

Decorah Historic Preservation Commission
Minutes of May 5, 2021 Meeting (FINAL)

1. **Roll Call.** Meeting was called to order at 3:41 pm after difficulty with the city's Zoom call. Present were Mark Muggli, chair, Hayley Jackson, Diane Scholl and Judy van der Linden. Commissioners Steve Kelsay, Adrienne Coffeen and Mark Branum were absent. Joining by phone was Decorah resident Janelle Pavlovec.
2. **Review and approval of April 7, 2021 minutes. Submitted by DHPC Judy van der Linden.** Mark declared the minutes adopted as written.
3. **Murals in Historic District.**
 - a. **Draft guidelines for possible "acceptance" by P&Z and City Council, along with Sign and Design guidelines.** Mark made and Hayley seconded a MOTION to accept page one of the Murals Guidelines. During discussion, Judy moved and Mark seconded a MOTION to add a phrase to item #1 to better explain the term "public face" of a building. Motion passed. Commissioners decided the current city C-3 permit form was sufficient for mural applications. Judy made and Diane seconded a MOTION to ask P&Z members about adding illustrations to the guidelines. Motion passed. Vote on original motion by Mark passed 4-0.
4. **C-3 District.**
 - a. **Mural Permit, 520 W. Water St. (Vesterheim Museum)--consider Muggli draft response.** Commissioners decided to add a bullet item to the response and one word to the recommendation statement. Mark made and Judy seconded a MOTION accepting Muggli's response, as amended, which passed unanimously. Mark had two other C-3 updates: 1) Hacker Nelson will not consider any other suggestions about the 121 W. Water St. facade -- HN is proceeding with demolition and the plan to mimic 123 W. Water; 2) the Armory building contractor may install transom windows on either side of the front door as DHPC suggested.
 - b. **Sign permitting process--open meeting at P&Z May 10, 7:00 pm.** (Note the P&Z meeting begins at **5:30, not 7:00 pm**, and the public hearing or open meeting is item 6 on the agenda.) *Mark will remind commissioners to speak up before or at the open hearing if they object to the sign permitting process being entrusted only to the city code enforcer.* Mark said he's quite sure P&Z will proceed with this change if no one objects.
 - c. **Information dissemination.** Points i.-iv. were not discussed.
 - i. **Design and Signage Guidelines attached to permit request.**
 - ii. **Ch. 15 included on all C-3 building abstracts.**
 - iii. **Contact with new owners.**
 - iv. **Other**
7. **Decorah Railroad project.** (see below for part a.)
 - b. **David Wadsworth and Railroad Ave. Combination Depot.** Owner David Wadsworth has offered his depot building to DHPC, although the city would have official ownership. Commissioners discussed how DHPC might use the building and decided to meet with David sometime in the next three weeks for a tour. *Mark will contact commissioners and make arrangements to meet.*

- 14. Adjournment.** Official meeting was adjourned at 4:32 pm when Hayley signed off and there was no longer a quorum. Remaining agenda items were discussed informally (see below).

Informal Discussion after Adjournment of DHPC 5/5/2021 Meeting

- 5. Preserve Iowa Summit, June 3-5, \$25 reimbursable.** Mark encouraged all commissioners again to register for the summit.
- 6. DHPC Annual Historic Preservation Award for “a significant contribution to the identification, study, or preservation of Decorah’s historic built environment.”**
Mark will write a press release about the award, which this year will be presented to City Engineer Jeremy Brill and to the Winneshiek County Historical Society.
- 7. Decorah Railroad project.** (see above for part b.)
- a. Update on Water St. depot project.** Several more meetings have been held and there is still a chance that the railroad track outside Scott Johanningmeier’s building can be relocated to Dry Run Park, according to Mark.
- 8. Luther College Campus Historic District.**
- a. Luther College Chips article.** Mark reported that an article about the campus historic district designation appeared in Chips.
- 9. Courthouse Advisory Committee meeting April 29, 2021.** Mark said that the committee is still active, meeting about every six months. Architect Bethany Jordan wrote a grant proposal for \$125,000 to help restore the courthouse dome, and the county received the grant. The award hasn’t been publicized yet.
- 10. Charles Altfillisch Project.** Mark hopes DHPC can again focus on this project after other obligations wind down. Perhaps the Altfillisch brochure can be done by fall.
- 11. Commissioner Reports.** Judy reported she has corresponded with Jann Sproatt Klaas, who grew up in the Altfillisch firm home at 901 Park St. Mark said DHPC’s Broadway-Phelps Park district expansion project is ongoing.
- 12. Public Comment.** Janelle was disappointed to learn that the Calmar railroad depot, which is on the NRHP, has been sold and will be converted to a restaurant. She’s also unhappy that the Decorah Public Library remodeled its post office artifacts/archive room into a staff office.
- 13. Possible upcoming meeting Wednesday, June 2, 2021, 3:30 pm.** Mark said the conference room at City Hall has been converted to office space, which limits meeting space for commissions. He proposes meeting in person in June and will survey commissioners who aren’t present today. Meeting day and time may have to change, perhaps to Tuesdays at 4 or 4:30 pm.
- 14. Adjournment.** (see official meeting minutes above)

MURAL GUIDELINES FOR DECORAH'S C-3 DISTRICT

Developed by the Decorah Historic Preservation Commission in May 2021, using Decorah Municipal Code Chapter 15 and 2019 State Historic Preservation Office recommendations

The City of Decorah encourages public art of all kinds. Like building designs and signage, murals in the C-3 district are considered a major alteration 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. The guidelines illustrate the principles of Municipal Code Chapter 15, with special emphasis on the C-3 district's historic character.

1. Murals should not be painted on a building's public face (usually the front facade).
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, stucco) 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.

May 5, 2021

TO: Decorah Planning and Zoning, Council, and Building Owner
FROM: Decorah Historic Preservation Commission
(Contact: mugglimz@luther.edu; 612-720-5795)
TOPIC: 520 W. Water St. (Vesterheim, Main building, rear addition, Mill St. & north side)
C-3 Mural Permit Application

I. The Property

As noted in this application, Vesterheim Museum added a one-story concrete-block addition to 520 W. Water in 1934, but in 1974 expanded the addition to three stories, added roofed balcony walkways at the first and second story levels, and covered the block with a stucco incised to resemble large, formally-cut stone. The 2017 National Register designation for the Decorah Commercial Historic District identifies the historic front section of 520 W. Water as a “contributing building” and notes that it might be individually eligible for the Register because of its architecture, but merely mentions that there is a “more modern addition to the rear” that presumably replaced a former brick addition visible on a ca. 1935 photograph included in the nomination.

II. The Proposal

The Museum proposes to add a mural on the rear addition that covers the complete elevation of the first story and that wraps around the corner at the same full height. The mural would be painted directly on the stucco. The mural design will draw upon the museum’s collection for its colors and motifs.

III. DPHC Recommendation

- City Code Ch. 15 says that unpainted masonry, specifically stone and brick, should not be painted. It isn’t ideal that the museum’s stucco would be painted over, since it is a carefully-done, historically-evocative stucco style, and has now been in place for almost fifty years. If the mural is ever abandoned, it will have to be painted over, which means that the first-story section of stucco will no longer match the unpainted stucco on the rest of the building.
- Ch. 15 emphasizes the preservation of architectural details, including window openings. Because this building has no windows and no architectural details, the mural does not create a problem.
- Because Ch. 15 emphasizes overall architectural integrity, DHPC is concerned about murals that somehow obscure a building’s three-dimensional shape, and we therefore encourage framing devices that identify murals as an art piece rather than as a substitute for the building’s shaped artistry. The proposed Vesterheim mural is nicely framed by the historic brick building on its right side and by the first-story balcony running the full length of the mural. The mural will wrap around the corner, and may therefore somewhat diminish the corner angle of the building, but the mural will then end part way across the north wall, which will complete the framing of the mural.

- As Ch. 15 requires, the mural's color palette and design features complement the historic downtown generally
- It's regrettable that Vesterheim only provided a sample of the mural design, but given the quality of their application, DHPC is confident that the entire mural design will be suitable.

Noting our appreciation for Vesterheim's early consultation with us about its mural plans and the relative thoroughness of its final application, the DHPC at its May 5, 2021 meeting voted unanimously to recommend Vesterheim's C-3 mural application.