

Montpelier Design Review Committee
June 6, 2006
Memorial Room, City Hall

Subject to Review and Approval

Present: Stephen Everett, Vice Chair; Vicki Lane (recused on item 3); Eric Gilbertson; Guy Tapper; and Daniel Richardson.
Staff: Kathy Swigon

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Vice Chair Stephen Everett.

Comments from the Chair

Mr. Everett explained the review process and the DRC's role.

I. Design Review – Sign Permit Application OP/DCD

National Life Drive

Applicant: National Life Insurance Company

Interested Party: Shawn Bryan, Vice President of Facilities & General Services , National Life

- Installation of 3,045 square foot wall sign

Vicki Lane recused herself from this agenda item.

Shawn Bryan appeared before the DRC to explain the proposed sign for National Life. He presented photographs to the Committee to demonstrate the need for replacing the sign. The old steel sign has been on the building for 46 years. It has deteriorated to the point that when the wind blows pieces fall out. National Life is concerned that structurally the sign could come off the building. In replacing the sign, National Life took the opportunity to look at National Life as a company and requested that the sign be replaced with something similar. The new sign would be “National Life Group”, which is the primary group of the companies that comprise National Life today. National Life was actually a dba and is not in use any more. National Life Insurance Company is the formal name of the insurance company, but there are also the Sentinel Funds, the Equity Services Company and the Southwest Insurance Company of Dallas. They want to replace the sign with a sign that contains the logo and the current name of the company, which is a holding company for all of the companies within it. They propose that the new sign would be in the same location and the same square footage on the side of the building. The new sign would have a gray logo and black letters. The sign would be an enameled aluminum as opposed to steel. Although the old sign hasn't been lighted for years, it is equipped for lighting. National Life proposes an unlighted sign for a replacement.

Steve Everett inquired about the size of the signs. The old sign's letters are 9 feet tall, and the new sign's capital letters are between 8 and 9 feet. He inquired if the small letters of the sign were going to be smaller. Shawn Bryan said the capital letters would be between 9 and 10 feet tall, with the small letters proportionately smaller than that. He said the new sign will be smaller than what is presently there.

Ms. Swigon asked for a clarification of the measurements for the sign. 29' x 105' is shown in the mark-up. Mr. Bryan said that was the size of the wall. On the application form that says 100' 4'' by 18' 9'', that is the size of the lettering and the logo. National Life is not proposing to use the entire wall for the sign. Basically this is a nonconforming sign with Montpelier's sign so National Life is asking for a variance. If they just needed to repair the sign that is presently there, they wouldn't need a variance because it is an existing use. National Life would like to put something new up that more accurately reflects the company so that is why they are asking for variance. This will be aesthetically much nicer to look. The black against the granite will look much better than the big blue letters presently there. The new sign has been designed with more modern letters.

Ms. Swigon said the maximum allowable for a sign in Montpelier is 150 square feet. The sign could be replaced exactly the way it is and not require a variance, but anything other than what is presently there that is more than 150 square feet would require a variance.

Eric Gilbertson remarked that the sign had always appeared to be out of scale with the Montpelier community. The visibility of the sign to the public is limited to coming in via Route 2 and when you are crossing the bridge on the Interstate; those are the only times you can see the sign. He said he is sympathetic with businesses who want to identify their businesses to the public, but he doesn't believe this achieves that goal. Even with the addition on the building the sign is almost out of scale with the building. He said he had a real problem with the size of the sign, particularly since it is a nonconforming sign under the existing ordinance. That is why the company is applying for a variance. 150 square feet compared to 3,000 square feet is a huge variance.

Dan Richardson asked whether there be a desire to change the sign again if the company changes its name in the future. He noted that the sign has become almost a landmark in Montpelier. He said this could be a reason in favor of a variance. Guy Tapper said he realized that National Life wants a sign to identify the office and he finds the proposed new sign more suitable. It looks more professional with the logo and the smaller letters.

Dan Richardson inquired why National Life wanted to have such a big sign. Mr. Bryan said it was their national headquarters and identifies the building. They believe the sign is of a proportional size to the building, which is 550,000 square feet. He said that they are unique in Montpelier because there isn't another building that size. This is the national headquarters of National Life with sites in Dallas and other locations in the country. They said that because of the zoning rules they are limited to where they can put

a sign. He said that this is the only sign identifying the building since there is no sign over the main entrance to the building.

The committee reviewed the design review criteria. It was noted that this is a unique property with a pre-existing sign outside of downtown Montpelier. Concern was raised about the size and scale of the sign and whether it was consistent with the scale of the community. It was noted that Cityscape was not applicable to this application because it was designed for downtown uses, for historic preservation and consistency with other downtown signs.

Steve Everett said he thought everyone was in agreement that the new sign looked better, but the scale that seems to be out of place with other buildings. He said that the committee acknowledges that this is a fairly unique property, but is concerned that this is a gateway view to the City of Montpelier. The sign is smaller overall with a logo and more subtle colors.

The vote on the National Life proposed sign was in favor 3 to 1. Eric Gilbertson voted no, and Vicki Lane recused.

2. **Design Review – HDR/DCD**

3 Corse Street

Applicant: Jim Donovan and Jody Petersen

- Request approval of constructed 20' x 9' platform
- Construction of access stairs to platform
- Installation of lattice in space between the platform on the south east and north sides
- Approval for changes to windows and trim

Jody Petersen provided photos to the DRC. Jody explained to the DRC that when The crew came to work on their property there was no level place for them to work they built a nice sturdy platform on top of the concrete. It serves as a good place for storage off the ground. They also want to construct stairs down the back to it because the slope is so steep. They plan on painting the stairs the same tan color as the trim of the house. They need the variance for this section of the property.

Jody described the proposed changes to the windows. Originally, there was no trim on the south side of the house. The windows were smaller so putting trim around them seemed to address the issue. They put Marvin windows in rather than another type so it altered by a few inches the windows on the outside. The new items we are addressing are the stairs, the windows and the trim around them. There is a combination of white and tan trim on the house. The stairs leading up to the porch are also tan.

Eric Gilbertson inquired about the lattice of the house. He was concerned that it was the same all around the house. Vicki Lane said she felt the lattice gave the house a finished look.

Steve Everett said the trim may be painted uniformly tan and a wider trim around the windows on the south and north elevations. Another option is to extend the lattice all around the house. The stairs are to be painted the same tan color as the trim.

Vicki suggested that perhaps there could be a trap door on the deck above the stairs if they are to only have seasonal use for storage. The applicants agreed this was a good idea. Mr. Everett suggested that the stairs on the north elevation be painted to match the trim or body color of the dwelling and a trap door may be placed over the stair access.

The DRC reviewed the criteria and recommended approval with optional changes.

3. 4 Witt Place – Jon Anderson

Jon Anderson described his application to replace an asphalt roof with a standing seam metal roof and increase the height of porch railings 80-year roof, and it's much superior to shingles.

Ms Swigon said that since this application has not been formally noticed that the DRC could not take formal action on it tonight.

Eric Gilbertson said that generally, in preservation projects, that unless the roof has something special, such as a slate roof, there shouldn't be any problem with a standing sealed roof. Steve Everett suggested a dark bronze color for the roof. For most of the historic houses you see they use a dark bronze color for the roofs.

Steve Everett told Mr. Anderson to look at the railing and how it is designed at the property the New England Culinary Institute is renovating on College Street. This would give him another option to repair his railing.

Minutes

The minutes from the May 16, 2006 meeting were approved unanimously.

Adjournment

The Design Review Committee adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen Swigon
Administrative Officer

Prepared by:
Joan Clack
Clerk-Treasurer's Office