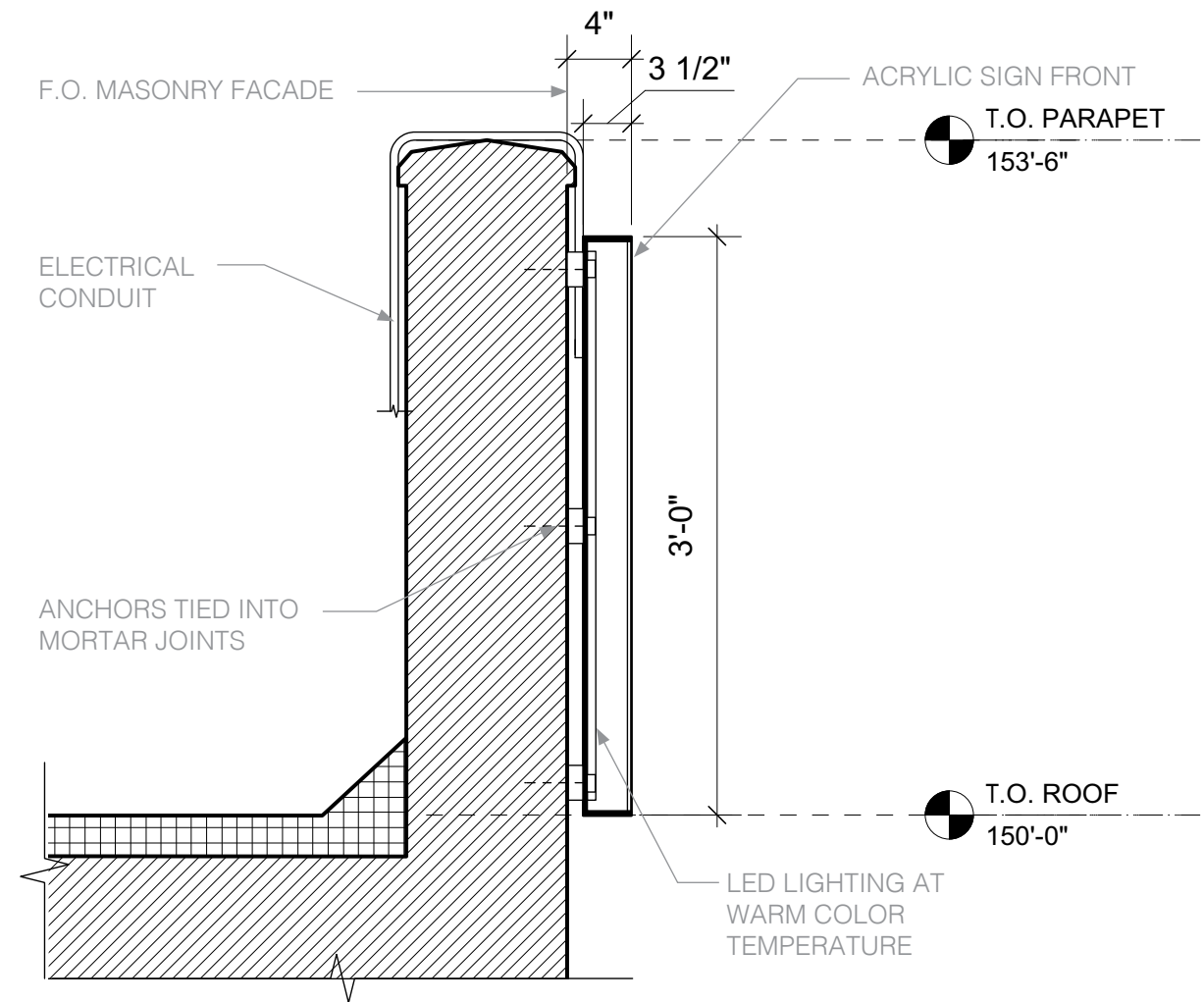
ROOFLINE SIGNAGE FABRICATION SPECS:

FACE LIT ACRYLIC LETTERS MATCH COLOR TEMP OF  
CORNICE LIGHTING (SOFT WHITE +/-3000K)

BLACK METAL HOUSING 4" DEEP MAX W/  
MOUNTING POINTS AT GROUT LINES ONLY



1. PARTIAL EAST ELEVATION

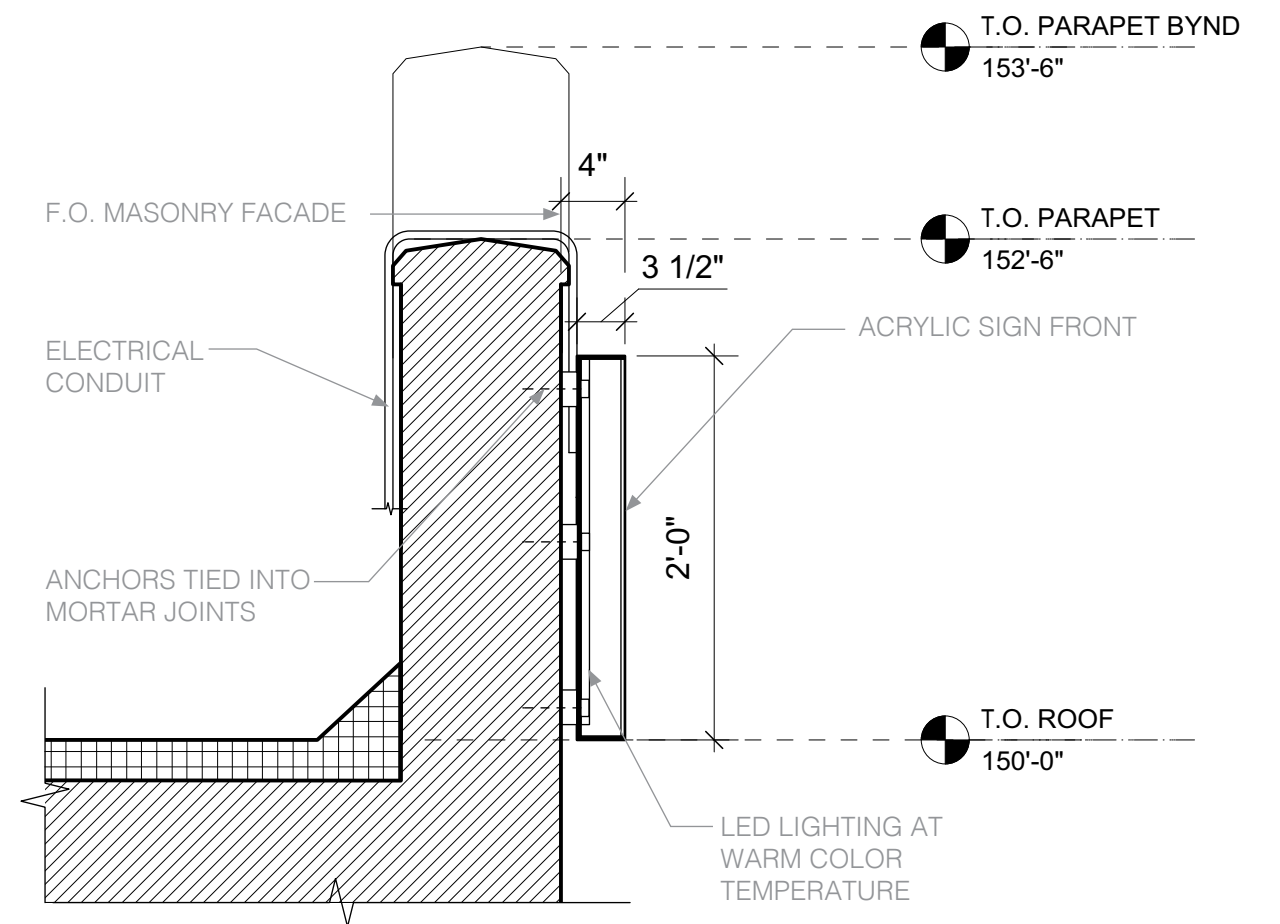


2. DETAIL @ EAST ELEVATION

SEE PAGE 5 FOR SIGNAGE FABRICATION SPECS

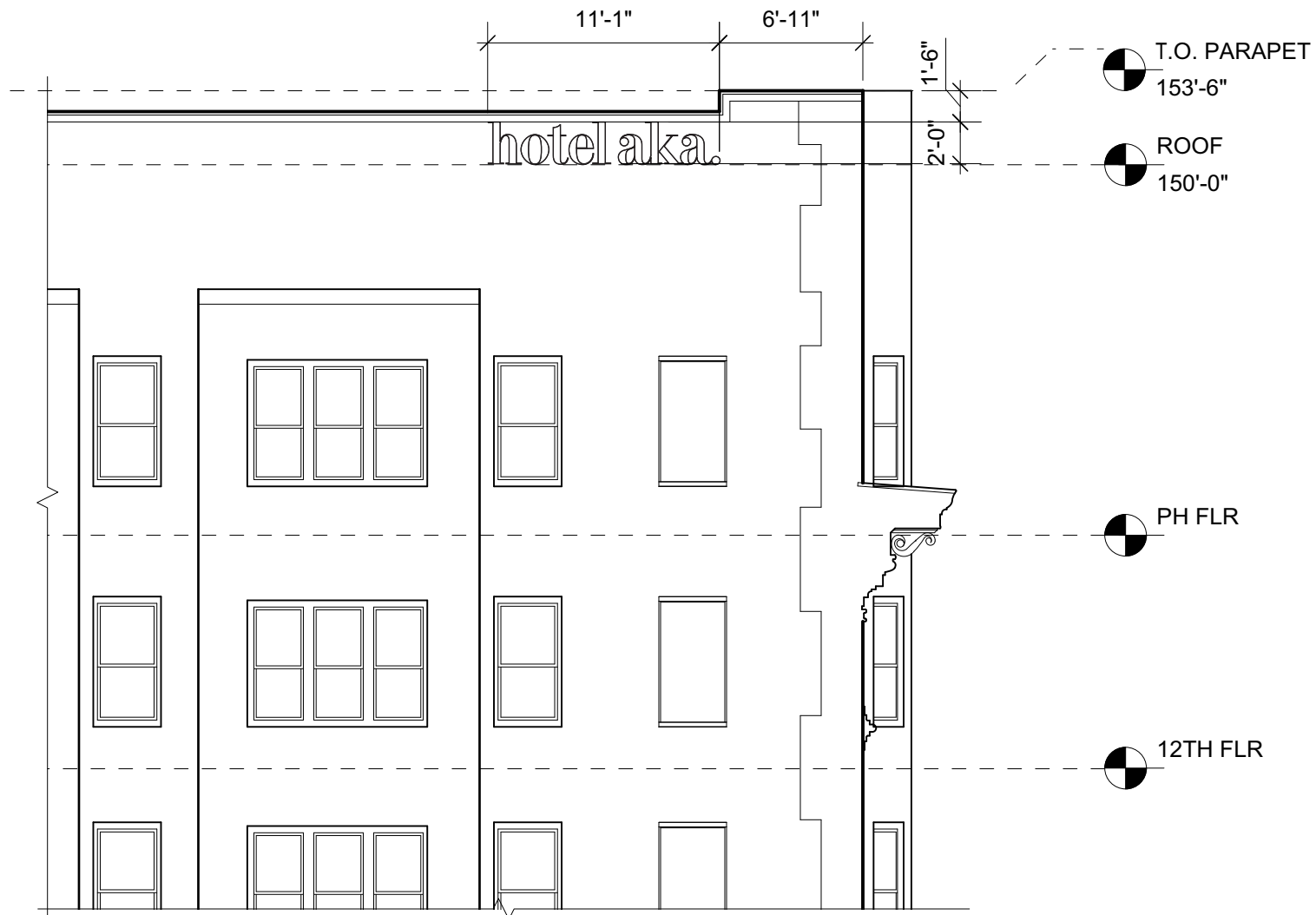


1. PARTIAL WEST ELEVATION

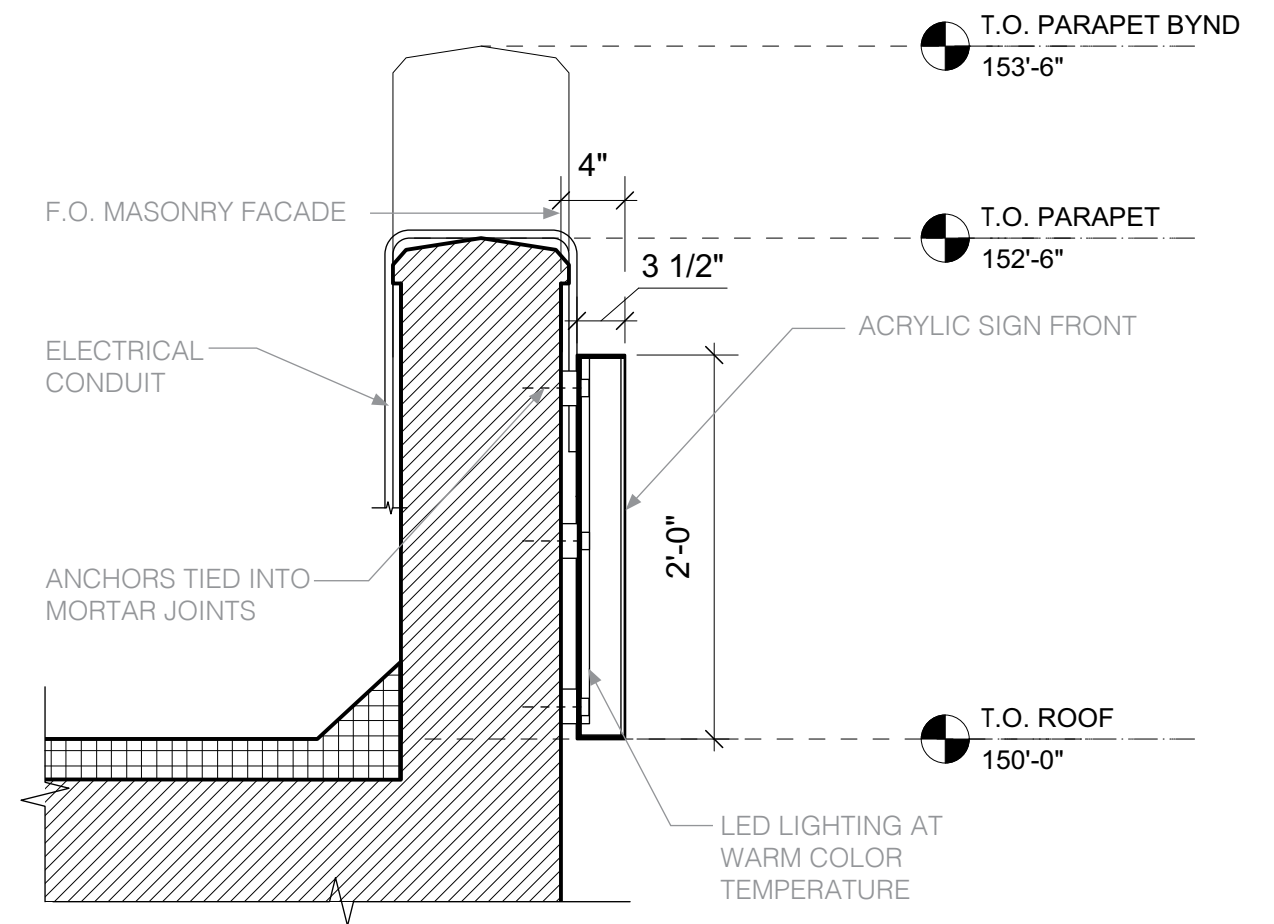


2. DETAIL @ WEST & NORTH ELEVATION

SEE PAGE 5 FOR SIGNAGE FABRICATION SPECS



1. PARTIAL NORTH ELEVATION



2. DETAIL @ WEST & NORTH ELEVATION



Rittenhouse Square View



Close Up View





Westbound Walnut Street View



Close Up View



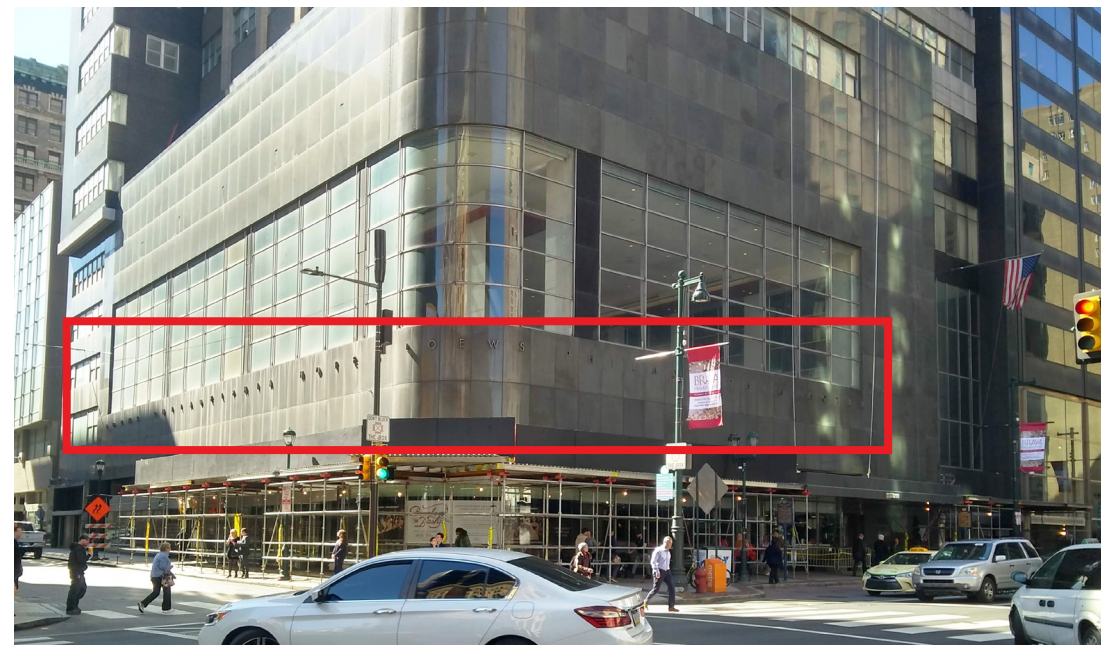
18th Street View Looking South



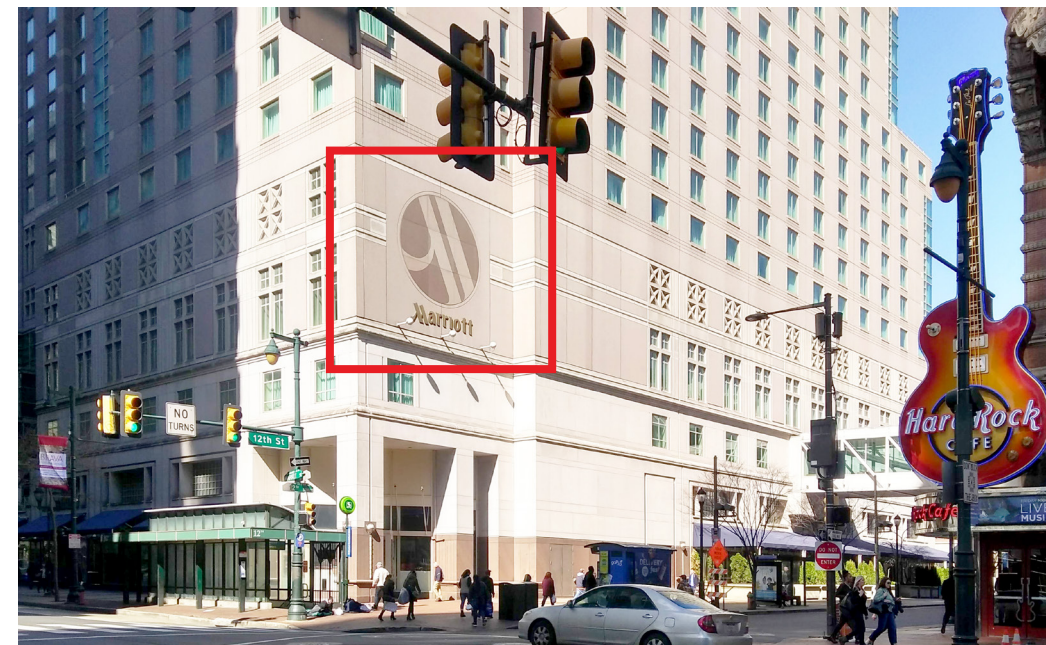
Close Up View



Sofitel Hotel - 17th and Sansom Street (Foreground)  
W Hotel - 15th and Chestnut Street (Background)



Lowes Hotel - 12th and Market Street



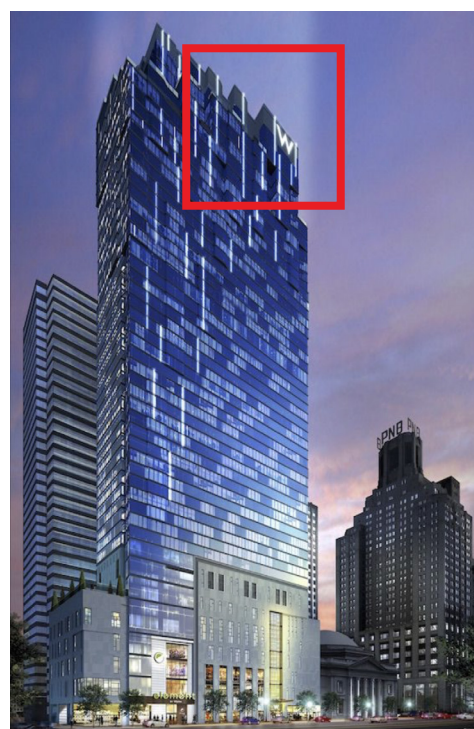
Marriott Hotel - 12th and Market Street



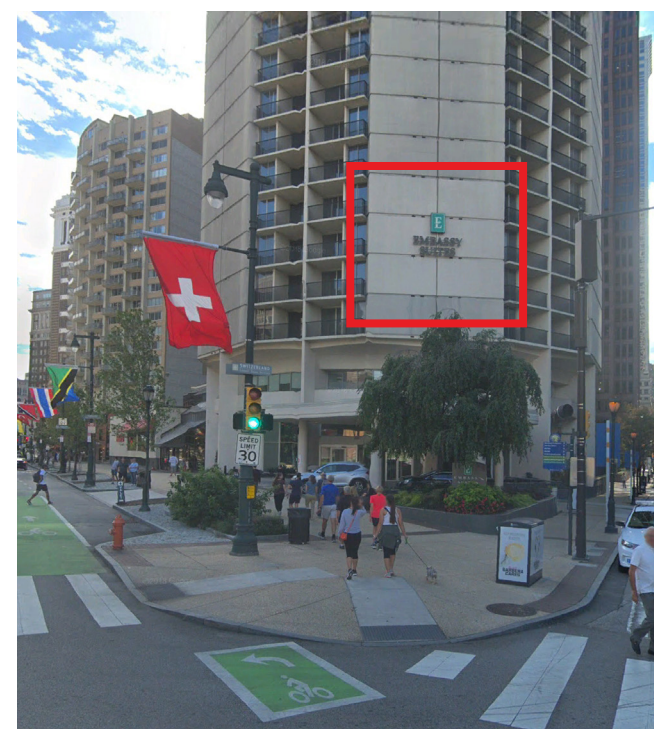
Marriott Hotel - 12th and Filbert Street



The Notary Hotel - 13th and Filbert Street



W Hotel - 15th and Chestnut Street



Embassy Suites - 18th and Benjamin Franklin Parkway



Aldine Hotel - 19th and Chestnut Street -1890s -1920s



Hotel - 17th and Walnut Street - Photo Date:1928



Aldine Hotel - Photo Date: 1920s



Hotel - 1200 Block of Locust Street - Photo Date: 1960



Hotel - Between 1200 Block of Walnut Street - Photo Date: 1931



Hotel - 1200 Block of Sansom Street - Photo Date: 1959



Hotel York - 1215 Walnut Street -Photo Date: 1921