

Decorah Historic Preservation Commission
June 9, 2021 Meeting Minutes (FINAL)

1. **Roll Call.** This meeting in Vesterheim's Amdal-Odland Heritage Center was called to order at 3:30 by Chairperson Mark Muggli. Present were Adrienne Coffeen, Mark Branum, Hayley Jackson and Judy van der Linden. Commissioner Diane Scholl and Planning and Zoning commissioner Joel Zook attended by Zoom. Decorah resident Janelle Pavlovec attended in person. Commissioner Steve Kelsay was absent.
2. **Review and approval of May 5, 2021 minutes, distributed by DHPC secretary Judy van der Linden.** Mark declared the minutes approved as written.
3. **Conversation with Vesterheim "Commons Building" architects.** Vesterheim CEO Chris Johnson, Board of Trustees chair Ruth Schultz, Director of Administration Marcia McKelvey and architectural firm representatives Jonathan Ramsey and Chad Carpenter were present to update commissioners. Recent focus of the museum's master plan has been the Cary/ArtHaus building, which they want to demolish to accommodate a new Commons Building. The new building will serve as a front entry and multi-purpose gathering space that connects to Vesterheim's Heritage Park and other campus structures. Presenters addressed DHPC's concerns about the need to demolish the Cary building and will explore reuse of building materials and design elements. One substantial interior brick wall will be renovated and featured in the new Commons Building. The Dayton House will not be affected by this project. Presenters estimated that demolition and construction will begin in early 2022 and the Commons Building completed by the end of the year.
 - a. **Possible non-binding poll of DHPC concerning Vesterheim's plans.** Mark proposed a straw poll of members to indicate the level of DHPC support of plans. MOTION: Mark moved, Judy seconded, a motion to accept Vesterheim's current plan to demolish and replace the Cary/ArtHaus building, recognizing the challenging condition of the building, and appreciating that Vesterheim has kept DHPC informed as plans evolved. Motion passed unanimously.
4. **Murals in Historic District Guidelines (MZM June 2, 2021 version).** Mark reported that Zoning Administrator Greg Swanson wants to use the Design, Sign and Mural guidelines right away, although he's unsure exactly how to classify murals. The three documents are not on this month's P&Z agenda for consideration. DHPC members agreed that unless P&Z wants to weigh in on them, DHPC will work with Greg to do any needed revisions to the three sets of guidelines
 - a. **Issue of "stucco" in item # 4.** MOTION -- Mark B. made a motion, seconded by Adrienne, to remove the word "stucco" from item #4 of the Mural Guidelines. Motion passed unanimously.
 - b. **Illustrations.** Members approved of the four mural illustrations that were added.
 - c. **Possible acceptance for forwarding to P&Z and City Council.** MOTION -- Mark made and Judy seconded a motion that DHPC endorse the Mural Guidelines with slight revisions -- these to be made by Mark and Judy to clarify

that Ch. 15 code is ultimate authority for design decisions (see attached final version of Mural Guidelines). Motion passed 6-0.

5. C-3 District.

- a. **Design Permit, 107 W. Broadway St. (ArtHaus, fencing).** Mark wrote the response to this permit application (see attached). Commissioners unanimously approved it.
- b. **P&Z consideration of Design, Signage, and Mural guidelines, Monday, June 14, 5:30, Council Chambers.** See 4 and 4c above.
- c. **Vesterheim Mural follow-up.** Mark reported that there was no real P&Z discussion of the proposed Vesterheim mural, nor of the DHPC response, but that the vote was 5-2 in favor of the permit. After the meeting, one of the "nay" votes cited issues raised by the DHPC mural guidelines.
- d. **C-3 Information dissemination.**
 - i. **Design and Signage Guidelines attached to permit request.** Greg will do this to help permit applicants.
 - ii. **Ch. 15 included on all C-3 building abstracts.** Every updated abstract will include a print out of all of Ch. 15.
 - iii. **Contact with new owners.** Mark has taken it upon himself to contact all new owners of properties he learns about.
 - iv. **Other.** Commissioners discussed possible other ways of contact but will wait to see if the distribution of guidelines has any positive impact.

6. Preserve Iowa Summit, June 3-5, recap. Mark, Judy and Diane and Adrienne all registered for the summit and attended sessions or will watch the recordings. Judy recommended the keynote talk, "Driving while Black."

7. DHPC Annual Historic Preservation Award for "a significant contribution to the identification, study, or preservation of Decorah's historic built environment."

News about the awards was sent by Mark to three outlets.

- a. **Decorah Public Opinion, June 3, 2021.**
- b. **DecorahNews, June 7, 2021**
- c. **Material sent for updated city webpage.** The webpage has been updated.
- d. **Certificates printed; need frames and delivery.** Adrienne volunteered to purchase frames and deliver the framed certificates to City Engineer Jeremy Brill and to Winneshiek County Historical Society.

8. Decorah Railroad project.

- a. **Update on Water St. Depot project.** There was no update today.
- b. **David Wadsworth and Railroad Ave. Combination Depot.**
 - i. **Tour, Wednesday, June 16, 4:00.** David has offered to give DHPC members a tour of the depot at this time.

9. Luther College Campus Historic District.

- a. **Luther Magazine Spring 2021 article (<https://www.luther.edu/magazine/>).** Mark contributed significantly to this article about the district.
- b. **Bronze plaque in central campus, with dedication event in the fall? Mark will contact several Luther administrators for their reaction to this idea.** Possible dedication date is Founder's Day, October 14.

10. Charles Altfillisch project. Mark reported that he and Adrienne toured the Methodist Church annex and that Adrienne is writing up the Congregational Church additions. *Hayley will try to look through boxes of Don Gray records from the Altfillisch firm. The boxes are at Winneshiek County Historical Society.*

11. Contacts.

- a. Potential owner of Horn house concerning National Register designation.**
Mark talked to this person, who wondered what restrictions NRHP designation placed on his/her plans to remodel, and if funds were available to pay for some remodel costs. Mark responded “none” and “no.”

12. Commissioner Reports. There were none.

13. Public Comment. Janelle asked where to find mural maintenance information. The mural on the Senior Center building on south River Street is deteriorating.

14. General consideration of future meeting schedule. Because of limited meeting space in City Hall and the need to send recommendations to P&Z before its meeting, commissioners agreed to change the regular DHPC meeting to the last Wednesday of each month at 4 pm.

15. Possible upcoming meeting, Wednesday, June 7, 2021, 3:30 pm. Next meeting will be Wednesday, June 30 at 4 pm in the City Hall council chambers.

16. Adjournment. Meeting was adjourned about 5:30 pm.

June 9, 2021

TO: Decorah Planning and Zoning, City Council, and ArtHaus
FROM: Decorah Historic Preservation Commission
(Contact: mugglimz@luther.edu; 612-720-5795)
TOPIC: 107 W. Broadway St. C-3 Design Permit for fencing

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 adding a garden-enclosing fence that begins at the building's northwest corner, runs 32' to the west, and then 24' to the south. The Board of Adjustment has evidently granted a variance to allow the fence to be 6' tall, instead of the typical 4'.

III. DHPC Recommendation

Because the area around the ArtHaus, at the intersection of Broadway and Washington streets, is dominated by open, unscreened, highly visible parking lots, just about any high-quality outdoor amenity would be a welcome addition. In addition, the fencing sample provided by ArtHaus looks distinctive (welded, rather than chain link, with steel poles), and in keeping with the ArtHaus building.

At its June 9, 2021 meeting, the DHPC voted unanimously to recommend accepting the ArtHaus fencing permit application.

MURAL GUIDELINES FOR DECORAH'S C-3 DISTRICT

Developed by the Decorah Historic Preservation Commission (June 2021)

The City of Decorah encourages public art of all kinds. Like building rehabilitation and signage, murals in the C-3 district are defined as an "Alteration" (see "Definitions" 15.04.020) and therefore require a permit before the project is begun. Because large-scale murals have the potential to conflict with and diminish the artistry of existing architecture, the City has developed the following guidelines.

These guidelines draw upon 2019 State Historic Preservation Office recommendations, and illustrate the principles and specifics of Decorah Municipal Code Chapter 15, with special emphasis on preserving the C-3 district's historic character. (In 2017 the Decorah Commercial Historic District was included on the National Register of Historic Places.) The most pertinent sections are these: Purpose and Intent (15.04.010, notably A); Procedure for Issuance of a Permit (15.04.040, notably B); Standards for Review (15.04.050, notably the introduction, A, Materials, D, Facades and the accompanying paragraph on "Street level facades," and G, Color); Building and Property Maintenance (15.08.010, notably 15.08.030.C, D, H, and 15.08.040.A).

1. Murals should not be painted on a building's public face.
2. Murals should not cover or obscure architectural details.
3. In order to preserve a building's architectural integrity and make its overall shape clearly visible, murals should be "framed" rather than covering the complete building elevation.
The following are some examples of framing:
 - Creating a new physical frame that surrounds the mural.
 - Using existing architectural features as the mural frame (e.g., extended roof parapets; stone or brick detailing between floors; vertical pilasters; window or door openings).
 - Using a neutral background--whether previously-existing or newly painted--to provide a framing space for the mural's central elements when they are located away from the background's edge.
4. Unpainted masonry (brick, stone) should not be painted.
5. Given the permanence of paint, muralists are encouraged to consider wall-mounted panels or electronic projections.
6. In order to facilitate regular maintenance and potential removal, owners and muralists are strongly encouraged to develop written contracts, photographic documentation, materials lists, etc.
7. As with any building alteration, owners planning a mural are encouraged to communicate with the owners of neighboring properties.



Even with its strong design and colors, and despite its ignoring of the windows, this mural does appropriately preserve the historic, building-defining architectural details along the building's right and top sides. Also, the mural is framed by this architectural detailing on the right and top sides and by the attached outside stairway along the left side, and therefore does not obscure the building's overall shape and mass.



This mural captures the energy of its subject, but uses an expansive neutral background so that the building's shape is still readily apparent.



By limiting the mural to the boundaries of a large loading door, this muralist has honored the building's unpainted brick and overall shape, while creating a vivid, thought-provoking image.



By working within an open space between the stone foundation and the first and second-story windows and leaving open space below the roofline, this mural preserves this previously-painted brick building's fundamental character.