

Decorah Historic Preservation Commission
Oct. 4, 2017 Meeting Minutes (Final)

1. Meeting was called to order at 4:31 p.m. by chairman Mark Muggli. Other commissioners present were Kris Lynch, Lois Humpal, Diane Scholl, Adrienne Coffeen, Hayley Jackson and Judy van der Linden.

Also present were Janelle Pavlovec, Decorah resident, and Rick Burras, Executive Vice President of Viking State Bank and Trust.

4. (d) Kris moved, Judy seconded and members approved revising the agenda to allow Rick Burras to speak about his bank's planned new building. It will occupy three lots on West Water Street, requiring demolition of the bank's current drive-up facility (#321) and current headquarters (#317), and also of the building at #315, which the bank owns and which currently houses Gossling Woodworking. This last building is listed as a contributing building to the new commercial historic district. The Planning and Zoning Commission will consider the new building Oct. 9.

*After Mr. Burras left, Mark said he will review his written response to the proposed building and send it to commissioners for comments.*** He urged as many commissioners as possible to attend the P&Z meeting Monday night.

2. Kris moved, Lois seconded and members approved meeting minutes from June 5.

3. Adrienne moved, Hayley seconded and members approved meeting minutes from Sept. 11.

4. (a) Budget and final report for the HRDP grant for the project to get Decorah's downtown on the National Register of Historic Places were reviewed by Mark. Original grant: Jan Full (\$29,970), local costs (\$1,530). Final budget: Jan Full (\$30,609.75), local costs (total was \$890.25; Porter House \$240, DGA \$334.25, WCHS \$316)

(b) Celebration of NRHP listing went well – 50-60 persons attending.

(c) Regarding signage for the district, members agreed the south entrance into town via Mechanic St. should be signed, in addition to entrances on East and West Water Street. Next steps include: *Kris will contact the street department to ask if it has money for signs and who would erect the signs; Judy will contact Chad Bird about the city's application to Living Roadways Program; Lois will contact Charlene Selbee about possible grant monies for signage, and Hayley, Mark and Judy will work on estimates for signage needs and costs.*

5. We will be working on amending the Broadway-Phelps district later.

7. Mark asked and members okayed item #7 on the agenda be considered next. Mark reported that he and Hayley will attend a meeting this month that will explore the possibility of nominating the Luther College Main building to the NRHP. The building is credited to Charles Altfillisch. If the idea moves forward, our commission would be the sponsoring CLG. Mark will report back.

6. Regarding DHPC's Altfillisch project, Kris reported she visited with owners of 500 5th Ave., an Altfillisch home, recorded her findings on our Google doc listing, and has returned the ledger she borrowed to Altfillisch's Mound Street home. Lois reported that Calmar Manufacturing will copy blueprints, but for a fee.

Next steps in the project: Mark will send Adrienne the Google doc links; Diane will try to set up meetings with the Gipps and Sheeleys, and she will make copies or scans of the Gipp magazine article pages; Adrienne will interview Lowell Erdman; Mark will check with David Anderson's son, Per, to see if David had papers related to Altfillisch's buildings; Haley will ask Duane Fenstermann if he remembers anything about Altfillisch documents that Susan Tone might have given to Luther College; Judy will ask WCHS if they know where the Altfillisch blueprints, etc., that they have come from, and Hayley will try to make a copy of the Altfillisch tape recording.

Mark said he'd like to know how much information the city has on its Altfillisch-designed buildings, such as city hall, the post office, etc. He also noted that someone could go through the building permits being stored by the city to connect Altfillisch with other construction projects. He also encouraged any commissioner to reach out to Altfillisch property owners and visit them, if possible. Information gleaned can be entered on our Google docs. Kim and Mary Glock could also be interviewed about their friendship with the Altfillisches.

12. Because it was late, Mark cut the meeting short (we did not discuss items 8-11), and members decided to meet next on Monday, Nov. 13 at 4:30 in City Hall.

13. Meeting was adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

****NOTE:** See DHPC responses to Viking State Bank proposal to construct a new bank below.

RESPONSES TO VIKING STATE BANK'S PLAN TO REMOVE 315-321 W. WATER ST. AND REPLACE WITH A NEW BUILDING

The Decorah Historic Preservation Commission

(Mark Z. Muggli, chair; mugglimz@luther.edu; 612-720-5795)

Oct. 8, 2017

1. The destruction of 315 W. Water St. would be a major loss to the downtown, given that it has one of the best-preserved first-story downtown facades. It is a "contributing"

building in the 2017 National Register of Historic Places listing for the Decorah Commercial Historic District. The loss of the former 317 W. Water and 321 W. Water is not nearly so major, since both buildings have been substantially altered; both were, consequently “non-contributing” NRHP buildings. In particular, the loss of a street entrance for 317 W. Water has made the building a peculiar downtown presence.

2. The Viking State Bank decision to construct a major downtown building could, on the other hand, boost downtown historic preservation, since historic preservation is so dependent on the economic/social viability of the area in which historic buildings are found. VSB is to be applauded for their commitment to the downtown and to the construction of an expensive, high-quality building.
3. The proposed VSB building will fit well with the scale of neighboring downtown buildings, in particular with the impressive K. I. Haugen building just to the east. The new building will also restore/retain a strong welcome to pedestrian, building-front traffic, an important aspect of historic preservation in a town center.
4. The style of the proposed building—a cohesive blend of Scandinavian, Victorian, and turn-of-the-century American—is likely to be very compatible with the full range of other commercial district buildings. The brick and stone surface materials are impressive, especially with the substitution of cut limestone for the imitation-stone cast concrete block included in the early October plan. Although the sample of the “tile” material for the upper wall isn’t completely clear, the upper façade in general complements the elaborate cornice on the Haugen building, while remaining appropriately deferential to the older building. The clock tower, which might look contrived with another building style, seems quite appropriate, and could become a notable downtown landmark. And the “carriage-house” look of the arched building over the drive-through bank seems to welcome automobile traffic without alienating pedestrians, either along the Water St. or River St. sides.
5. We applaud VSB for proposing plantings along the west property line, which will increase the building’s pedestrian welcome; we encourage them to consider as many mature trees among the plantings and in the boulevard as possible. Given the large parking area that the plan will include, we encourage the introduction of a high-quality brick/stone visual divider between the Water St. sidewalk and the parking area.
6. The total impact of the proposed destruction and re-construction will depend greatly on the details of the final building. The clock tower and drive-through arch especially could look silly without appropriate control over materials and scale (in relation to other buildings, and to the new building as a whole). We encourage a historically-appropriate clock face for the tower. Another crucial detail has to do with window and door treatments. These don’t have to directly reproduce other existing Decorah façade details, but they *will* need to avoid looking like modern impositions on a revival-style façade—this has to do with the size and shape of windows, the window and door mullions, and the window framing, but also with the materials and treatment surrounding the openings. We encourage the architect to take special care with the windows on the drive-through arch, which have changed in ambiguous ways on the two concept plans we have seen.
7. If it is evitable that 415 Water St. is to be destroyed, we encourage VSB to make the building’s materials available for reuse. It would, for example, be a happy outcome if

another downtown building owner were able to restore their façade using the cast iron columns and Decorah brick from this building.

8. Finally, we want to thank VSB for attending our Oct. 4 meeting and for their apparent openness to the Historic Preservation Commission's suggestions. We would be happy to remain engaged with the on-going conversation.