

Decorah Historic Preservation Commission  
August 4, 2020, Meeting Minutes (FINAL)

1. **Roll Call.** Electronic meeting was called to order at 4:45 p.m. after commissioners had some trouble entering the reserved Zoom room. Present were Mark Muggli (chair), Adrienne Coffeen, Steve Kelsay, Diane Scholl and Judy van der Linden. Lois Humpal and Hayley Jackson were absent. Decorah resident Janelle Pavlovec joined the meeting by phone.
2. **Review and approval of July 6, 2020 minutes distributed by DHPC secretary Judy van der Linden.** Mark declared the minutes approved as written.
3. **C-3 Design Permit applications.** *Mark will check with Chad Bird about P&Z's decision last month on signage for 307 W. Water St. (Your Place).* Steve believes the proposed sign projected outward more than code allows.
  - a. **107 W. Broadway, ArtHaus, outdoor mural.** Mark wrote the DHPC response for this application. Commissioners thought the ArtHaus proposal was poorly presented, and were concerned about the color and size of the murals, which will cover two walls of the building. Mark suggested a bullet point about the weak presentation be added to his response. MOTION -- Steve moved the following recommendation be sent to P&Z: That considering the high visibility of the murals on a building between two historic districts, the murals' overwhelming size, and the murals' proposed colors, which seem to contradict paragraph G of section 15. 04.050 of Decorah code, DHPC members are hesitant to recommend this proposal and believe there should be a broader conversation about it among the public before action is taken. Motion passed 5-0. *Judy and Mark will work on language of the recommendation before it is sent to P&Z.*
4. **Decorah Ch. 15 "Design Criteria" and permitting process for C-3 zoning district.**
  - a. **Ordinance language change update.** Mark reported that the City Council voted to adopt the new language for Ch. 15, although Chad Bird told him small changes could still be made to it before it becomes code. Chad suggested he, Mark and Steve work through the language at some point in the near future.
  - b. **Design Guidelines update.** Judy said that she, Steve and Hayley have not met, but that they are considering three different formats for the guidelines.
5. **Luther College Campus Historic District update.** Mark reported that Jan Full still hasn't received formal notice that her Luther College nomination will be on the State Nominations Review Committee's agenda for this October. Also, he asked Jan about using her descriptions of Altfillisch college buildings in DHPC's Altfillisch brochure. She said commissioners may copy any of her text.
6. **Broadway-Phelps Park Historic District expansion update.** David Wadsworth asked Mark if any homes on Main Street were part of the Broadway-Phelps Park Historic

District and was disappointed to learn they're not. Mark hopes to revisit this project and at least get the Decorah public library and St. Benedict's Church added to the BPPHD. Perhaps DHPC can reconsider adding some Main Street houses as well. Mark also encouraged any commissioner to copy BPPHD text describing the Altfillisch homes in the district to DHPC's Altfillisch brochure document.

- 7. Decorah railroad history opportunity.** Ed Epperly told Mark he believes the last surviving railroad track in Decorah is inside the former Ingvoldstad Lumber Co. He believes the track is important, and could be acquired and moved, possibly into the new park by the former depot at 300 E. Water St., now a chiropractor's office. *Steve volunteered to talk to Scott Johanningmeier about the track. Adrienne will ask Jon Romelton if local railroad buffs would be interested in helping with the project.*
- 8. Charles Altfillisch progress report and brochure content.** Adrienne and Diane described which properties they have added to the brochure document. Mark has been working on Luther College Altfillisch buildings. Mark made several assignments: *Adrienne -- bowling alley, St. Benedict's School and a biography of A.R. Coffeen; Diane -- two homes on North St. that belonged to Hamlet Peterson and Adrian Docken; Judy -- city hall and the Sproat home on Park St., and Lois -- the two Altfillisch homes she owns. Steve will talk to Lois about the homes, since she reportedly has resigned from DHPC.* Mark hopes Lois might let Hayley copy the full set of line drawings and specifications she has for one of her Altfillisch homes.
- 9. Commissioner Reports.** Mark reported he has two copies of a book about federal historic preservation laws. One will go into DHPC's file cabinet in the library; he will keep the other at his home as the chairperson's copy.
- 10. Public Comment.** There was none.
- 11. Possible upcoming meeting, Tuesday, September 8, 2020.** Mark suggested we try to meet in person, outdoors, with the meeting starting earlier in the day. Possibilities are meeting at 12 noon, either at Luther College or in a Phelps Park pavilion.
- 12. Adjournment.** Meeting was adjourned at 6:33 p.m.

### **C-3 Design Review Recommendation**

August 4, 2020

TO: Decorah Planning and Zoning Commission  
FROM: Decorah Historic Preservation Commission  
(Contact: [mugglimz@luther.edu](mailto:mugglimz@luther.edu); 612-720-5795)

TOPIC: 107 W. Broadway St. C-3 Design Permit for Mural

### I. The Property

107 W. Broadway, currently occupied by ArtHaus, falls within the C-3 district but not within any designated historic district. It is, however, just one block east of the Broadway-Phelps Park Historic District and one block south of the Decorah Commercial Historic District; this proximity gives the property some historic importance.

The Broadway-frontage part of the building was constructed in 1941 of concrete block, and a steel-frame warehouse was added to the back of the building in 1953 (according to the Assessor's record). The building was, within recent memory (1990's?), covered with metal siding. Given the relative distinctiveness of the sleek, somewhat Art Moderne original concrete block, the original property might well be classified as a contributing building if it lay within a historic district; the recent metal siding completely obscures the building's original integrity and would, therefore, make it a non-contributing building.

### II. The Proposed C-3 Design Plan

ArtHaus proposes painting murals on the building's eastern and northern elevations.

### III. DHPC Recommendation

Because painted murals in historic settings have often been very controversial, the DHPC would like to outline a few of the principles that might be considered in response to this permit application.

- Painting previously unpainted masonry surfaces is against the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. The Standards encourage historically-appropriate paint colors, but because painting is generally considered reversible, many federal, state, and local ordinances do not control color choices.
- The recently adopted Chapter 15 design ordinances also strongly recommend against painting previously unpainted masonry and specifically define the "visible elevation painting of murals and signage on existing facades" as an "Alteration" that requires a design permit. This is in line with common practices in other cities that see murals as fundamentally altering a building's architectural character. The DHPC would generally strongly oppose murals that would violate the architectural integrity of an historically important building, most especially to murals occurring on prominent street facades.
- Section 15.04.050 "Standards for review" of the Decorah city ordinances includes the following section concerning color:
  - G. Color. The color of buildings should work in harmony with other C-3 structures and should maintain the unique historic quality of the downtown. The accent colors should complement the primary color. Permanent materials like brick, stone, and metal should not be painted and should remain, or preserved, as close to original or existing finish as possible.
- Some people especially interested in history in general tend to appreciate murals that document local history or historical practices--examples of such murals are found in Decorah on the east side of West Music (126 E. Water St.), the west side of Donlon's

Pharmacy (401 W. Water St.), and the west side of the Montessori School (418 W. Water St.). Other people more focused on historic preservation note that these kinds of murals often include buildings that have themselves not been preserved, and can sometimes imply that recording the past visually is somehow equivalent to or perhaps even preferable to actually preserving historic properties.

- There is some support for contemporary murals that enliven historic areas, especially when the murals are included on non-historic properties, non-contributing properties in historic districts, or on less prominent, less historically important elevations of historic buildings. (The Brian Andreas “Story People” mural appears on the north, alley-side of 110 Washington St., a non-contributing building in the Decorah Commercial Historic District and a building that would overall be in violation of the design ordinances adopted by Decorah in the early 2000s. The Carl Holmstead mural appears on the side of 415 W. Water St., a contributing building in the Decorah Commercial Historic District, but is mostly visible from the Courtyard and Cellar [west] side and is painted on an undistinguished concrete block wall, rather than on the distinctive thin, staggered yellow brick that occurs on the building’s Water St. facade.)

At its Aug. 4, 2020, meeting, the DHPC voted 5-0 in favor of the following recommendation:  
Given these considerations,

- 1) The unclear presentation of the permit proposal which makes it difficult to envision the finished mural
- 2) The high visibility of this mural on an unusually open street intersection
- 3) The proposed mural’s overwhelming size
- 4) The proposed mural’s intense color palette, which seems to contradict color recommendations in Section 15.04.050, paragraph G

the historic preservation commission is hesitant to recommend this proposal and believes there should be a broader conversation about it among members of the public before action is taken.