

City of Decorah  
Planning and Zoning Commission  
December 11, 2017 – 7:00pm  
Meeting Minutes

Members present included: Nathan Thompson, Tony Clarke, Joel Zook, Brain Cook, Stan Moellers and Barbara Massman

Others present: Zoning Administrator / City Manager Chad Bird, Assistant City Attorney John Anderson.

Absent: Llew Jenkins

Consider approval of minutes from the November 13, 2017 meeting

**Motion by Zook and seconded by Massman to approve the minutes from the November 11, 2017 commission meeting.**

**Roll call vote: Unanimous, motion passed.**

Presentation by Chris Johnson, president and CEO, Vesterheim Museum

*President Johnson attended the meeting to present an overview of plans being organized by the Museum in regards to changes in landscaping and layout on the museum grounds.*

*There was general discussion about the layout, material, sidewalks and accessibility.*

*Dale Goodman and Lindsay Erdman were also present representing the museum board.*

*The commission thanked Johnson for his presentation and for coming to the meeting to share the museum's plans.*

Consider C-3 Commercial Design Review re: Donlon Pharmacy, 201 West Water Street – sign

*Bird noted this item was on the agenda again as a tabled item from the November 2017 meeting. Bird reviewed the sign construction and materials. The proposed sign is an 8'x10' white aluminum sign materials with vinyl lettering. The largest letters are 5 inches in height or less, the large "D" is larger at 13 inches due to the style of the logo.*

*The proposed sign will replace the existing façade letters making up the "Donlon Health Mart" green and blue sign and the flu shot banner.*

*Bird reminded the commission that In November, the commission asked about the blank spaces and what type of letters may be proposed. Bird provided an illustration showing they are intended to be similar to movie theater or service station style interchangeable letters.*

*Matthew Maker, the owner reviewed his plans with the building and noted he would envision painting a large portion of the building façade to set the sign off from its current perceived look. He also noted that would consider using magnetic replaceable letters rather than the proposed slide in letters.*

**Motion by Thompson and seconded by Zook to recommend approval of the C-3 Commercial Design sign application presented by Donlon Pharmacy, 201 West Water Street.**

**Roll call vote: Unanimous, motion passed.**

Consider C-3 Commercial Design Review re: Decorah Bank & Trust, 202 East Water Street – sign and building façade

*Bird presented this item is for a renovation at this address. The applicant has purchased the adjoining building and is proposing to renovate the exterior to match, as closely as possible, the main building at this site. Ben Grimstad was present representing the application and drew attention to the proposed detail work on the image provided. It was noted doors will be in matching black anodized aluminum.*

*Modifications are proposed for both front and rear entrances of the building.*

*Bird shared with the commission the historic preservation commission also reviewed the application and is supportive of the work noting the building is not a contributing building to the downtown historic designation.*

*The C-3 design application also includes a blade sign on the front of the building.*

**Motion by Massman and seconded by Clarke to recommend approval of the C-3 Commercial Design sign application presented by Decorah Bank & Trust, 202 East Water Street for a sign and building façade renovations.**

**Roll call vote: Unanimous, motion passed.**

Discussion and possible action on amendment to sign code; *Chapter 17.16.110*

*Bird opened this discussion by introducing the assistant city attorney, John Anderson. The commission continued discussion on this issue from the November meeting and hoped to learn more on the issue from Anderson.*

*Anderson referenced an October 2014 US Supreme Court ruling (Reed v. Town of Gilbert, AZ) that struck down local municipalities' ability to specifically regulate political signs or any "ideological" signs, basically saying a city shall not regulate content. The content of sign, in the opinion of the court, is protected free speech.*

*Anderson commented that by naming a "political sign" in a sign code, one may be infringing on free speech.*

*The intent and goal of a re-write of at least the temporary signs will be to be less specific and to avoid any reference to content. Bird stated he believed staff have the ability to regulate signs but by size, shape, location and duration only, not content.*

*Bird and Anderson noted they would bring a sample ordinance back to the commission for approval and to set a date for a required public hearing.*

Discussion and possible action on sidewalk policy revisions

- a. Consider action to engage professional engineering services

*Bird distributed a redraft of a sidewalk administrative policy for the commission's consideration.*

*There was general discussion regarding several points. Cook asked when the city first began to pay attention to sidewalk issues and focus on installations. Lindsay Erdman and Bird noted they believed it to be around 1988.*

*There was discussion of the waiver section and recognition of amenities and utilities that may be in the path of a proposed sidewalk.*

*The commission noted hiring an engineer to redesign and present ideas for sidewalk development should be at the discretion of the city council.*

**Motion by Moellers and seconded by Clarke to recommend approval of the sidewalk policy as presented.**

**Roll call vote: Unanimous, motion passed.**

2017 Zoning Board of Adjustment year in review

- b. Discussion about zoning code amendments

*Bird reviewed the Board of Adjustment annual report with the commission. He noted one reason for doing this is to discuss any possible changes or amendments to code as a result of frequent variance applications. The commission reviewed the application report. Bird noted the board of adjustment suggests looking at changes to the accessory structure five-foot setback requirement and the accessory structure maximum height ordinance of 12 feet in favor of going to 14 feet.*

*There was some conversation and support from the commission to consider a 16-foot maximum height for accessory structures.*

Other business

*In other business, Zook raised a conversation regarding lot sizes, smaller housing, affordable housing and zoning that might better align with the affordable housing conversation.*

*Ross Hadley, 402 Winneshiek Avenue raised a point regarding making accessory dwelling spaces available above garages in some zoning districts.*

*There was additional conversation regarding in-fill development.*

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:18pm

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Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chad A. Bird".

Chad A. Bird  
City Manager  
Zoning Administrator