

Decorah Historic Preservation Commission
Minutes of May 30, 2023 Meeting (FINAL)

1. Roll Call. Chairman Mark Muggli called the meeting to order just after 4:30 pm. Commissioners present were Kathy Buzza, Adrienne Coffeen, Hayley Jackson, Diane Scholl and Judy van der Linden. Also present were Nan St. Clair, prospective DHPC member, and Decorah resident Janelle Pavlovec.

2. Review and approval of April 26, 2023 minutes distributed by secretary Judy van der Linden. Minutes were approved as written. (See 6b for a research assignment change from the April 26 meeting.)

3. DHPC membership. Mark Branum has officially resigned from DHPC and Nan St. Clair has applied as a new member. The mayor should act on Nan's application soon.

4. C-3/Commercial District

a. 508 W. Water St. (Vesterheim) sign application. Mark wrote the response to this application for a new sign in front of the Vesterheim Common's building. Members agreed the sign was unique and appropriate, and voted unanimously 5-0 for a MOTION to approve the application.

b. Historic District within C-3? Mark talked to City Council member Emily Neal about this issue. She said she wants looser zoning regulations in the non-historic parts of the C-3 district, and is especially concerned about certain permitted uses. On the other hand, Mark and Judy would like to see stricter regulations in the historic part of the C-3 district, for example with regard to windows, doors and demolitions. Commissioners decided not to offer input on the matter for now, and instead to monitor the Planning & Zoning meetings for new developments. Next P&Z meeting will be Monday, June 12 at 5:30 pm, with a Zoom option for attending.

c. Other. Mark noted that Salu Spa, 110 Washington St., whose sign permit was approved by DHPC in April, has indeed put up additional blade signs on the building.

5. Steyer Bridge repair and sign project. Mark wrote a letter to thank the city for maintaining the bridge and to ask if DHPC could develop a sign about the bridge for visitors. City Manager Travis Goedken and Engineer Jeremy Brill agreed a sign would be great – either a Decorah Parks or Walk-Into-the-Past style sign. Steyer Bridge is on the National Register of Historic Places and is described in the booklet "Winneshiek County Stone Structures," and elsewhere. A sign might mention other structures constructed/carved by Steyer. *Nan and Diane will research Steyer and the bridge.*

6. Altfillisch project

a. Web updates. Mark reported that city staff didn't have time to make updates to the website, but offered to pay Iroc Web Design Services to do it. Iroc finished them quickly.

b. 609 W. Broadway centennial celebration. Judy volunteered in April to research the Altfillisch home at 704 W. Broadway (see item 6bi in the April 26 meeting minutes), but Mark later asked Diane to do the research, and she agreed. That house will be featured along with 609 W. Broadway at its centennial celebration this summer.

c. Preservation Iowa "Preservation At Its Best" award application. Mark has heard nothing and doesn't know the status of DHPC's award application.

7. DHPC 2023 Historic Preservation Award follow-up. DHPC awarded its annual

preservation awards on May 15 to The Depot Outlet and Vesterheim Museum. The ceremony went smoothly but the crowd was small. Mark suggested DHPC get press releases out even sooner to ensure they are published before an event.

8. Iowa Cultural and Entertainment District. Mark helped Jessica Rilling and Amanda Streeper complete the ICED application, and it was submitted before the deadline on May 1.

9. Decorah Demolition permit process. There was nothing to report.

10. Significant Decorah Properties project. Mark is anxious to finish this list and have it posted on the web. Commissioners will aim to proofread 20 properties each by June 15. Mark reminded members to distinguish especially between “significance” and “integrity,” and to place the date of construction in parentheses after notes about significance. *Kathy will take rows 1-20, Adrienne will do 21-40, and so on, alphabetically by last name. Everyone should proofread the preamble.*

- a. Project Guidelines and goals
- b. List development
- c. Publication date?

11. DGA offer of artifact storage space. Members discussed DGA’s offer of artifact storage space, and agreed the commission does not need desk space but might in the future want to store some items or books. *Judy will thank Midge Kjome and Kevin Lee at DGA and let them know. Kathy volunteered to talk to Kristin Torresdal about relocating DHPC’s file cabinet in the library to an unlocked, more accessible space.*

12. Viking River Cruise tours to Decorah. Cruisers will be bussed to Decorah on 12 days between July 7 and Oct. 16, and will have 1-2 hours to sightsee after their tours and lunch. *Mark will contact Vesterheim officials to ask their plan for getting information/brochures about historic districts and buildings to the guests.*

13. Contacts

a. **Phil Iverson tour of restored 1860s cabin.** *Mark will contact Phil about a tour during June, perhaps on a Wednesday beginning about 4:30 pm.*

14. Commissioner Reports. Hayley noted that Lowell Erdman recently died, and that his obituary mentions Charles Altfillisch.

15. Public Comment. Nan St. Clair said she thought recordings of public meetings should be accessible, referring to the P&Z meeting video that Judy was told wasn’t available to watch. Judy will ask Travis Goedken when she sees him.

16. Upcoming meeting: Wednesday, June 28, 2023, 4:30 pm.

17. Adjournment. Meeting was adjourned shortly after 6:00 pm.

May 30, 2023

TO: Decorah Building Administrator
FROM: Decorah Historic Preservation Commission
<historicpreservation@decorahia.org> TOPIC: 508 W. Water St. (Vesterheim Museum)
Sign Permit Application

I. The Property

The Vesterheim complex includes three contributing Water St. buildings in the Decorah Commercial Historic District. The proposed sign will stand in front of the Commons building that is nearing completion.

II. The Proposal

The proposed sign is a flat, metal sign 3 feet 8 inches wide, and 78 inches tall. It will include a cutout of the new Vesterheim “V” logo (partly intended to provide photo opportunities) and some non-raised lettering with wayfinding arrows. The sign will be embedded directly into the pavement in the area of the curb expansion previously approved by P&Z and the City Council. There is a small planting bed, with one tree, running to the west of the sign, and a series of staggered benches to the east.

III. DHPC Response

In August 2022, Vesterheim submitted a concept for this sign, and DHPC reacted very positively to it: “Stylistically the sign represents Vesterheim’s latest branding and matches the modernist/post-modern look of Vesterheim’s new Commons building. This is not a conventional Decorah historic district sign, but it represents an exciting, compatible visual counterpoint to the more traditional blade signs on many of the area’s nineteenth-century buildings.”

We were at the time slightly concerned about potential pedestrian congestion in the area, but speculated that the new landscaped opening between the Dayton House and the Commons building would help mitigate any potential problems. Now that we have seen the final plans, and have actually been able to walk amidst the new trees on the new sidewalk and pathways, we are even more excited about the sign and the landscaped area in front of and beside the Commons. Historic Preservation puts a premium on pedestrianization and we believe this Water St. extension of Heritage Park, including the proposed Modernist sign, will quickly become an iconic, welcoming downtown pedestrian meeting place.

On May 30, 2023, the DHPC voted unanimously to endorse the proposed sidewalk sign at 508 W. Water, noting again Vesterheim’s exemplary, long-standing consultation with the City and the City’s Historic Preservation Commission about their on-going projects.