

Design Review Committee Meeting Minutes

Wednesday July 10, 2019

Committee Members Present: Lenny Horr, Dianne Connolly, Steve Cabana, Kelly Tarbox, Paula Peters, Thom Gagne

Support Staff Present: Joe Scala, Beth Della Valle, Jo-Ann Cropley Cavanaugh

Meeting called to order at 5:00pm by Chair Horr.

- 1) Approval of Minutes from the June 18, 2019 meeting. Thom Gagne made comments about the minutes he took at the June meeting. Motion to approve as written by Dianne Connolly, seconded by Steve Cabana. Passed by a vote of 5:0 (Kelly Tarbox, who was absent from the June 18 meeting, abstains).

- 2) Beth Della Valle initiated a conversation around the second item on the agenda, continued discussion of past reviews and potential adjustment of standards/process of review. The first item discussed was the creation of a master plan of sorts for the MidTown Mall in regards to design features. This would afford the proprietor, Benjamin Meggs, an opportunity to submit an overall plan and guidelines for design features at the Mall, which would then allow Mall tenants to bypass design review by the Committee if their proposals were in conformance with that master plan. Beth Della Valle stated that the Planning Department has offered to set up an appointment to prepare a plan at least three times with no response. At this point, it was announced that Committee support staff member Jo-Ann Cropley Cavanaugh was currently working on creation of the requested master plan with Benjamin Meggs. She would therefore have to recuse herself from this conversation due to potential conflict of interest. Beth Della Valle also mentioned that she is trying to coordinate a meeting between herself, Benjamin Meggs, Code Enforcement Officer Jamie Cole, and Community Development Director Ian Houseal to begin a conversation about the renovation plan for the MidTown Mall, in light of the recent Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) that was awarded to the City to improve the Mall. Typically the City does not work so closely with private entities to prepare plans but are in this particular case, since the City and Meggs are partnering on this specific CDBG award.

The discussion then turned to a reminder of appropriate conduct by DRC members. In light of recent Facebook posts that have been circulating, Beth Della Valle reminded the Committee members not engage in discussions of applications outside of meetings, which no one had done, as well a general reminder of standards of conduct for Committee members to follow.

Discussion next turned to potential ways to improve or “right size” the design review process. The first topic discussed was residential properties located farther off of Main Street, on the edges of the current Downtown District and whether or not these properties necessitate design review? Do reviews of these properties add value to the overall review process? Some felt that these smaller reviews were some of the Committee’s best work and provided the most useful information to applicants. Also discussed at this time was whether or not there should be

minimum unit size that triggers design review. Currently any exterior improvements for multi-family development requires design review. Should the trigger be higher, perhaps 3-4 units? More? Steve Cabana agreed with the idea, he suggested 5 units. From the City's perspective, 4 units is considered a trigger point for changes in garbage collection. Dianne Connolly suggested that maybe there should be a height component as well, perhaps 3 stories or more. Kelly Tarbox commented that no matter what is decided on for a standard, it should be applied consistently. Thom Gagne asked if single family homes were included in design review. They are not. Thom also commented that he thought the area around the Lafayette School, or the East Side neighborhood, should not be included in the design review district. Discussion amongst the group followed pertaining to the merits/need for design review in this area (East Side). To close this topic of conversation, Beth Della Valle handed out paper copies of the existing design review district maps for Committee members to review and draw proposed changes on for the next meeting. She stated that she will also look at the City Ordinance to see how multi-family residential is defined there.

The next topic of conversation on this agenda item was whether or not design review should be required for very small projects, such as awnings, franchise signs, etc. and whether projects like these could be delegated to the staff level for review, with the provision that staff could bump these reviews up to the Committee if warranted. Or should these smaller items just be reviewed by Codes? This topic was discussed amongst the Committee. After further discussion on all of the previous topic areas, the conversation was wrapped up. Beth Della Valle said that she will do more background work on all what was discussed and this item will be reviewed again by the group at the start of the next meeting, and hopefully a set of revised standards and recommendations could be finalized at that time to send to the Planning Board for review and discussion.

- 3) Todd Fortier from Bubba Frye's restaurant came before the Committee at 6:01 pm to review the placement of a sign at his new restaurant in the MidTown Mall. Mr. Fortier began by describing his business and background. The new restaurant will occupy two suites, 2,000 square feet of space, and have 36 seats. He may look into adding outdoor seating in the future and was advised that would require DRC review. He is looking to open sometime in mid-August. Currently there is a temporary "coming soon" banner placed where the future permanent sign will be located. Mr. Fortier is proposing a 4'x8' internally lit molded plastic sign. Currently the Ordinance only allows for 24 square foot signs in this particular location. The applicant was advised that the standard in the Ordinance may be changing in the near future, as the Planning Board is working on draft amendments to go to the City Council.

At this point there was a conversation amongst the Committee about internally lit signs in the MidTown Mall, and the need for a consistent signage plan there. The sign as proposed by Mr. Fortier was not consistent what the Mall's proprietor, Benjamin Meggs, had stated he was looking for in the past, which was a preference for aluminum, non-illuminated signs. Some Committee members felt that the sign should not be internally lit for that reason, and that there have been consistency issues regarding signage in the Mall.

Lenny Horr made a motion to recommend sign as designed but to be 24 square feet in area, with the decision regarding lighting to be made at a later date/meeting. Dianne Connolly seconded the motion. Steve Cabana commented that the applicant was following the guidelines put forth by the design standards, and that the applicant had been advised by Mr. Meggs that the sign he proposed was OK.

Thom Gagne made motion to amend the wording of the proposed motion to add language indicating that the sign could be *up to* the maximum size allowed by ordinance at the time the application is submitted to Codes. Lenny Horr seconded.

Kelly Tarbox stated her agreement with Steve Cabana's previous comment about the applicant's proposed sign. She noted that Mr. Meggs is the one who filled out the application, suggesting that his ideas about consistency of sign design in the MidTown Mall had changed and that he therefore, by that line of thought, approved of the proposed design. Therefore, Kelly felt that the DRC's recommendation should include the proposed lighting component, which is allowed by Ordinance. There was some discussion and debate between the Committee at this point as to whether the sign should be lit, sign consistency at the Mall, the overall signage plan for the Mall, how to handle of the question of the size of the proposed sign.

After discussion, Lenny Horr agreed to withdraw his original motion, Dianne Connolly agreed to retract her second.

Lenny Horr then made another motion to recommend approval of the sign design as proposed, up to maximum size permitted by Ordinance at the time the sign application is submitted. The motion was seconded by Thom Gagne. The motion passed with a vote of 5:1, Dianne Connolly opposed. 6:40pm.

- 4) Minimal further discussion of the MidTown Mall took place, as did some limited further discussion about district boundaries. Lenny Horr made a motion to adjourn. Thom Gagne seconded. Meeting adjourned at 6:46pm.