

Decorah Historic Preservation Commission  
Minutes of Sept. 27, 2023 Meeting (FINAL)

1. **Roll Call.** Chairperson Mark Muggli called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m. All members were present: Kathy Buzza, Adrienne Coffeen, Hayley Jackson, Diane Scholl, Nan St. Clair and Judy van der Linden. Janelle Pavlovec, Decorah resident, was also present.
2. **Review and approval of July 26, 2023 minutes distributed by secretary Judy van der Linden.** Minutes were approved as written.
3. **C-3/Commercial District**
  - a. **206 W. Main St. (Ulring Properties) Mural permit.** Mark wrote the response to this permit request to paint a mural on one wall of a concrete block garage behind 206 W. Main St. Adrienne said she believes the vines now growing on the wall will be difficult to remove completely, affecting the smoothness of the surface. Members agreed to encourage the artist to consider painting the mural on removable panels, rather than on the wall. Vote on MOTION to approve the C-3 mural permit with this addition to the response was 6-0, with Hayley abstaining. *Mark will rewrite part of the response and reword the motion (see attached).*
4. **Altfillisch project.** Mark said three more houses that might be included on the list have come to his attention: 409 Leif Erikson Dr. (homeowner Melvin Martin brought in a board from the house that was signed by Altfillisch and assumes the home was designed by Altfillisch), although the assessor build date (ABD) of 1925 is very early; 701 Center Ave., ABD 1947, which owner Barb Sokol said Roger Olson lived in for many years; and 805 Day St., ABD 1948, which Cindy Wolmeldorf discovered was an Altfillisch home but Mark has learned has a relatively new chimney, windows and addition, according to owner Scott Butters. *Adrienne will check with Roger Olson's son about 701 Center Ave.*
  - a. **609 W. Broadway centennial celebration.** Judy learned that Rich Svenson helped build the home's garage 45 years ago when Rambos owned the house, and that he also built a retaining wall that still stands and is near the garage.
  - b. **Brochure reprint.** Mark reported there are only 150 of 1,000 copies remaining of the Altfillisch brochure. He suggested DHPC reprint it as is for now, and wait 1-2 years until the next reprinting before making corrections to the text, photos and map. (Perhaps 805 Day St. could be deleted and another house added, he offered?) Members agreed. *Mark and the Chamber of Commerce will negotiate how many copies to print this time.*
  - c. **Adrienne contact with Robin Welch.** Adrienne was contacted by Robin Welch, daughter-in-law of Ruth Altfillisch, who was the daughter of Otto Altfillisch, Charles Altfillisch's brother. Robin has two letters written by CA to Ruth. *Mark will contact Robin, subtly suggesting that the letters be donated to Luther College, but will also write Susan Tone.* Mark also wondered about the exact location and condition of the house he knows CA designed for Otto's family in 1923.
5. **Steyer Bridge sign project**
  - a. **Procedures, contacts.** Mark and Nan will talk with Jeremy Brill and Andy Nimrod about the sign after Mark returns from Italy in early November.
  - b. **Include 1963 Highway 52 bridge and refer to overhead Highway 52 bridge?** Mark made a MOTION that the Steyer Bridge sign include a secondary reference to and a picture of the 1963 Hwy. 52 bridge, a significant structure in itself. Motion was seconded by Diane and passed 7-0. *Judy will talk to Kevin Lee about other stonework of Michael Steyer and also ask St. Benedict's Church if there are*

*records of who carved the church cemetery grave markers.*

6. **Decorah 175th Anniversary (1924).** *Diane will talk in person to Decorah mayor Lorraine Borowski and Hayley will email Stacey Gossling about any plans the city or Winneshiek County Historical Society have for the event.*
7. **Decorah Demolition permit process.** Nan contacted a person from Mt. Vernon and they will talk. Mark wishes some process were in place in Decorah – he believes a brick house at 709 Washington St. is about to be demolished.
8. **Significant Decorah Properties project progress.** Commissioners reviewed the properties they have selected for possible site inventories. Kathy has begun researching and writing a site inventory for 506 E. Main St., and wants to do the Immaculate Conception Academy at 408 John St. Mark hopes to add lists of A. R. Coffeen and William Bucknell properties to the website in the near future.
9. **DHPC Web update and Mission Statement.** Mark is preparing a Google document of changes that need to be made to the DHPC website, and he encourages input. He suggested the following refinement of DHPC’s mission statement: *The Decorah Historic Preservation Commission is a federal and state-certified city board that promotes Decorah’s educational and economic welfare through the recognition of historic sites.* Commissioners voted 7-0 to approve the statement.
10. **DHPC, City Council, Planning and Zoning, Board of Adjustment.** Commissioners agreed to take turns monitoring the posted meeting agendas of council, P&Z and BoA, and to contact fellow DHPC members if they see items needing attention. Months were assigned alphabetically by last name, with Oct=Buzza, Nov=Coffeen, Dec=Jackson, Jan=Muggli, Feb=Scholl, Mar=St.Clair and Apr=van der Linden.
11. **Continuing education: WCHPC/SHPO Workshop (Oct. 20, 2023, Decorah Lutheran Church; early registration ends Oct. 6).** Mark will not be here but encouraged others to attend. Registration fee is reimbursable.
12. **Contacts**
  - a. **Paul Hexom.** Paul contacted Mark and recommended DHPC get photos of any buildings in Decorah that are slated for demolition.
  - b. **Mark Z. Muggli, “National Register of Historic Places Walking Tour of the Luther Campus,” Homecoming, October 7, 2023.** Mark will give this tour.
13. **Commissioner Reports. Hayley** has submitted a session proposal for the Midwest Archives Conference about her work with DHPC’s Altfillisch project. The conference will be held May 2-4 in Des Moines. **Judy** talked to several people who were pleased with the Significant Decorah Properties list. Judy also recommended the Altfillisch tour to Decorah visitors. **Adrienne** passed a newspaper article to Nan about Dr. Archie Clark Woodward, who lived in Nan’s house for many years.
14. **Public Comment.** Janelle suggested DHPC chastise other city boards that don’t contact DHPC about items of shared interest. She also noted that her family’s rock company was involved in handling rock generated by the “cut” near Twin Springs.
15. **Upcoming meeting: Wednesday, October 25, 2023, 4:30 pm.** Hayley will conduct the meeting, since Mark will be gone. *Nan volunteered to write the draft response to a C-3 mural permit Mark knows is coming.*
16. **Adjournment.** Meeting was adjourned at 6 p.m.

September 27, 2023

TO: Decorah Zoning Administrator, P&Z Commission, City Council

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

TOPIC: 206 W. Main St. (Ullring Properties) Sign/Mural Permit Application

### I. The Property

206 W. Main St. is an important brick Courthouse-facing building. It was not included in the 2017 Decorah Commercial Historic District because it was built as a residence, even though it for many years operated as a commercial space for two generations of the Lynch law firm. The building also falls just outside the Broadway-Phelps Park Historic District (which includes the public library, the courthouse, and St. Benedict Church). 206 W. Main St. is, however, included on the DHPC Significant Decorah Properties list, where it is identified as having been built in 1904 (based on the Assessor's information), although it is probably older. The building's alley-accessible concrete block garage (dated 1920 by the Assessor), where the mural would be painted, is, however, not a significant building—neither in structure, materials, or design.

### II. The Proposal

The garage owners have contracted with local artist Hannah Tulgren to paint a mural on the longer, west-facing side of the garage. The mural is a blue/red/white Nordic-inspired design incorporating flowers and a highly stylized fox.

### III. DHPC Response

When judged by the city's mural guidelines, developed by the DHPC with help from P&Z, this mural proposal is reasonable:

- The application is professionally done and shows awareness of the technical issues involved in outdoor murals.
- The project was initiated by the building owners.
- This engaging mural will add vitality to an under-utilized alley location and will enliven the view from the alley entrance from the historic, brick-paved Court St. The mural will not be visible from Winnebago, Main, or Water Streets.
- Although the mural will evidently completely cover the garage's west elevation, the mural itself has a distinctive border. More importantly, the building itself has minimal significance and its architecture will therefore not be compromised by this large-scale mural.
- The mural guidelines exclude painting directly on masonry. In this case, the concrete block masonry is itself of minimal importance. Still, it may be challenging to completely remove the vine residue from the block, which might affect adhesion. And if the mural does deteriorate, it will require a cycle of continual over-painting. We therefore encourage using attached panels for the murals, as the guidelines suggest, and as the ArtHaus is doing on its *second* go-around with its full-building mural.

**MOTION: On September 27, 2023, the DHPC voted 6-0 (plus one abstention from a late-arriving Commission member) to endorse the proposed mural on the west elevation of the concrete-block, alley-accessible garage of 206 W. Main St., while encouraging the owners and artist to seriously consider using wall-mounted panels for the mural surface.**