

Michael Gehr, chair, called this special meeting to order at 4:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 21, 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, and S. Silas. S. Bockmiller, Development Planner/Zoning Administrator, and D. Calhoun, Secretary, were present on behalf of the Planning and Code Administration Division.

DESIGN REVIEW

100 North Potomac Street – Scott Bowen – Replacement Windows – Revision to Previously Approved Application, Case No. HDC 2015-10.

Scott Bowen and Chris Weir, MSB Architects, 1165 Imperial Drive, Hagerstown, were present.

Staff Report: Mr. Bockmiller explained that the applicants are working on the renovation project for University System of Maryland-Hagerstown campus student apartments. The HDC approved the initial application for replacement windows, however, a problem has arisen regarding fire code compliance. The rear fire escape is being bricked in which triggers code issues. None of the bedrooms front North Potomac Street, just on East Franklin Street. The fire code requires windows to be a certain size for egress purposes. The two-over-two replacement windows that were originally approved create an opening that is too small to meet code. Applicant is requesting approval to use casement windows that will have the appearance of a two-over-two window. There will be a very thick horizontal muntin that will simulate the bar and a thinner muntin to simulate the panes of glass. Casement windows are generally flush with the building and double-hung windows show some relief. Eight of the 12 windows on the East Franklin Street façade would be casement windows. At the last meeting, staff had concerns about how two different window styles would look on the same façade. Mr. Bockmiller asked if the commission would prefer that all 12 of the windows be replaced with casement windows for uniformity.

Commission/Applicant Discussion: Mr. Bowen told the commission that they are in the process of seeking a waiver from the fire code through the Fire Marshal. Two of the eight windows did not meet code anyway. If the waiver is accepted they will use the windows that were originally approved. Since casement windows provide a larger opening, they would be used wherever the bedrooms are located. Mr. Bowen noted that the building has a sprinkler system and the tenants will not be transient so they would be familiar with the egress pattern. Mr. Bockmiller provided an example of another project that has a double-hung window and a casement window side by side.

Mr. Bockmiller stated that he discussed this matter with the Chief Code Official, Blaine Mowen, just before this meeting. Because the openings would be smaller with the proposed double-hung windows than the existing windows, Mr. Mowen did not appear to be inclined to go along with a

waiver from the code requirements. Mr. Gehr stated that usually egress issues cannot be overridden.

Mr. Bockmiller pointed out that the applicant plans to match the lintel design of the existing windows. The horizontal bar will be two inches wide at the sash line and 3.5 inches at the bottom rail to match the heavier bottom on a double-hung window. Mr. Bockmiller added that the windows could also be set back to create a shadow line. The new sashes will be consistent with the existing sash locations. Mr. Gehr pointed out that there will be brick between each window so it will buffer the difference.

Windows on the first floor will not be replaced and are not part of the application. Nothing changes on the North Potomac Street side. Commission members did not have any concerns about the chosen window. Since this is a major intersection, Ms. Allen had concerns about not replacing all of the windows with the casement windows. Mr. Crumrine pointed out that the existing windows do not match now: some are flat on top and others have an arched top. Mr. Silas and Ms. Davis did not have an objection to mixing window styles. Mr. Gehr did not have a preference either way noting that most people do not look up and most likely will not notice the difference in the windows. In this case, due to the circumstances of the renovation and the egress requirements (existing openings will be maintained), he did not think it will be an issue.

As an aside, Mr. Bockmiller noted that the applicant might be replacing all of the air conditioning units on the first floor so the window units might be coming out. Also, there are plans to renovate the basement as a commercial space so the applicant will be coming back to HDC.

MOTION: (Davis/Silas) Mr. Chairman, I have inspected the project plans and the property in question and if constructed in accordance with these plans and the use of the windows as indicated in the plans, the project is compatible with the character of the district for the reasons that the architectural detailing in the windows is generally in harmony with the Architectural Design Guidelines for the Downtown Historic District and the character of the adjoining properties. In addition, this project is complying with fire codes and is featuring removal of a fire escape which necessitates the change in the type of window. Therefore, I move that the HDC grant a Certificate of Appropriateness to the applicant for Case No. 2015-10.

DISCUSSION: Ms. Allen asked if the windows needed to be defined. Mr. Bockmiller suggested that the motion include that the new windows need to closely approximate the existing conditions.

ACTION: APPROVED (Unanimous)

Mr. Bockmiller noted that he gave the applicant permission to close in windows in the rear that are not visible from a public way or an alley.

OLD BUSINESS

Staff-Approved Work - Discussion.

Design Guidelines Amendments – Economic Development Demolition Provisions and Window Signs.

At a recent meeting, staff and commission members preliminarily discussed the types of work that the commission would allow staff to approve administratively. The HDC was waiting for input from staff on acceptable lettering sizes. Once the commission settles on a size, that number will be incorporated into the Design Guidelines. Prior to this meeting, Mr. Bockmiller measured the window lettering on each example provided in the packet material (see meeting file). As a result of this survey, Mr. Bockmiller reported that the ideal size for window lettering is in the three- to four-and-a-half-inch range. Lettering on larger windows could go to six inches depending on how much additional text is part of the sign and the font style. Staff suggested that simple fonts work best. They should not be overly complex but not generic either. Other factors include what is behind the window (i.e., dark space and dark letters or a light background with white letters get lost). Lettering looks more professional if it is adhered to the inside of the glass. Exterior lettering tends to deteriorate over time. Commission members were hesitant to dictate to business owners what style lettering they could use on their signs.

There was discussion about “permanent ‘sale’” signs and whether they should be permitted. An option would be sandwich boards for advertising sales which could be re-used. Staff cautioned that the commission needs to be careful about regulating the content of signs. Ms. Allen was concerned about setting a precedent for ongoing “sale” signs. Mr. Bockmiller said language could be placed in the Design Guidelines advising against permanent “sale” signs. Ms. Allen suggested that the guidelines could give a business owner the opportunity to choose a specified number of elements that could be on a window sign (logo, address, business hours, telephone number, etc.) and also a range of sizing based on window size would provide a business owner some flexibility.

Currently interior window clings are not under the HDC’s purview; however, that is proposed to change. If the Zoning Ordinance amendments are approved by the Mayor and City Council, the Historic District will be able to review any signage on the interior within one foot of the window glass. Any nonconforming permanent signage will be grandfathered. Temporary signs will need to be removed.

Commission members and staff reviewed the proposed Design Guidelines language pertaining to window signage (see meeting file). The following suggestions and changes were recommended by the commission:

- Graphics, *images*, and *lettering*, should not cover more than 50% of the surface of any window *or block of windows*.

- If applied to the window, painting is preferred but pre-manufactured lettering applied to the interior of the window ~~may be considered, provided that the product can be applied in such a way where adhesives are not visible~~ *is preferable to applying to the exterior of the window.*
- Application of window graphics to the exterior of a window is strongly discouraged. ~~When considered, painted lettering is strongly preferred.~~
- Height of lettering should not exceed 8 inches in height, but may be larger when considering extra-tall windows. The number of lettering styles in any one sign should not exceed two. ~~Simple, traditional and Easy-to-read fonts are recommended,~~ *however, very plain block lettering is discouraged.*
- Colors should be compatible with the architecture and color of the building when possible. ~~Black, brown, white, metallic gold, silver, and the basic primary and secondary colors are recommended. Pastel tints or neutral tones of the above are acceptable.~~ (Mr. Gehr noted that this will depend on what is behind the window. There was also a question about branding issues.)
- Use of films on ~~the interior of~~ windows for purposes ~~exceeding~~ *other than* normal signage, ~~such as reducing visibility into storefronts~~ is strongly discouraged. Storefronts with expansive areas of glass and transparency between the sidewalk and the business pace is an important character-defining feature for commercial and mixed-use buildings in the downtown district.
- Etching of glass is permitted, provided the property owner co-sign the application for a Certificate of Appropriateness and understands that once the business leaves the unit, the Zoning Ordinance requires signs to be removed after 30 days and this may require replacement of the window *glazing*.

In a related matter, Mr. Bockmiller asked the commission for its guidance about a proposal by the City's Economic Development office for window scrims in vacant storefronts that depict vibrant interiors. There was a discussion about how to distinguish this use of scrims from the request by the tenant at 33 West Franklin Street for permanent window scrims. Ms. Allen stated that if the scrims are to be used as an economic development tool, a prescribed time limit could be set. After that time has expired, the scrims would need to be removed or re-approved. Mr. Bockmiller stated that the City is lining up donors and contractors would install the scrims at no cost. Commission members did not have a concern about temporary scrims and asked Mr. Bockmiller to work up language to include in the guidelines.

Concerning temporary signage for specific events, Mr. Bockmiller stated that these types of signs will not be included in the Design Guidelines. He added that the City's sign regulations are being completely rewritten.

**Historic District Commission
MINUTES – Special Meeting**

**May 21, 2015
City of Hagerstown, Maryland**

ADJOURN

It was moved and seconded that the meeting adjourn (6:20 p.m.).

7/23/2015

Approved



Debra C. Calhoun – Secretary