

**Historic District Commission
MINUTES**

**November 14, 2019
City of Hagerstown, Maryland**

Michael Gehr, chair, called the meeting to order at 4:31 p.m. on Thursday, November 14, 2019, in the Conference Room, Fourth Floor, City Hall. A roster of the members of the commission and the technical posts they fill are on file and available upon request. Also present were commission members L. Allen, M. Chilton, R. Powell, S. Silas, and M. Wertman. S. Bockmiller, Development Planner/Zoning Administrator and D. Calhoun, Secretary, were present on behalf of the Planning and Code Administration Department.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

October 30, 2019.

The secretary noted that the HDC assigned a number to the Vietnam Memorial case. She went back and checked how projects in City Park are usually handled. Historically, these types of projects were considered as “information only” and not voted on by the HDC; the commission only made recommendations on proposed projects. On page 4 commission members agreed to put a period after “comments” and delete the remainder of that sentence and the motion.

MOTION: (Allen/Silas) So moved (to approve the minutes as amended).

DISCUSSION: None.

ACTION: APPROVED AS AMENDED (Unanimous)

CONSENT AGENDA

1019 Oak Hill Avenue – Robert and Edith Miller – Replace Bay Roof, Case No. HDC 2019-43.

43 South Prospect Street – Ronald G. Ginste – Dryer Vent, Case No. HDC 2019-45.

MOTION: (Wertman/Silas) Mr. Chairman, I have reviewed the materials submitted in Cases 2019-43, and 2019-45, and their associated staff reports and recommendations, and I have viewed the properties in question. The staff reports recommend approval of these applications as consistent with the applicable standards adopted by this commission, and no one has appeared at this hearing with concerns about, issues with, or objections to these applications. Therefore, I move that this commission adopt the staff evaluations and recommendations in these cases as its own and grant Certificates of Appropriateness to the applicants for Cases. HDC 2019-43 and HDC 2019-45.

DISCUSSION: None.

ACTION: APPROVED (Unanimous)

DESIGN REVIEW

**141 South Potomac Street – St. John’s Lutheran Church – LED Digital Sign,
Case No. HDC 2019-34.**

This case was moved to the end of the agenda since the applicant was not present.

**59 West Washington Street – Dean Martin/Sign Here – Wall Signs and Awning Sign,
Case No. HDC 2019-47.**

Dean Martin, Sign Here, 345 East Antietam Street, Hagerstown, Maryland, and Mark Halsey, Director, University System of Maryland, were present.

Staff Report. This is a B resource in the Downtown Local Historic District. The applicant proposes to install two non-illuminated acrylic name/logo clusters (one on the upper west façade and one on the south façade) and add vinyl graphics on the awning on the West Washington Street façade. The name/logo cluster on the west façade will measure 40 inches tall by 182 inches wide (½-inch flat-cut acrylic, blind stud mount with mounting pattern, standard black, customer red with a matte finish); the south façade sign will measure 37 inches tall by 182 inches wide (same material as the west façade). The awning graphics will measure 44 inches tall by 260 inches long. The logo itself is 22 x 100 inches. Material for the awning will be high-performance vinyl with accent striping, lamination, and it will be adhered to the existing awning.

Concerning the wall signs, the guidelines recommend that signs for single-occupant buildings be located below the second floor of the building. There is a history of the HDC approving signs higher up on this building in the recent past (for Susquehanna Bank). The cumulative size of the signs exceeds sign area limitations in the CC-MU zoning district. Mr. Bockmiller explained that there are two separate regulations at play: the HDC’s purview over general appearance; and the square footage maximums spelled out in the Zoning Ordinance. As presented the proposed wall signage exceeds the size limitations in the Zoning Ordinance. Staff has not worked through the calculations yet but advised that the HDC can approve the application if it desires. Signage is proposed for three sides of the building, although signs on rear facades are rare in the historic district. Staff suggested putting a condition on the approval that the proposal be subject to further compliance so the university does not have to come back to the commission for review of a modification. Removal of one of the signs or reducing the size of the signs could bring the signs into compliance with the Zoning Ordinance.

Applicant/Commission Discussion: According to staff the signs will not be illuminated. Ms. Wertman pointed out that that historic signs tend to be larger, including painted on the wall. Mr. Bockmiller stated that these signs need to comply with the current regulations, but if the commission is concerned that the current regulations are too restrictive, the Planning Commission will be holding a public hearing on text amendments, which include a complete re-write of the

sign regulations. If the commission would like to offer comments at the public hearing, it will be held on Tuesday, November 19, at 7:00 p.m. Any comments would have to come from the commission as a group.

Mr. Gehr questioned how much smaller the signs would have to be in order to be in compliance. Mr. Bockmiller explained that the calculations are based on the width of the building (one square foot of signage per the width of building). The applicant needs to consider whether there will be other users in the building because if the university maxes out the permitted area, then any other users in the building would not be able to have signage. Mr. Halsey stated that 15% of the first floor front would be used by another tenant. The purpose of the awning signage is to mark the university's entrance in the front of the building. The university is asking for approval of the use of the entire canopy rather than half of the canopy. The presumption by the owners is that whoever rents the second floor would want the other half of the awning. Mr. Bockmiller pointed out that per the sign regulations, projecting signs are not counted toward the square footage calculations. Mr. Halsey stated there is no public entrance to their lease space on the back of the building. The point of the wall sign on the rear is to promote the university from the proposed plaza. Mr. Martin noted that historically all the occupants of this building have had signage on the rear. Mr. Halsey said the canopy on the front of the building creates a "sense of campus." The canopy sign and the wall sign on the west façade are the most critical. If any of the signage would need to be eliminated to meet the Zoning Ordinance, they would remove the sign on the south façade.

If the commission is inclined to approve the application, staff suggested a condition ". . . subject to further compliance with the Zoning Ordinance and/or removal of the rear sign" so the applicant does not have to come back if they choose to reduce the size of the sign or to eliminate a sign.

MOTION: (Wertman/Silas) Mr. Chairman, I have inspected the project plans and the property in question, and if constructed in accordance with these plans and under the condition that they comply with the Zoning Ordinance of the total square footage of the signage on the building and not go over it, then the project will be compatible with the character of the district because it will fit in with the general form and proportions of other signage on other buildings, and it will be generally in harmony with the Architectural Design Guidelines for the Downtown Historic District and the character of the adjoining properties. Therefore, I move the HDC grant a Certificate of Appropriateness to the applicant for Case No. 2019-47.

DISCUSSION: Mr. Bockmiller wanted to make certain it was clear that the approval is subject to compliance with the Zoning Ordinance. Ms. Wertman added that the HDC's approval is pending on the compliance with the Zoning Ordinance in order to stay within the square footage allowed.

ACTION: APPROVED (Unanimous)

The landlord needs to be aware of how approval of these signs impacts the prospective additional tenants. The future tenant could have a hanging sign which would not figure into the square footage calculations for wall signs.

72 West Washington Street – UGO, LLC – Façade Repairs, Case No. HDC 2019-37.

Mo Azadi, UGO LLC, owner of the property was present.

Staff Report. This is a B resource in the Downtown Local Historic District. Applicant proposes to repair the façade of 72 West Washington Street after demolition of the Delta Building next door earlier this year. Portions of the display window on the east side of 72 West Washington Street became exposed when the adjacent building was removed. The applicant is proposing to cover the exposed area with HardiePlank® siding. Mr. Azadi had samples of the HardiePlank. Several sections of brick will be repointed. Staff recommended approval.

Applicant/Commission Discussion: Mr. Azadi said he is interested in finishing this project and moving forward. The temporary plywood will be removed. Dens-Glass will be installed with Tyveck. The HDC had no preference on the color of the HardiePlank®; Ms. Wertman suggested a reddish brown to blend with the brick.

MOTION: (Silas/Allen) Mr. Chairman, I have inspected the project plans and the property in question, and if constructed in accordance with these plans the project is compatible with the character of the district for the reasons that the materials, with a selection of a red color, are generally in harmony with the Architectural Design Guidelines for the Downtown Historic District and the character of the adjoining properties. Therefore, I move the HDC grant a Certificate of Appropriateness to the applicant for Case No. 2019-37.

DISCUSSION: None.

ACTION: APPROVED (Unanimous)

**141 South Potomac Street – St. John’s Lutheran Church – LED Digital Sign,
Case No. HDC 2019-34.**

Zondria Lansdowne, representing St. John’s Lutheran Church, 141 South Potomac Street, Hagerstown, Maryland, and Dean Martin, Sign Here, 345 East Antietam Street, Hagerstown, Maryland, were present.

Staff Report. This property is a B resource in the Downtown Local Historic District. The applicant would like to install an LED digital sign including a 16 x 75-inch header cabinet (which will display the name of the church) and a 41 x 75-inch LED message center. The sign will be installed in a planter bed on the left side of the office and will be mounted to three steel poles with

decorative bases and acorn finials. Nothing in the design guidelines specifically prohibits electronic message board signs in the historic district. Certain zoning restrictions apply which are not within the HDC's purview regarding the number of signs on the property, animation, frequency of message change, etc. This will be the third freestanding sign for this facility. One of the existing signs will need to be removed. The drawings submitted with the application include use of "animated text" and "video clips" which are prohibited by the Zoning Ordinance.

Staff's only concern is that it comply with the Zoning Ordinance with regard to changing message, animation, and that there be a dimming capability. The sign needs to fit in with the character of the district.

Applicant/Commission Discussion: Mr. Martin confirmed that the software contains dimming capabilities. Ms. Lansdowne stated that the church would be willing to remove one of the signs to come into compliance with the Zoning Ordinance.

Several commission members did not believe these types of signs are appropriate in a historic district. Even though she agrees that these signs are not appropriate for a historic district, Ms. Allen understood the need for this type of sign. Ms. Wertman believed that the proposed colors for the electronic portion of the sign are too bright for the situation. Ms. Allen agreed that the brilliance of the colors and the angles on the font are not compatible. Mr. Bockmiller reiterated that there is a gap in the guidelines concerning new technology. Mr. Silas had no issue with the style of the sign structure but was opposed to the digital media. (Ms. Wertman left the meeting.) Mr. Gehr had concerns about the middle post on the sign structure. Mr. Martin indicated the middle post could be removed if the outside posts are bolstered, if necessary.

Staff recommended that this case be continued until the next meeting to allow staff an opportunity to research and check in with the City Attorney to see what the HDC's limitations are. The commission needs to be careful about denying a sign for a church, which has legal implications. If the HDC decides to deny the application, there needs to be a legal basis for the denial. Ms. Allen asked if the sign could be placed somewhere else on the property. Ms. Lansdowne explained that they did not want to put the digital sign next to the historic church. The proposed location is as far to the edge of the church's property as possible. Commission members discussed the possible proliferation of digital signs should this one be approved. A policy should be put into place to address them.

Mr. Martin informed the commission that the digital portion can be dimmed and also turned off if necessary. The header cabinet would remain illuminated at all times. Ms. Lansdowne stated there are residential units across the street; however, she went door to door and spoke with the residents in the area to make certain no one would be offended by the electronic sign.

Mr. Bockmiller stated that the aforementioned pending sign ordinance amendments would not affect this application. Staff suggested that the commission propose an amendment to the design guidelines or a text amendment to the Zoning Ordinance to address electronic signs in historic

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districts. An amendment to the Zoning Ordinance would take precedence over the design guidelines. Regardless, any changes would need to be approved by the Mayor and Council.

Commission members present were polled about a special meeting date. The following members indicated they would be available to attend a special meeting on November 21: L. Allen, M. Chilton, M. Gehr, and S. Silas. Mr. Powell was not available. Staff will provide guidance from the City Attorney and interpret the design guidelines based on the City Attorney’s advice. A church representative should be in attendance.

MOTION: (Allen/Powell) I move to table this case to a meeting on November 21.

DISCUSSION: None.

ACTION: APPROVED (Unanimous)

WORKSHOP

None.

NEW BUSINESS

2020 Meeting Schedule – April Meeting Dates.

Because the Passover holiday falls on the first meeting in April, commission members agreed to meet only once in April on the fourth Thursday. Concerning summer meeting times, Mr. Gehr will advise staff about his schedule.

Planning Commission Public Review Meeting.

The public review meeting for the Land Management Code Text Amendments is scheduled for Tuesday, November 19, at 7:00 p.m. One of the significant issues is changes to the sign ordinance. This is the window that would allow the commission to speak up if they want to ask that electronic message board signs be regulated by the Zoning Ordinance. The commission can either send a representative to the meeting or provide written testimony within the ten-day period the record will remain open.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

ADJOURN

It was moved and seconded that the meeting adjourn (6:00 p.m.).

12/12/2019

Approved



Debra C. Calhoun – Secretary