

Decorah Historic Preservation Commission
Minutes of July 31, 2024 Meeting (FINAL)

1. **Roll Call.** Vice-chairperson Hayley Jackson called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m. Present were Kathy Buzza, Adrienne Coffeen, Mark Muggli by telephone, Judy van der Linden and Jenny Werner. Commissioner Nan St. Clair was absent. Also present were architect Keith Koch and new Decorah Parks and Recreation Director Marc Holtey.
2. **DHPC Membership.** Commissioners wish to thank outgoing member Diane Scholl for her ten years of service. They welcomed Jenny Werner to her first official meeting as a new commissioner, and thanked Hayley and Nan, who both agreed to be reappointed to another term on the commission.
3. **Review of June 26, 2024 minutes distributed by secretary Judy van der Linden.** Minutes were approved as written.
4. **C-3/Commercial District**
 - a. **418 W. Water St. (Vesterheim) north elevation site plan.** Mark wrote the response to this C-3 site plan application (see final response attached to minutes). On behalf of Vesterheim, Keith Koch described proposed new doors and canopies on the building's rear elevation and said the Museum's budget will determine which additional improvements will be made to the facade. If money becomes available, Koch and commissioners leaned toward repairing and repainting stucco on the east side of the facade, replacing vinyl siding on the west side with stucco and adding design elements to break up the relatively long expanse of stucco, and painting over a mural on a retaining wall in the yard. Commissioners voted 6-0 to endorse Vesterheim's current site plan.
 - b. **Decorah Bank and Trust Nordic Fest temporary banner.** Commissioners were fine with City Manager Travis Goedken approving the bank's banner.
 - c. **201 W. Water St. update.** Building owner Caleb Ullring told Mark that the Carl Homstad mural wall of this building was recently damaged, making restoration of the mural more complicated. Ullring suggested replacing the mural with a window in the facade. Mark, Hayley and Jenny approved of that idea, while Adrienne, Kathy and Judy opposed it. A compromise suggestion to retain and restore the mural and put a window elsewhere on the facade was approved by five commissioners, with Mark abstaining. Mark felt these results could help guide Caleb, who likely will have to submit a new C-3 permit application if he decides to install a window.
 - d. **111 Winnebago St. progress.** Mark reported that the east facade has been framed up and the owners are confident the planned repairs will fix the problem.
 - e. **209 E. Water St. (Nordic Chiropractic) window replacements.** Mark reported 2nd-story windows have been replaced and apartments on that floor are rapidly being installed. The owner opted for four apartments rather than the original five because the larger number required a fire escape which would have been difficult and expensive to install.
5. **Steyer Bridge sign project**
 - a. **Meeting with Park/Rec Director Marc Holtey.** Mark Muggli met with Marc Holtey in July to discuss the sign project. Marc attended DHPC's meeting and reported he talked with City Engineer John Hjelle and Public Works Director Mike O'Hara about the project and that Mike agreed to contribute 50% of the cost of at least one sign

and possibly a second one. Although DHPC members had earlier talked about a parks/recreation-type sign for Steyer Bridge, Marc said that the city manager suggested the sign or signs be the same style as Decorah's "Walk into the Past" signs. Mark Muggli pointed out that DHPC can't write content for the first sign until commissioners know if there will be a total of one or two signs, and Marc agreed to consider that and get back to DHPC.

6. Significant Decorah Properties progress

a. Site Inventory progress

i. SI added to website:

1. 409 E. Main St. (completed by Jan Full)
2. 401 E. Water St. (completed by Shay Gooder)
3. 305 Fifth Ave. (completed by Mark Z. Muggli)
4. 506 E. Main St. (completed by Kathy Buzza)

ii. 404 Fifth Ave. (Smith-Stabo House, completed by Judy van der Linden).

MOTION – Kathy moved and Adrienne seconded a motion to endorse Judy's SI. Vote was 5-0 with Judy abstaining. The SI will be submitted to the state under DHPC's name. Adrienne showed A. R. Coffeen records indicating that his firm did indeed carry out the remodel of 404 Fifth Ave. in 1939.

b. Highlight property anniversaries (150, 100) on Facebook Historic Sites of Decorah and Winneshiek County:

- i. **Ice Cave Mill, 1874 (submitted by Mark).** Hayley identified this property's anniversary and Mark submitted it to the Facebook page. *Hayley volunteered to next search for properties that are on the National Register of Historic Places and are observing anniversaries of 50, 75, 100, etc. years old.*

- c. **101 Grove St.** Commissioners decided to add this property to the Significant Decorah Properties list, even though it has lost its original integrity. Judy reported the house was built by Silas Dayton around 1865. It was extensively remodeled in the 1980s by Don and Wilma Olson, and the remodel was described to Judy in detail recently by the Olson's daughter. Judy hopes to learn more details and perhaps see early photos of the house. *She will add it to the SDP list.*

- d. **Anundsen Chapel.** The SDP list states the chapel was designed by A. N. Hanson, Decorah City Engineer until his untimely death in 1933, but Judy found several articles with more description of the chapel and she also connected A. N. Hanson with Borger Hanson, a Norwegian immigrant and a designer and building contractor in Decorah between about 1895 and 1930. Borger was A. N.'s father. *Judy will post background articles and information on A. N. Hanson, Borger Hanson and the chapel to the SDP*

7. **DHPC, City Council, Planning and Zoning, Board of Adjustment updates.** Adrienne will monitor city commissions during the month of August. Meeting dates will be: **City Council** – Mon., Aug. 5 and Mon., Aug. 19, at 5:45 p.m.; **Board of Adjustment** – Wed., Aug. 7 at 5:15 p.m.; **Planning and Zoning** – Mon., Aug. 12 at 5:30 p.m.

8. **DHPC Design Review expansion/Form Based Code.** Mark reported that City Manager Travis Goedken seemed receptive to the idea of DHPC expanding its C-3 property responses to include all individual and district properties on the NRHP. Goedken did say the expansion might be moot if the city adopts "form based zoning," which P&Z has discussed. Mark suggested DPHC wait to see what the city decides.

9. Contacts

- a. **208 Leif Erickson (Svestka).** Mark contacted the current owners (Eric and Megan Svestka) by mail about the house's history and its original owner's grave marker – carved by Michael Steyer – in Phelps Cemetery, but he hasn't had a response.

10. Continuing Education. No one reported completing any continuing education.

11. Commissioner Reports. Judy added to her earlier information about builder Borger Hanson, saying he was at one time in charge of the erection of many buildings at Luther College. Adrienne and Mark wondered aloud if Hanson worked with A. R. Coffeen's crew. Judy also said she would not be able to attend DHPC's August meeting.

12. Public Comment. There was none.

13. Upcoming meeting: Wednesday, August 28, 2024, 4:30 p.m. Neither Judy, Mark nor Jenny will be in town on August 28. Depending on whether there are C-3 applications for DHPC's attention, Mark said commissioners may not meet, or they may have to hold a hybrid in-person/remote meeting to consider the applications.

14. Adjournment. Meeting was adjourned at 5:45 p.m.

July 31, 2024

TO: Decorah Building Officials Greg Swanson and Travis Goedken
FROM: Decorah Historic Preservation Commission
<historicpreservation@decorah.iowa.gov>
TOPIC: 418 W. Water St. (Vesterheim) C-3 Site Plan Application

I. The Property

418 W. Water St. is a one-story, double-width, stucco-clad building. The National Register nomination speculates that this building may be a combination of two separate older buildings. Using Sanborn Insurance maps, the nomination suggests 1900 as a date for the combined building. Because of its lack of historic integrity, the building is non-contributing in the historic district.

II. The Proposal

Vesterheim wishes to renovate the building's lower level for a forge studio. (The upper level, and the south and west elevations will not be modified at this time.) In addition to the interior renovation, the building's rear exterior elevation will be modified:

- Using the existing wall openings in the concrete structure, Vesterheim wishes to install a full-glass, opening garage-door in the building's left-hand (east) portion and a new all-glass pedestrian opening in the building's right-hand portion.
- Both openings would be covered with metal, industrial-style canopies.
- Depending on the project's cost, Vesterheim would potentially like to replace the left-hand section's vinyl siding and to repaint the right-hand section's stucco finish. In an email, Vesterheim's architect hoped that DHPC could "comment on both 'minimal' and 'ideal' modification options."
- Vesterheim would like to remove or paint over the mural on the retaining wall that runs alongside the property. (Note: This mural should not be confused with the Carl Homstad mural that covers a portion of the west-facing, upper-level elevation.)

III. DHPC Response

The Water St. rear building elevations are currently a very mixed bag. Some are in near-pristine historic condition (original brick; original windows within original window openings) and should at all cost be preserved. Others—like 418 W. Water—include later additions or coverings of mixed materials, often in a bad state of repair.

In many aspects, Municipal Code Chapter 15 does not distinguish the Water St. and the rear building elevations. "15.04.050 - Standards for review. A. Materials" does specifically exclude certain materials, including vinyl siding, on the front and visible side elevations, suggesting that those materials may be allowed on the rear elevation. Section "H. Rear Entrances," on the other hand, says "Rear entrances should mimic the design criteria for the front as much as is practical and reasonable and use the same primary materials where possible."

The rear of 418 W. Water St. is currently a bit of a mess. The new garage and entrance doors, with their expansive windows, will be a great improvement. The proposed overhead canopies will be much more stylish and appropriate than the current asphalt-shingled rooflets. Repainting the west-half stucco is desirable, especially if the current color is not embedded in the stucco. Any new colors should match the palette described within section "15.04.050. G. Color."

The deteriorating condition of the vinyl siding on the left-hand side reminds us all why vinyl siding is not a suitable material in the Commercial District. One possible replacement—assuming that the E.I.F.S. stucco is to remain on the building's other elevations—would be stucco or a stucco-like finished concrete board. On the other hand, the design guidelines encourage breaking up long facades, and provide ideas on how that might be done. The unbroken facade is less of an issue with a long single-story facade like the Water St. elevation than it is with 418's two-story rear elevation. One might therefore consider stuccoing the left (west) side to match the east side, but also incorporate design elements that would help distinguish one side from the other and break up the long stucco facade. Or, one could consider some kind of durable wood-composite siding to replace the current vinyl siding, thus creating some visual contrast with the right-hand stuccoed side.

Finally, DHPC has no concern about removing the deteriorating mural on the rear retaining wall. The mural served its purposes for the previous tenants and has no identifiable historic value.

At its July 31, 2024 meeting, DHPC voted 6-0 to endorse Vesterheim's current 418 W. Water St. plan, noting that DHPC would be happy to respond to refined proposals for a further potential refurbishment of the rear elevation.