

Decorah Historic Preservation Commission
March 29, 2023 Meeting Minutes (FINAL)

1. **Roll Call.** Chairman Mark Muggli called the meeting to order at 4:30 pm. All commissioners were present: Mark Branum, Kathy Buzza, Adrienne Coffeen, Hayley Jackson, Diane Scholl and Judy van der Linden. Janelle Pavlovec, Decorah resident, also attended.
2. **Review and approval of February 22, 2023 minutes, distributed by secretary Judy van der Linden.** Judy will correct the spelling of one name. With that change, Mark declared the minutes adopted.
3. **C-3/Commercial District.** Mark wrote responses for both permits.
 - a. **304 W. Water St. (Exit Realty) sign permit.** Permit motion was seconded by Hayley; permit application was approved 7-0.
 - b. **122 E. Water St. (American Family Insurance / Cedar Valley Auction) sign permit.** Permit motion was seconded by Judy; commission voted 7-0 not to recommend this sign application.
 - c. **Other.**
4. **Altfillisch project.**
 - a. **609 W. Broadway centennial celebration.** The owners of three Altfillisch homes neighboring 609 W. Broadway will all participate to different degrees in the celebration, which will likely be in September. Jeni Grouws would like visitors to remain outside her home; Drew Stevenson and Maria Jones will open part of their home to visitors, and Lois Humpal is happy to have people walk by and may open up her house depending on the date.
 - b. **Preserve Iowa Summit presentation application.** Mark reported that the presentation was accepted and has been scheduled for Saturday afternoon, June 3. He and Hayley will make the presentation.
 - c. **Preservation Iowa “Preservation At Its Best” award application.** DHPC’s application for this award has been submitted. Because the application directs award judges to the Altfillisch website, Mark suggested commissioners search for some of the more obvious errors on that website. He wants to submit a list of errors to the city by Friday, April 7, for correction. *Mark will send members a list of some errors he’s already found, and he will search the biographical and “other Altfillisch properties” sections; Hayley will search the Luther College tour; Adrienne, the South Decorah tour; Diane, the West tour, and Kathy, the Central tour.* Mark suggested everyone also look for broken links, if possible.
5. **DHPC 2023 Historic Preservation Award.** Mark M. and Diane both said they are unsure if they will be in Decorah on the award presentation date.
 - a. **Monday, May 15, 2023, 4:30-6:00, Vesterheim Painter Mill shelter (rain venue: Amdahl Center).**
 - b. **Presenters.** *Hayley will present the Vesterheim award; Kathy will present the Depot Outlet award.*
 - c. **Certificates.** *Mark will send certificate information to city hall and Adrienne will frame the completed certificates.*
 - d. **Refreshments.** *Judy will organize refreshments.*
 - e. **News Release.** *Mark will write a news release for late April or early May.*
6. **Iowa Cultural and Entertainment District.** Mark reported that the scheduled January meeting was canceled at the last minute and he’s heard nothing since. Because the district

application is May 1, *he will reach out to Jessica Rilling at the Chamber office.*

7. Decorah Demolition permit process. Mark will summarize commission members' thoughts about DHPC's possible role in the demolition process.

8. "Architecture and the Building of Luther College," Mark Z. Muggli, LC Emeriti Colloquium, April 13, 2023, Baker Village, 3:00-4:00 (refreshments to follow). Mark will be giving this presentation on the profession of architecture in Decorah. The public is invited.

9. Contacts.

a. Phil Iverson tour of restored 1860s cabin. Tour may take place in June.

b. Brittany and Nathan Todd (303 Decorah Ave.). The Todds contacted Kathy about possible sources of funding for repairing the wrap-around front porch of their home, which was designed by William Bucknell.

c. Bill Keating, Grand Ave. Community Outreach, Spencer, IA. Bill reached out to DHPC to ask for guidance on building rehabilitation strategies or grants for the city's five-story, 101-year-old community center.

10. Significant Decorah Properties project. Mark hopes to post the list of properties to DHPC's website soon so that commissioners can begin writing Site Inventories for some of them. Commissioners discussed whether leaving NRHP properties off the list could be confusing to some users who come across the list and assume it includes ALL significant properties in the city. One possible solution is to clarify in the list title that NRHP properties are not included. Members agreed to post the list on DHPC's website as soon as possible after April 13.

a. Project Guidelines and goals

b. List development. Mark proposed deleting 724 Day St. from the list, while Adrienne urged adding 722 Day St.

11. Commissioner Reports. There were none.

12. Public Comment. There was none.

13. Upcoming meeting: Wednesday, April 26, 2023, 4:30 pm.

14. Adjournment. Meeting was adjourned at 6 pm.

March 29, 2023

TO: Decorah City Manager and Building Officer

FROM: Decorah Historic Preservation Commission

TOPIC: 122 E. Water St. (American Family Ins./Cedar Valley Auction) C-3 Sign Permit

I. The Property

122 E. Water St. may have been built in 1885 and may be one of the oldest surviving buildings in the district. At various times, it has served as housing, saloon, Chinese laundry, jewelry store, beauty shop, music store, and gift shop. At the time of the 2017 National Register nomination the building was considered non-contributing because its original facade had been reworked several times, most recently with an unfortunate swept stucco finish accented with red tile roofs that together had a vaguely Southwest Spanish effect. Soon after 2017 new building owners installed white hardboard siding with window surrounds and vertical battens, and with black metal roofing to replace the tiles over the slightly projecting first-story elevation. The owners also regularized the second-story window openings, which was a notable improvement over the unbalanced pre-2017 facade. The new look, while not historic, was a reasonable compromise on a small building with a small renovation budget (although DHPC was disappointed that the owners never followed through on some of the detailing discussed at the Planning and Zoning meeting when the building permit was granted).

II. The Proposed C-3 Sign Plan

The building occupant proposes a 4' x 8' lighted sign above the second-story windows.

III. DHPC Recommendation

The 122 E. Water St. building is 22' wide, which means that the proposed sign covers slightly more than the middle third of the front elevation's width. The 4' sign height means that the sign begins only several inches above the second-story windows and ends only several inches below the minimally-delineated roofline. In other words, the proposed sign is very large for the available space and is, in addition, lighted, which will make it even more intrusive.

The rooflet above the ground-level windows prevents the installation of a flat banner sign at the transom level--thus the former building occupants relied on vinyl window decals only. But installing an overly-large lighted sign above the second story windows is not an appropriate design solution, given the goal articulated in the city's Municipal Code "Design Criteria": "to maintain the distinct character and harmony of the downtown, with special attention to the building's historic features, and with awareness of the 2017 National Register of Historic Places designation for the Decorah Commercial Historic District" (City Code 15.04.010.A). Also relevant here is the prologue to the "Standards for Review": "The historic preservation commission, the planning and zoning commission, and the city council shall consider each design review on the merits of the individual case and shall consider, among other things, general designs, character and appropriateness of design, scale of buildings, arrangements, texture, materials and color as well as the scale design and appearance in relation to structures in the immediate and surrounding area" (15.04.040).

Although DHPC has sometimes wondered whether too many businesses were installing blade signs--since DHPC has no overriding goal to impose a uniform sign pattern on the downtown's

varied buildings--122 E. Water would be an ideal location for a modestly-sized projecting blade sign.

Motion: At its March 29, 2023 meeting, DHPC voted 7 to 0 to recommend against the 122 E. Water St. sign permit application.

March 29, 2023

TO: Decorah City Manager and Building Officer
FROM: Decorah Historic Preservation Commission
TOPIC: 304 W. Water St. (Exit Realty/Driftless) C-3 Sign Permit

I. The Property

304 W. Water St. is a modest one-story brick building flanked to the west by a very similar massed one-story brick building and on the east by an elaborated 1901 two-story brick building. Without further research, the history of 304 W. Water remains unclear. The Assessor dates the main building to 1900 (often a catch-all date), and the National Register consultant Jan Full dates it to 1927-48 (based on Sanborn maps and the facade layout), but to our eye, the brickwork looks considerably more recent. In any case, the National Register classifies this as a contributing building in the 2017 Decorah Commercial Historic District.

II. The Proposed C-3 Sign Plan

The owners propose four goose-neck lights and a single centered projecting blade sign with the company's black and teal logo.

III. DHPC Recommendation

First of all, the occupants are to be commended on their recent removal of the aggressive building-width, yellow vinyl, fixed awning that has held different business signs since at least 2009. We also appreciate that the building occupants consulted with DHPC as they were finalizing their lighting and sign plans. The proposed goose-neck lamps are similar to those on a number of other downtown businesses and are classic without seeming falsely historic. We think the occupants have also made the right decision in settling on a projecting blade sign rather than on another style they were considering, a flat transom-height sign that might have overwhelmed this modest building. Both of the alternative proposed sign brackets are reasonable choices.

Motion: At its March 29, 2023 meeting, DHPC voted 7 to 0 to endorse the 304 W. Water St. sign and lighting permit application.