

Decorah Historic Preservation Commission  
Minutes of Feb. 26, 2019 Meeting (FINAL)

1. **Roll Call.** Chair Mark Muggli called the meeting to order at 4:40 p.m. All commissioners were present -- Adrienne Coffeen, Lois Humpal, Hayley Jackson, Steve Kelsay, Diane Scholl and Judy van der Linden.
2. **Working session on signage issues in Decorah, especially in Historic District.**
  - a. **Commissioners list three favorite and three least favorite downtown signs - in order to get a sense of our concerns and our preferences.**

Commissioners took turns with lists. Least favorites mentioned more than once were Letterwerks, Koreana and Sundance Travel. Favorites mentioned several times included Tupy's, Blue Heron, Rubaiyat, and Decorah Hatchery. We seemed to agree we don't like brightly colored plastic signs or banner-type signs, and that we do like more understated wooden signs with softer colors; but we also agreed that personal preference is a big part of what we each think is appropriate.
  - b. **Sources for ideas -- Dept. of Interior, NAHPC, Main Street program, etc.**

Adrienne and Steve mentioned language about appropriate signage from the city of Mt. Vernon, the Main Street program, the Orton Family Foundation and from the city of Warrenton, VA. We consulted Decorah's sign ordinances and were confused by an apparent inconsistency in ordinance copy given to sign permit applicants and how the ordinances read online.
  - c. **Options for Ordinance language.** There was discussion about whether we really want to propose changes to city sign ordinances. One concern is that business owners will be upset because they were told there would be no additional regulation when the downtown was put on the National Register. Another was that stricter code for signs would have to be enforced, which might be hard for Chad and/or might involve DHPC as a design review body. Mark proposed a range of options:
    - i. **No change.** Discussed but agreed we want some sort of change.
    - ii. **Additions to ordinance preamble meant to provide general guidance.** This seems doable and appropriate. Possible suggestions by Mark:
      1. **(Current preamble emphasizes minimizing number of signs in order to avoid visual blight.)** We agreed we could add more positive statements to preamble with emphasis on signage in historic district. (At the same time we could develop some guidelines for business owners that suggest appropriate signs and also seek to modify current time frame of P&Z sign consideration.) Possible language that might be added to preamble:
      2. **Signs should be compatible with both the building and the neighborhood in materials, colors, fonts, design, etc.**

**3. On historic buildings [In historic district,] especially, signs should preserve and enhance distinctive architectural and design features.**

**iii. Additions of specific prohibited signs [e.g., back-lit, “halo”].**

Commissioners seemed more in favor of working with the preamble than adding more prohibitions to current ordinance. Consequently, Mark moved and Judy seconded a motion to draft 1-2 paragraphs of positive general language that explains the importance of architecture, historical districts and building integrity and that we try to get it into the ordinance preamble. This motion was set aside temporarily.

Mark moved and Hayley seconded a motion that we talk to the city manager, first about inconsistencies between Decorah’s sign ordinance and permit process and second, about the timetable for approval of new signs. The motion was unanimously approved.

Commissioners then returned to the first motion about new language in the ordinance preamble. That motion was unanimously approved as well. We talked about whether to move forward with the idea of drawing up guidelines that could be handed out to sign permit applicants OR pursue making more precise changes to ordinances that would give them more teeth. Steve suggested well-written guidelines might be accepted and used by P&Z to the point that P&Z decided to change ordinances themselves to reflect guidelines.

With that in mind, Mark moved we add two points to our first motion: First that we also ask Chad what he would think of us drafting several paragraphs for preamble; second that we ask what he’d think of us drafting more specific guidelines for signage? Judy seconded the motion to amend motion #1. All voted to approve.

**3. Scheduled upcoming regular meeting: Monday, March 4, 2019.** *Mark will contact Chad to set up a meeting, preferably before our next regular meeting on March 4, and will let rest of commissioners know. Steve, Hayley, Judy and Diane may be able to attend with Mark.*

**4. Adjournment.** Meeting was adjourned shortly after 6 p.m.