

Decorah Historic Preservation Commission
September 28, 2022 Meeting Minutes (FINAL)

1. **Roll Call.** Chairperson Mark Muggli opened the meeting at 4:30 pm. Present were Mark Branum, Adrienne Coffeen, Hayley Jackson, Diane Scholl and Judy van der Linden. Decorah resident Janelle Pavlovec arrived about 5:30 pm.
2. **Review and approval of August 31, 2022 minutes distributed by secretary Judy van der Linden.** Mark requested an addition to #9 of the 8/31 minutes. With that change to be made, the minutes were declared approved.
3. **DHPC membership.** Prospective new member Kathy Buzza's application was not acted on because city officials didn't realize DHPC had a vacancy. Her application will be voted on shortly. Mark also noted that Ryan Engelman has returned to Decorah and may be interested in serving on DHPC at some point.
4. **C-3 District Permit Application Review.** Mark wrote all three DHPC's responses. He will add sentences to both the Getup and Windsor responses asking for more detail in the permit applications and noting that both proposed signs are backlit. Commissioners were pleased with Nordic Chiropractic's plan to restore second story windows to their original size. (All three responses are attached to minutes.)
 - a. **212 W. Water St. (The Getup) sign permit.** Application approved 6-0.
 - b. **209 E. Water St. (Nordic Chiropractic) design permit.** Application approved 6-0.
 - c. **309 W. Water St. (Double Windsor) sign permit.** This permit application was received after the meeting agenda was set. Commissioners approved of the sign.
5. **Charles Altfillisch project update.** Mark reported that the Altfillisch brochure printing has been held up while the Chamber of Commerce checks on grant funding. *Mark will ask the Altfillisch grandchildren about holding a celebration in the Mound Street house backyard once the brochure is printed.*
6. **Iowa Cultural and Entertainment Districts followup.** Mark is very enthusiastic about applying for an ICED designation for Decorah because he thinks it would be good for the city, it would highlight National Register properties, and it could help redefine historic preservation as less dry and more alive and exciting. He hopes Vesterheim, ArtHaus and the Chamber will be partners. MOTION made by Mark: The Decorah Historic Preservation Commission supports an application for a downtown Decorah "Cultural and Entertainment District" and agrees to become a "consortium partner" and to provide a Commission member as an "advisory board" member for the application process and the required annual report. Motion seconded by Judy, and approved 6-0.
7. **Significant Decorah Properties project.** Mark and Adrienne added over 30 properties to the project list that were first identified during the Altfillisch research. Mark suggested several prominent homes on W. Main Street might be considered significant properties.
 - a. **Project Guidelines**
 - b. **List development**
8. **Contacts:**
 - a. **112 Winnebago St. (Schrubbe building).** Owner Diane Whealy and partner Lissie Maurus recently remodeled the facade and entrance in a historically appropriate

way, and Mark wrote them emails to thank them. Both responded and appreciated his comments.

- 9. Commissioner Reports.** **Mark** reported that an association of deaf persons will hold a convention in Decorah and Steve Johnson asked DHPC to give the group a 15-minute summary of Decorah history. *Mark volunteered to do that.* **Mark** also asked for comments on the parking ramp ordinance language that Planning and Zoning has worked on for six months, and which the City Council changed significantly at its Sept. 19 meeting with little discussion. Kate Rattenborg Scott is very concerned that the council's changes may open up the historic district – especially the side streets – to more development. Mark contacted P&Z member Martin Refsal, who didn't seem panicked by the changes, but also hadn't read the changed language yet. After lengthy discussion, commissioners decided to send a memo to the City Council asking that the language changes be clarified, expressing concern over the potential number of parking garages off Water Street, and noting that entrance and egress of such garages from the side may affect pedestrian safety. *Mark will write the memo and circulate it to commissioners for comments.* A public hearing on the new ordinance language will be held Oct. 17, after which the council will vote on the language. Commissioners will attend the meeting. **Judy** reported that commissioners wanting to access DHPC's file cabinet in the library basement may have to make an appointment to do so. *Mark Branum will talk to Kristin Torresdal about moving the cabinet to a more accessible location.*
- 10. Public Comment.** Janelle said she was concerned about a proposed 40-unit apartment building in downtown Decorah and urged commissioners to fill out the North Alley questionnaire if they hadn't already done so.
- 11. Upcoming meeting: Wednesday, October 26, 2022, 4:30 pm.**
- 12. Adjournment.** Meeting was adjourned at 6:13 pm.

September 28, 2022

TO: Decorah Zoning Administrator

FROM: Decorah Historic Preservation Commission <historicpreservation@decorahia.org>

TOPIC: 212 W. Water St. (The Getup) Sign Permit Application

I. The Property

212 W. Water St. and 214 W. Water St., for a number of years combined with a single bronze awning and using the 212 address, are both brick nineteenth-century Italianate buildings that were identified as “contributing” in the 2017 National Register Decorah Commercial Historic District nomination.

II. The Proposal

The proposed back-lit fascia signboard replaces previous signs in the same location.

III. DHPC Response

Stylistically, the proposed sign is a notable improvement on the blue and white Sports World sign that it replaces. The Getup’s new logo is effective—strong without being domineering. We do wish, however, that the application listed the sign/letter material. We notice that the blue background on the previous Getup sign on the Steyer building—which some DHPC members loved, and others hated—is not part of the proposed sign.

The city’s sign guidelines note that “Internal illumination is not always appropriate and will be carefully reviewed.” In this case, the gold-glowing, back-lit letters seem appropriate for this historic building in this historic district.

MOTION: On September 28, 2022, the DHPC voted 6-0 to endorse the proposed backlit “Getup” fascia sign for 212 W. Water St.

September 28, 2022

TO: Decorah Zoning Administrator, P&Z Commission, City Council FROM: Decorah Historic Preservation Commission <historicpreservation@decorahia.org> TOPIC: 309 W. Water St. (Double Windsor Clothing) Design & Sign Permit Application

I. The Property

309 W. Water St. is a notable late Victorian (1897) brick building that retains much of its original stone trim, its second-story window openings, and its distinctive second-story oriel window. It is a “contributing” building in the 2017 National Register Commercial Historic District.

II. The Proposal

The building’s owner proposes gray painted trim on the ground-story level, and black trim within the ground-story door alcoves. They also propose a back-lit lettered sign running the full width and height of the signboard area.

III. DHPC Response

Given how much of its second-story historic brick and stone fabric is intact, 309 W. Water is ripe for a full restoration that would remove the second-story oriel window cladding, reduce the ground-level bulkhead area, expand the display glass area, and restore the glass transom areas. We understand that nothing that major is being proposed now, and we appreciate that the building’s new owner is proposing only modest painting and sign changes that will refresh the building without damaging any of the existing historic fabric.

The suggested gray and black colors are perfectly appropriate. The sign, although pushing the size limits that the building can contain, has a distinctive, historically-compatible look. We do, however, wish that the permit application had included the sign materials. The city’s sign guidelines note that “Internal illumination is not always appropriate and will be carefully reviewed.” In this case, the gold-glowing, back-lit letters seem appropriate for this historic building in this historic district.

MOTION: On September 28, 2022, the DHPC voted 6-0 to endorse the painting and sign proposals for 309 W. Water St.

September 28, 2022

TO: Decorah Zoning Administrator, P&Z Commission, City Council FROM: Decorah Historic Preservation Commission <historicpreservation@decorahia.org> TOPIC: 209 E. Water St. (Elvira's Estates/Nordic Chiropractic) Design Permit Application

I. The Property

209 E. Water St. is one of the most important buildings on the south side of the 200 block of E. Water St. The "Twentieth-Century Commercial" style building was constructed (and designed?) by A. R. Coffeen in 1916, seems to be in good shape structurally, and has been relatively unchanged since its construction. It is a "contributing" building in the 2017 National Register Commercial Historic District.

II. The Proposal

The building's owner proposes to convert the building's second story open space, originally designed as a dance hall, into five apartments. The second story street-facing windows will be replaced. No changes are being made at the ground-level.

III. DHPC Response

Historic preservationists regularly argue about conversions like this one, given the loss of the upper story's original function, shape, and size. But if a town needs apartments more than a dance hall, the owner needs the rental income, and the conversion supports the building's preservation, we tend to support such changes. The ground-level facade will not be changed, although we note that the owner's painting of the window-inserts has already improved the facade over earlier incarnations.

From our point of view, the owner's most important decision on the exterior is to replace the second-story fill-in windows with new bronze windows that closely mimic the original window design, a distinctive three over one design with three vertical muntins in each of the eight windows. Unlike the replacements, the original windows were presumably double hung, and the vertical wooden mullions were broader than in the proposed windows. But replicating the original window design within the original window openings is the most crucial decision. We look forward to the time when the owner will be able to introduce similar historically appropriate windows at the ground-level. And we hope this on-going restoration will become a model for other downtown building owners.

MOTION: On September 28, 2022, the DHPC voted 6-0 to endorse the changes to 209 E. Water St., noting most especially the very appropriate second-story window replacements.