

Decorah Historic Preservation Commission
April 7, 2021 Meeting Minutes (FINAL)

1. **Roll Call.** Electronic meeting was called to order at 4:07 p.m. by Chair Mark Muggli. Other commissioners present were Mark Branum, Adrienne Coffeen, Steve Kelsay, Hayley Jackson, Diane Scholl and Judy van der Linden. Also present representing Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum were Chris Johnson and Marcia McCelvey.
2. **Review and approval of March 3, 2021 and March 5, 2021 minutes. *Distributed by DPHC secretary Judy van der Linden.*** Mark declared the minutes approved as written.
3. **Murals in Historic District.**
 - a. **Chris Johnson and Marcia McCelvey, Vesterheim Museum.** Marcia said the mural planned for Vesterheim will be rendered by Lauren Bonney on the lower half of the stuccoed concrete block west wall of the back museum building. Size will be 78' long by 11' tall, and it may wrap around the corner to the north side. Theme will be "Together in Decorah." The artist's style is whimsical. Vesterheim has not applied for a C-3 permit for the mural yet.
 - b. **Other 2021 Decorah murals.** Mark reported there will be other indoor and outside murals painted this summer. *He will contact Ross Hadley about a mural on the back of his building at 130 W. Water St.*
 - c. **Draft Guidelines for possible "acceptance" by P&Z and City Council.** Commissioners disagreed on the guidelines' content and length and considered several ways to amend them. One motion to reword item #6 died for lack of a vote. Mark suggested adding a short preamble stating DHPC's support for public art and how it may be best presented in historic districts. MOTION: Mark made and Mark B. seconded a motion that a subcommittee revise the guidelines. Motion passed 4-3. Mark, Mark B. and Adrienne will make up the subcommittee.
4. **C-3 District.**
 - a. **Design Permit, 302 Washington St. (Convergence CiderWorks), signage.** Mark wrote this recommendation. MOTION: Mark made a motion, Judy seconded, to approve the permit. Motion passed 7-0.
 - b. **Design Permit, 421 W. Water St. (Old Armory), exterior rehabilitation including windows, building addition and signage.** Judy wrote this recommendation and will edit one part to state that there is historic photographic evidence of transom windows on the north facade. MOTION: Judy moved, Mark seconded a motion to deny the permit. Motion passed 7-0.
 - c. **Design and Signage Guidelines (distributed by secretary Judy van der Linden, ready for possible "acceptance" by P&Z and City Council).** MOTION: Judy made and Hayley seconded a motion to accept both sets of guidelines. Motion passed 7-0.
 - d. **Sign permitting process.** Mark drafted this memo to P&Z explaining DHPC's opposition to a proposal to remove P&Z from the sign permitting process. At Steve's suggestion, Mark will include a sentence saying that Chad Bird also opposed the proposed change. MOTION: Mark moved and Hayley seconded a motion to approve the memo. Motion passed 7-0. (*Secretary's note: Meeting time*)

ran low at this point in the agenda. The group skipped to 6b, the final agenda item to be discussed. See attached memo for Chair Muggli's comments on remaining agenda items.)

- e. **Contact: Heavenly Made Gift Shop.**
- f. **Contact: Tim Olson, Ethos Design Group.**
- g. **Information dissemination.**
 - i. **Design and Signage Guidelines attached to permit request.**
 - ii. **Chapter 15 included on all C-3 building abstracts.**
 - iii. **Contact with new owners.**
 - iv. **Other.**
- 5. **DHPC Annual Historic Preservation Award for “a significant contribution to the identification, study, or preservation of Decorah’s historic built environment.”**
- 6. **Decorah Railroad project.**
 - a. **Update on Water St. Depot project.**
 - b. **David Wadsworth and Railroad Ave. Combination Depot.** Mark reported that David W.’s business has outgrown his depot building. David offered the building to WCHS, which refused. He offered it to DHPC. Mark learned that the commission can’t own a building, but the city can. DHPC would need a plan for the building’s use and maintenance before requesting the city take ownership of it. DHPC continues to consider the offer. Steve noted that he, Ed Epperly and Kelly Regan will meet to discuss the Water St. railroad track project. Jeremy Brill will join them.
- 7. **Luther College Campus Historic District.**
 - a. **News release: Decorahnews and Decorah Newspapers; regional TV stations.**
 - b. **Luther Magazine article, Spring 2021.**
 - c. **Agora article, Fall, 2021.**
 - d. **Revision of City web page link.**
 - e. **“Decorah Distinctively,” April 9-10, campus walking tour.**
- 8. **Broadway-Phelps Park Historic District.**
 - a. **Boundary expansion.**
 - b. **Pat Meyer, 306 Upper Broadway.**
- 9. **Contacts.**
 - a. **WCHS Newsletter reprinted the article on Commercial HD signage.**
 - b. **Dean Thompson photos of Green Parrot.**
- 10. **Charles Altfillisch project updates.**
 - a. **St. Benedict School.**
 - b. **Cindy Womeldorf volunteer research.**
- 11. **Locust Road Cave research project.**
- 12. **Commissioner Reports.**
- 13. **Public Comment.**
- 14. **Possible upcoming meeting, Wednesday, May 5, 2021, 4:00 p.m.**
- 15. **Adjournment.** Meeting was adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

-- SEE MEETING ADDENDUM on pp. 7-9 --

April 7, 2021

TO: Planning & Zoning Commission, City Council, and Building/Business Owner
FROM: Decorah Historic Preservation Commission
(Contact: mugglimz@luther.edu; 612-720-5795)
TOPIC: 302 Washington St. (Convergence CiderWorks) C-3 Design Permit Application

I. The Property

The Involstad Lumber Yard property on the corner of Washington and Broadway Streets was an important business in Decorah's early history, going back to the 1889 Wilbur Lumber Company purchase of this site. Currently the site is on the edge of the downtown commercial district, and a block south of the southern boundary of the National Register "Decorah Commercial Historic District" and a block east of the eastern boundary of the National Register "Broadway-Phelps Parks Historic District." The Current building owner reported that when he began rehabilitation of the corner building in 2019/20, the building contained very little historic material, including little intact material of its original brick, which had been covered with different siding, including, mostly recently, vinyl. (The main wooden lumber storage building on the eastern side of the property is quite intact, and still includes its distinctive clerestory windows and the original railroad tracks for deliveries of material directly into the building.)

II. The Proposal

The business occupant of the first-story retail space is proposing acrylic red lettering on the west and north elevations, with gooseneck lighting above; a nearly-square naturalistic apple-bough banner on the north elevation; and an unlit vertical red-lettered vinyl cabinet sign, readable from both sides, attached on the corner of the building at the Washington/Broadway intersection.

DHPC assumes that the signs do not exceed Municipal Code size requirements.

III. DPHC Recommendation

The sign fonts, coloring, and the photographic apple-bough banner will add attractive coloring and style to a corner that has for a long time suffered neglect. We think the individual letters of the wall signs will make a stronger statement than would a printed banner; we believe three-dimensional letters would be even stronger. The signage should also work well with the contemporary cladding placed over the building's historic materials. (The owner has recently added the same cladding to the 1994 one-story frame building lying further south along Washington St., an upgrade that substantially improves the overall impact of that secondary building.) We doubt that the plastic and vinyl sign materials will convey the same quality as the building's new cladding and we don't believe the materials will convey the solidity and quality that the whole C-3 district aims for.

DRAFT: Despite a voiced preference for higher-quality sign materials, the DHPC voted at its April 7 meeting to endorse the proposed signage.

TO: Planning & Zoning Commission, City Council, Building & Zoning Officer Greg Swanson

FROM: Decorah Historic Preservation Commission
(Contact jo.vdlinden@gmail.com, 563-382-4282)
TOPIC: 421 W. Water St. (The Armory Building), C-3 Design Permit application

I. The Property

The Armory is a prominent three-and-a-half story brick building that along with the Vesterheim Museum anchors the west end of downtown. The building has three public faces (or facades) because of its location on the corner of Mechanic and Water streets, and an open courtyard on its east side. It was originally constructed in 1895 as a two-story brick building for the J.J. Marsh farm implement business, then purchased in 1915 by Adams Seed Company. A fire in 1917 damaged the building, which was repaired and enlarged in 1918. A photo in a March 18, 1925 newspaper shows all three and a half stories in place, and the new business name "Decorah Seed Company" painted on the building's west wall (see below). The Armory has been remodeled over the years, including a small 1-story addition to the east side, but retains significant integrity to be a contributing building to the historic district. Current owner Nicholas Rowley has been renovating the inside one floor at a time for several years. Exterior rehabilitation began in earnest in 2020.

II. The Proposal

The contractor will continue replacing and repairing brick and tuck-pointing around the outside. Six bricked-in windows have been opened up. Nine windows have been created on the west and east sides, and two windows increased in size on the east side. New store front windows will be installed on the north facade. Apparently the courtyard and current 1-story addition on the east side will be replaced with a new steel addition of as-yet-undetermined size.

III. DHPC Recommendation

This prominent historic building required exterior maintenance, so the Decorah Historic Preservation Commission is pleased to see the owner doing extensive, careful brick work on all four facades. We also commend the restoration of six windows that had been bricked up on the south side, returning that wall closer to its original appearance.

The decision to cut nine new windows on the east and west sides represents a major alteration to those facades that should have been reviewed and approved before being done. The new windows do appear to match existing windows in size and shape. The downtown National Register nomination did note that the windows on the west and east elevations are "neither symmetrical nor balanced." Thus although the new window openings on those two sides are not historic, they do not in themselves destroy an original symmetry. And the windows on the west, with their arched brick caps and stone lintels, have the detailing that will make them blend well with the original windows on that side.

In his Scope of Work statement, Mike Owens notes that "*With the exception of new storefront windows, the North Exterior will remain unchanged. It's important for us to maintain the*

architectural ornamentation associated with the Armory Building." The DHPC appreciates those thoughts, and is happy to see that the most important existing elevation, the north, does retain its integrity. We have found photographic evidence indicating transom windows existed over the storefront windows at one time. We encourage restoring those, if possible. Additional glazing via transom windows would serve to create more light inside the entrance.

We are concerned that important details about the work that remains to be done are missing from the owner's C-3 permit application. These include the types and sizes of doors and storefront windows to be installed (section 15.04.040-B of the Design Criteria code requires "samples, specifications and/or photos of all visible materials; i.e., doors, windows, grills, brick stone, trim" etc.), as well as a description of materials, size, color and lettering of planned signage.

But most concerning is the lack of information about the 1-story addition proposed to the east side. The application does include a model and sketch of a north elevation plan that outlines the addition structure, but basic important features such as the precise dimensions, materials to be used other than steel and amount of glazing are not described. Apparently the addition's footprint will require demolition of the present 1-story addition.

Because the application as submitted lacks many critical details about work yet to be done, the Decorah Historic Preservation Commission voted 7 to 0 to deny the C-3 permit, urging The Armory building's owner to resubmit a more complete and accurate application at a later date.

HOME OF DECORAH SEED CO.

- 1** A steel reinforcing rib runs the full length of this post, making it much stronger by actual test than other types. Improvements in design do away with all punching of holes in the post.
- Anchor Plate Attached Without Rivets or Holes in Post**
- 2** The Red Top is not weakened at this vital point by punching holes in the post. The sturdy anchor plate is permanently united to the post by spreading the heads of two of the studs.
- Handy Fasteners With the Long Leg**
- 3** The long leg on the patented Red Top Fastener wraps all the way around the stem of the post and permanently holds the wire in place. It never loosens up. One man attaches fencing to posts with this fastener.
- Pure Aluminum Metallic Finish—Baked-on**
- 4** This double duty finish adds extra years to the life of the post by protecting the steel. Red Tops with the Al. metallic finish make neat, attractive fences, that you will be proud of.

We have a good stock on hand. Come in and see us about your needs.

Photo reproduced in the Decorah Journal, March 18, 1925, showing the repaired and enlarged building at 421 W. Water Street, currently The Armory.

April 7, 2021

TO: Planning and Zoning Commission
FROM: Decorah Historic Preservation Commission
TOPIC: C-3 Signage Permitting Process

We noticed that P&Z chair Tony Clarke and member Joel Zook have suggested an expedited process that would allow the city Zoning Administrator to approve sign requests in the C-3 district. The current process includes advisory review by DHPC, and approval by P&Z and the City Council.

We would like to speak against the recommended expedited procedure for two primary reasons:

1. Although we recognize that approval by a single person is always more efficient than by a group or groups, we resist putting this much responsibility on the Zoning Administrator. (We want to note that former City Manager Chad Bird made this same general point at a meeting with two DHPC members in mid-March.) This isn't a judgment on any particular administrator, current or past. We are simply reflecting the fact that a single individual always brings a single perspective. And especially when business owners are in a hurry to install their new signage--even when they themselves have delayed moving forward until near the application deadline--it is very difficult for an individual administrator to resist inadequate applications, shortcuts, or vague oral promises.
2. We also believe it is important to convey to building and business owners the importance of signage in our central commercial district, especially now that the core of the district is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. An individual sign is a way for an individual business to announce its presence. But each sign is also part of the larger fabric of a district that we are all committed to using as a magnet to draw in both locals and visitors. We are less worried about an occasional "bad" sign than we are about achieving a substantial number of impressive, catchy, stimulating signs that can become a part of downtown Decorah's draw. Our municipal code conveys a positive message about signage and its importance, but we believe a thorough, considered permitting process also helps convey that message of importance.

DHPC APRIL 7, 2021 MEETING ADDENDUM

A report on agenda items for which time was not available at the April 7 meeting--the notes follow the numbering of the original agenda.

Mark Z. Muggli

April 13, 2021

4. C-3 District
 - a. Design Permit, 302 Washington St. (Convergence CiderWorks), signage
 - b. Design Permit, 421 W. Water st. (Old Armory), exterior rehabilitation including windows, building addition, and signage
 - c. Design and Signage Guidelines (distributed by secretary Judy van der Linden; ready for possible "acceptance" by P&Z and City Council)
 - d. Sign permitting process
 - e. Contact: Heavenly Made Gift Shop
After the former West Music building sale was noted in the newspaper, I wrote an email to the new owners: I copied the NRHP statements about the building, I passed on some comments from Adrienne Coffeen (without naming her) concerning the possibility that the original transom windows might be visible underneath the current signboard, noted that a new sign would require a C-3 permit, and noted our willingness to confer about the property, the windows, or the sign. I never heard back.
 - f. Contact: Tim Olson, Ethos Design Group
After the news announcement that an architect was moving into the former Maasman Realty/Broker Leather building, I emailed the architect, summarized the NRHP description of the building, said we were excited to have an architect in town, and noted our willingness to confer on the building. Tim Olson wrote back, explained that he is renting (he said building belongs to "Bob Harman"?), and that he believes in historic preservation as long as it is cost and energy effective.
 - g. Information dissemination (Judy had suggested we have a general discussion of how we can better intervene *sooner* in the design and signage discussions with owners. We may pick that up again in the future. My agenda items were meant to cover current attempts.)
 - i. Design and Signage Guidelines attached to permit request
 - ii. Ch. 15 included on all C-3 building abstracts
Chad Bird directed, on behalf of the city, that all new C-3 district abstracts would include the *whole* of the revised Ch. 15 "Design" chapter. Thus new building owners who have gotten an updated abstract have no excuse for not understanding their legal obligations when altering the building.
 - iii. Contact with new owners
As I hear ownership changes, I will continue the process of contacting new owners and offering our services.
 - iv. Other
5. DHPC Annual Historic Preservation Award for "a significant contribution to the identification, study, or preservation of Decorah's historic built environment."

Jeremy Brill immediately expressed surprise and delight at being offered our award.

Due to several technology mixups on WCHS's end, I didn't hear until April 13 that WCHS is very pleased to receive the award, and appreciates the way in which the award will

respond to a few vocal community members who consider the Adams-Landers house restoration a waste of time and money.

6. Decorah Railroad project
 - a. Update on Water St. Depot project
Discussions continue with the building owner, the city, and potential helpers. This has involved a couple of meetings at the former lumber yard. We have still not committed ourselves to moving forward--we're testing feasibility.
 - b. David Wadsworth and the Railroad Ave. Combination Depot
As reported at the meeting, David is willing to donate the building to DHPC. The City tells me that DHPC cannot own a building directly, and that the city would have to own it.

7. Luther College Campus Historic District
 - a. News release: DecorahNews and Decorah Newspapers; regional TV stations
We got some good regional press with the new historic district, partly because Luther College took over the shaping and distribution of the news release. At her April 6, 2021 webinar with retired Luther faculty, president Jennifer Ward commented that the NRHP listing of the LCCHD was "a fun bit of news."
 - b. Luther Magazine article, Spring 2021
An article based on my draft is being prepared for the spring 2021 issue.
 - c. *Agora* article, Fall 2021
The *Agora* editor says he will be pleased to publish a longer essay on the LCCHD in the fall issue.
 - d. Revision of City webpage link
I worked with Jon Pankow to update the webpage, which now includes a brief introduction and links to the final nomination and photos. Check it out.
 - e. "Decorah Distinctively," April 9-10, campus walking tour
I had 15 participants total at the two 30-minute tours I created to highlight the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act, and the LCCHD. I spent much of my time on Altfillisch and Main III.

8. Broadway-Phelps Park Historic District
 - a. Boundary expansion
Judy and I have had considerable correspondence with SHPO, who in turn corresponded with the reviewer at the National Park Service. The upshot: the 1977 nomination is deeply flawed (no clear "period of significance," no distinction between "contributing and non-contributing" properties, etc.). This does not mean that the district itself is problematic. We are highly encouraged to do a full-scale "re-survey" of the whole district, including neighboring properties--this would likely require hiring a professional consultant who would need to greatly expand the explanation of significance.

But we were also given the go-ahead to develop a streamlined application for amended boundaries. (This definitely feels like another variation, after a series of different expectations for the expansion in the last three years.) I drafted anew, took more photos, Judy read a draft, SHPO responded with suggestions and changes, etc. This involved, among other things, designating the St. Benedict "Prayer Garden" as a non-contributing property. SHPO, bless them, prepared a completely new map with longitude/latitude coordinates. In early April I sent a "final" version that will be presented to SNRC (State Nominations Review Committee) in October, which could

- involve more revisions, but which would likely lead to NPS certification in early 2022. It's a LONG time since we received the City and St. Benedict go-ahead for this project in December 2016, but if it goes through, it will be a worthy end-goal.
- b. Pat Meyer, 306 Upper Broadway
Some back-and-forth contact about possible tax credits for her home rehabilitation. (I have updated our tax credit hand-out document to show that there is no longer a named individual at SHPO who property owners can contact about potential credits.)
9. Contacts
- a. WCHS Newsletter reprinted the article on Commercial HD signage
Either a sign that they were short of copy for their newsletter, that they liked our mention of their role in the ca. 2007 blue Broadway-Phelps Park signage, or because our orange signs are kind of cool.
 - b. Dean Thompson photos of Green Parrot
After some correspondence about his Altfillisch house at 217 Riverview Drive, Dean sent me a couple of photos of the former Green Parrot restaurant--one showing his Corvair in front of the early 1970s Roscoe's, and another more historic. I will eventually include these in our DPL file cabinet.
10. Charles Altfillisch project updates
- a. St. Benedict School
Adrienne has done another fine building description for our brochure, including some useful exterior photos. Check it out as a model for other web-page reports.
 - b. Cindy Womeldorf volunteer research
After some back-and-forth correspondence about an Altfillisch re-do on Winnebago St., Cindy volunteered to help with our research. After some delay and indecision on my part, I asked her to research the homes on Pleasant Hill. She has dived in. In addition, I've gotten some intriguing background on 110 Pleasant Hill from former owner John Christianson, which I will also copy for our file cabinet.
11. Locust Road Cave research project
- Given Chad Bird's leaving, I wrote interim City Manager Wanda Hemesath and City Engineer Jeremy Brill explaining the project and the unresolved issue. Wanda asked that we delay attempting to complete the sign project now, given how overwhelmed they are at City Hall. I said that was fine, but said that we don't want our research to get lost, and that we will pick this up again in the fall.