

Michael Gehr, chair, called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m. on Thursday, August 27, 2015, 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, C. Crumrine, C. Davis, P. Reed, 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 Division.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES –July 23, 2015 and August 13, 2015:

MOTION: (Silas/Allen) Motion to approve.
DISCUSSION: None.
ACTION: APPROVED (Unanimous)

CONSENT AGENDA

659 Oak Hill Avenue – Janet Parrish – Fence, Case No. HDC 2015-27.

**120 East North Avenue – Stephanie Craft – Front Porch Alterations/Repairs,
Case No. HDC 2015-28.**

**71 West Franklin Street – Okorina International Food & Boutique/Tam Israel – Sign,
Case No. HDC 2015-29.**

Ms. Allen questioned the sign application at 71 West Franklin Street and whether that constituted the total allowance for signage. Mr. Bockmiller noted this sign is on the back of the building, facing traffic traveling north on Jonathan Street. The applicant is refacing the existing sign. There were no additional questions or concerns by the commission.

MOTION: (Davis/Wertman) Mr. Chairman, I have reviewed the materials submitted in Cases HDC 2015-27, 659 Oak Hill Avenue; Case No. HDC 2015-28, 120 East North Avenue; and Case No. HDC 2015-29, 71 West Franklin Street, 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 the cases as its own and grant Certificates of Appropriateness to the applicants in Case No. HDC 2015-27, HDC 2015-28, and HDC 2015-29.

DISCUSSION: None.
ACTION: APPROVED (Unanimous)

DESIGN REVIEW

None.

WORKSHOP

66 West Washington Street – Delta Building.

Scott Bowen and Chris Weir of MSB Architects, Hagerstown, Maryland, were present. After the last meeting they reassessed their design based on the discussion at that meeting. Mr. Bockmiller stated that the architects were encouraged to look into a three-story design that would fit in with the streetscape. At the last meeting two options were presented, with one of those options showing a modern design. After considering the architects' rationale for the modern design, Mr. Bockmiller better understood the reason for it; however, staff still prefers the more tradition option. Mr. Bowen stated that the revised design they will present this meeting is based on the modern concept.

Mr. Bowen's client would like to include four apartment units in the project. The new design shows wedges on third floor and which will create four two-story units that will help meet the egress requirements. They are working with massing to try to solve the code requirement issues. The modern approach incorporates the shape of each adjoining building. Since there is very little green in the area a "living wall" concept was added to the street front. The canopy line carries across from the building to the east. The trellis feature provides a visual of a flat front. Mr. Bockmiller stated that the Design Guidelines discourage balconies that face the street, however, a well-designed balcony might work. A balcony feature would need to be differentiated from a standard wood residential deck.

Dr. Reed (who missed the first meeting) questioned how the commission got past the removal of an individually listed building and the only remaining 1820s building in the downtown core. She asked if consideration has been given to leaving the front portion and constructing the multi-story building behind the historic portion of the building. Since this is such a rare building she would like to see the front part saved—the rear ell could be demolished. Mr. Bowen indicated that his client does not want to begin compiling numbers for demolition if the HDC is not on board with the modern design.

Staff's concerns are that the design needs to meet the Downtown Design Guidelines. Mr. Bockmiller has not researched how a modern building would mesh with the design guidelines. The design guidelines discuss shape, proportion, and picking up different cues from the surrounding buildings. Chris Weir of MSB Architects explained they are attempting to not replicate something that was there, but to help a new building blend in better especially considering the other buildings next door.

Ms. Allen noted that when this was discussed the first time it was noted that the flooring in the front portion of the building was dropped. Dr. Reed stated that the second floor is intact, including roof structure, dormers, attic, second floor front façade, chimneys and interior woodwork. This was a tax credit project in 2004 or 2005 and the owner at the time sold the building and the project was never finished. Mr. Bockmiller stated that demolition is not an element of convenience in the guidelines. In this case, the owner is under pressure from the Code Enforcement office because of the condition of the rear ell. In order to demolish the owner/developer will need to provide numbers to show it is not feasible to repair it because it is an “A” resource.

Mr. Bowen indicated that the building has been vacant for at least 11 years. One side of the building is a shell. Dr. Reed was greatly disturbed that a building individually eligible for National Register listing was being considered for demolition. Demolition would most likely be conditioned upon ensuring that the replacement building is constructed. Mr. Bockmiller pointed out that this is a U-shaped building with two ells. Another unique feature about the site is that the property has its own parking lot and the owner could offer its tenants onsite parking.

Mr. Gehr asked if the two first floor commercial tenants would be enough to start the project, or whether the residential units would be leased or sold first. The Downtown needs residents. He was concerned about removing the building and still having second floor vacancies in the new building. Ms. Davis said she believed this design is better suited than the first one presented.

If this design moves forward, staff recommended that the architect provide a narrative about the design process for this option, including bullet points on how it meets the design standards for the record. Mr. Bockmiller said that if the demolition is denied, another application for demolition could not be resubmitted for a year. However, if demolition is denied and the developer comes back with a proposal for saving the building or parts of it, it would be considered a different application and the HDC could consider it. Mr. Bowen asked what specifically the commission needs for the financials. Mr. Bockmiller said they need to show income generation from retail and residential units in the existing building if renovated, including a business plan for saving the building and a plan for demolishing it. Mr. Gehr cautioned that the profit margin is not as much of a concern to the HDC.

Commission members were polled on their thoughts on the proposal:

- Mr. Crumrine felt this design is more in the direction of what the commission is seeking.
- Mr. Silas agreed that the design is fine, but shared Dr. Reed’s opinion about demolishing an 1820s building.
- Ms. Wertman agreed that the design is appropriate if it were a C resource. She has concerns about demolishing an A resource.
- Mr. Gehr did not have an issue with the design. His concern is more about whether this is a viable property even fixed up. If nothing happens to it, it is not helping downtown. He

would hate to lose an A resource, so a strong justification needs to be made for the structure to come down.

- Ms. Davis concurred that this design is better but agreed with Mr. Gehr. If you save it because it is old, and then nothing happens and it has to come down anyway it is not helping downtown.
- Ms. Allen said if this were a different resource she felt the proposed design would be an appropriate replacement; however, she concurred with Dr. Reed. Need to find a compromise for dealing with these types of challenged buildings.

Dr. Reed stated that preservation tax credits address situations like this building. It was approved for tax credits in the past. If a new developer came in they would have to re-apply for tax credits, but then guidelines need to be followed. Mr. Bockmiller noted that with the potential for this being a tax credit project that needs to be figured into the financials as well.

In summary, assuming that the building needs to come down, most commission members were okay with the design but the developer needs to do his homework to justify the demolition and demonstrate that this design is consistent with the design guidelines.

Patterson Building:

On other matters involving MSB Architects, Mr. Bowen asked the commission members whether they were pleased with the casement “double-hung” windows on the Patterson Building. Commission members have looked at them and said they looked great. Mr. Bockmiller asked if the owner plans to do anything about the front door and the storefront windows. Mr. Bowen said probably not because of the amount of code issues that were addressed on the upper floors that they had not planned on. The owner is still reeling and unhappy.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

OLD BUSINESS

Design Guideline Updates. Mr. Bockmiller stated that the time has come to begin reviewing the guidelines for possible updates. He asked the commission if it wanted to conduct the reviews during regular meetings or hold special meetings. In the meantime, commission members were encouraged to look at the guidelines individually and staff will add this item to the October 8 agenda. If special meetings are desired, they can be scheduled at that time. Staff will send a link to members.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Ms. Allen pointed out that the new windows are going in on the building at the corner of West Franklin and Jonathan Streets and they look good.
- Mr. Bockmiller informed the commission that an exhibit will be opening at the Washington County Free Library on Monday, August 31, from 7:00 p.m. until 8:30 p.m. The exhibit will highlight Washington County in the Spanish-American War and will run through the end of the year.

ADJOURN

It was moved and seconded that the meeting adjourn (5:27 p.m.).

9/24/2015

Approved



Debra C. Calhoun – Secretary