

Montpelier Design Review Committee
October 18, 2005
Memorial Room, City Hall

Subject to Review and Approval

Present: Margot George, Chair; Stephen Everett; Eric Gilbertson; Soren Pfeffer
Staff: Stephanie Smith

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Ms. George

I. Design Review and Variance Request - Sign Permit Application

Property Address: 101 Northfield Street
Applicant: Kuldeep Sharma, Capital Inn
Zone: CB-II/DCD

- Replacement of an existing 32.5 square foot ground sign with a 36.9 square foot ground sign

Ms. George explained the Design Review Committee's role in advising the Development Review Board. Ms. Smith explained that a permit was issued to a prior owner of this property in 1991 for the erection of a 32.5 square foot (6' x 6.5') sign. She said that a 36.9 square foot sign was installed at that time, which was a violation of the then issued permit. She said that the current applicant subsequently replaced the sign within the existing sign surround without the requisite sign permit and is now beginning the process. Ms. George said that she remembered that the original sign was a red and white "Econolodge" sign.

Ms. George asked whether the current sign met the size limitations. Ms. Smith said that the sign would require a variance because it was larger than would be permitted. Mr. Gilbertson asked whether this represented a technical violation of the permit. Ms. Smith said that it did. She said that if the DRC recommended approval of the sign, it would still need a variance from the DRB unless the size was reduced.

The committee reviewed the evaluation criteria. The committee discussed the need for the sign to be compatible with the residential neighborhood in which the property is located. Mr. Gilbertson said that the sign is large and the white background really stands out in the residential neighborhood. Mr. Pfeffer agreed that the colors stand out. He noted that the applicant is continuing the red and white color of the prior sign. Mr. Gilbertson said that there is a real issue of compatibility with the neighborhood.

Ms. Smith explained that a variance had been issued with the original sign permit and the applicant could now request a new variance for the larger size of the sign. Mr. Pfeffer asked how the Design Review Committee could vote on the permitted 32.5 square foot sign when the applicant has applied for the 36.9 square foot sign. Mr. Gilbertson suggested that the application should be tabled until these issues are clarified. Mr. Sharma said that he could not reduce the size of the sign without tearing down the sign structure that was previously installed. The committee discussed concerns with the size of the sign. Mr. Pfeffer said that the applicant should obtain the variance before the committee reviews the proposal. Ms. Smith said that the committee might want to have its recommendations on design issues considered in the review of the variance. Ms. George said that if the application was for a brand-new sign, she would have an issue with the size and color scheme. She said that, since the sign is not an approved sign, the committee should look at it as though it were a new sign. Mr. Gilbertson said that the application should be tabled to be fair to the applicant. Mr. Pfeffer agreed. He said that the applicant should have the opportunity to apply for a variance. He advised the applicant that the committee was not looking favorably upon this design. Mr. Sharma said that he would withdraw the application.

II. Design Review and Site Plan Review

Property Address: 3 Pitkin Court
Applicant: Duane Wells
Zone: CB-I/DCD

- Construction of a concrete block retaining wall;
- Landscaping;
- Creation of six parking spaces

Mr. Wells described the project. He said that a 22' retaining wall was proposed behind the existing building. Ms. Smith noted that honeysuckle and bittersweet vines were proposed to be planted at the top of the wall. She suggested that Virginia creeper would be a good species to plant. Mr. Wells said that he would use the same concrete retaining blocks as are currently in place behind the building. He said that the blocks used a tongue and groove design and were more structural than other types of block. Mr. Everett asked whether a block with a formed irregular face could be used for a more natural appearance. Mr. Wells said that the irregular face was not available in this size block. Mr. Pfeffer asked whether plants could be added at the base of the wall. Mr. Wells said that the blacktop would go right up to the wall.

Ms. George asked whether these blocks were the only material suitable for the wall. Mr. Wells said that it would cost almost twice as much to use the faced blocks and the cost of about \$15,000 per parking space was already excessive. He said that the plantings will grow down the face and eventually cover the wall. Ms. George said that she was concerned about an unrelenting 22 foot high concrete wall. Ms. Smith said that the wall is not 22 feet high all the way across. Ms. George said that she did not think that the flat-faced concrete block is an appropriate treatment in the Design Review District. She added that the plantings will not be adequate. Ms. Smith suggested increasing the number of plantings and using Virginia creeper to get faster coverage. Mr. Wells said that he was willing to change the plant species and increase the number of plants. Ms. Smith suggested increasing to two plants per block or one plant every three feet. She advised the committee that a standard chain link fence was also proposed at the top of the wall. Mr. Everett noted that the TRC recommended using a black vinyl fence. Mr. Wells said that he preferred a galvanized finish. The committee agreed that a black powder coat finish was the most appropriate treatment.

The Committee reviewed the evaluation criteria. The DRC voted 3-1 (Ms. George opposed) to recommend approval of the application with the following adjustments and optional change:

Adjustments:

1. The plantings will be at a spacing of two plants for every block (one every three feet) and will use a suitable cascading and climbing plant material that will hide the blocks and fence.
2. The chain link fence will be black powder coated.

Optional change:

1. The blocks may have a textured surface.

Adjournment

The Committee unanimously agreed to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephanie Smith
Administrative Officer

These minutes are subject to approval by the Design Review Committee. Changes, if any, will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting at which they are acted upon.