

**Historic District Commission
MINUTES**

**December 12, 2019
City of Hagerstown, Maryland**

Michael Gehr, chair, called the meeting to order at 4:35 p.m. on Thursday, December 12, 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:

November 14, 2019.

MOTION: (Silas/Wertman) Move to approve.
DISCUSSION: None.
ACTION: APPROVED (Unanimous)

CONSENT AGENDA

None.

DESIGN REVIEW

**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.

This case was tabled at the last meeting to allow staff time to obtain guidance from the City Attorney as to what the commission’s limitations are with regard to denying a sign for a church. The City Attorney, Jennifer Keefer, provided a memorandum (in the meeting file) and was also present at the meeting to answer questions from the commission.

Most commission members did not believe a sign using electronic media is appropriate in the Downtown Historic District. The applicant and staff clarified that there would be no animation associated with the proposed sign. Its main purpose is to serve as an “event board.” Mr. Bockmiller reiterated that the commission cannot regulate the content of the sign, just the appearance (the commission cannot regulate “turkey dinner” but it could require that the sign maintain a basic background). Frequency of the message change is regulated by the Zoning

Ordinance; each message must be displayed for at least six seconds with no phase in, zoom in, or changes longer than one second (as administered).

Ms. Lansdowne stated she met with the church Board after the last meeting. The church was agreeable to reducing the size of the sign; however, they were not in favor of eliminating the electronic media element of the proposed sign. She also pointed out that the sign will be placed at the southernmost portion of the church property, well removed from the historic church building farther north. Mr. Martin noted that there will be a dimmer on the sign to allow the amount of illumination to be reduced if necessary during certain hours.

(Ms. Wertman left the meeting.)

Commission members were apprehensive about setting a precedent for this type of sign in historic districts. There are several organizations downtown which could theoretically request this type of sign. It was noted that approving the proposed sign as presented could open this type of signage up for any building downtown, not just churches.

Mr. Bockmiller pointed out that according to the City Attorney's memo, the HDC does have grounds to deny the application if it believes it is an insensitive design. Mr. Gehr added that if the application is denied, the applicant cannot come back to the commission with the same proposal for a year. He said he understood St. John's goal, and did not want to present obstacles to that. He was amendable to working towards a compromise.

In the spirit of compromise, Mr. Gehr suggested a sign with a full base, two "doors" with more space at the top to more replicate the look of a traditional church message board sign (see meeting file). The commission was still concerned about the level of illumination for the sign. Mr. Martin noted that the issue of brightness and timing would be automated so the church would not have to manually make adjustments.

(Ms. Wertman returned to the meeting.)

Mr. Gehr stated stylistically the cabinet needs to reflect a traditional style and needs to maintain a semblance to the period it represents. He noted that this application will set the standard that will be used as an example for future applications for this type of signage.

In the spirit of cooperation, Mr. Martin believed it was in the church's best interests to create a dialogue. He stated he would like an opportunity to work with the commission to resolve the differences. At the end of the day, the sign will still be an LED message center. Mr. Gehr noted that when the application comes back to the commission there will need to be a description about how the sign would be operated. Time frames need to be spelled out in the application and how the sign is going to be used.

Concerning disposition of the case, Mr. Gehr encouraged the applicant to work through this. If the application is dismissed, the case is withdrawn and they could come back at the next meeting, even with the same application. An extension could be requested by the applicant and mutually agreed upon between commission and applicant. The next meeting is January 9.

HDC members were more comfortable with Mr. Gehr's proposed design revision. HDC members were hoping to work through the issues so the church can have an electronic sign. Mr. Bockmiller cautioned that if St. John's cooperates with the commission's suggestions, the HDC will need to show good faith and approve an electronic sign if it is modified per the discussions at this meeting. Mr. Bockmiller offered to speak with a church board member to explain the commission's process.

MOTION: (Allen/Wertman) I move to grant a 45-day, mutually agreed upon extension.

DISCUSSION: None.

ACTION: APPROVED (Unanimous)

**563 West Franklin Street – Lloyd Steven Swayne – Security Lighting,
Case No. HDC 2019-46.**

The applicant was not present. Because the 45-day time limit for commission action on this case will expire on December 22, 2019, the commission moved to dismiss the case.

MOTION: (Powell/Wertman) So moved (to dismiss Case No. HDC 2019-46, Lloyd Steven Swayne).

DISCUSSION: None.

ACTION: APPROVED (Unanimous)

WORKSHOP

None.

NEW BUSINESS

2020 Meeting Schedule – Summer Meeting Times.

Commission members agreed to revise the meeting schedule times so only the meetings in July and August will begin at 4:00 p.m.

MOTION: (Wertman/Powell) I so move (to adopt the revised meeting schedule).
DISCUSSION: None.
ACTION: APPROVED (Unanimous)

Election of Officers.

With the pending resignation of Chad Crumrine (the current vice chair), Mr. Silas agreed to serve as the commission's vice chair. Mr. Gehr agreed to continue to serve as chair.

MOTION: (Allen/Powell) I so move (to accept the slate of officers: Mike Gehr, chair, and Steve Silas, vice chair).
DISCUSSION: None.
ACTION: APPROVED (Unanimous)

Bridge of Life. Ms. Allen thanked the Bridge of Life Church for obtaining a grant to remove the weeds growing out of the terra cotta on their front façade.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

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ADJOURN

It was moved and seconded that the meeting adjourn (5:50 p.m.).

1/9/2020

Approved



Debra C. Calhoun – Secretary