

## Montpelier Design Review Committee

July 17, 2007

### Memorial Room, City Hall

*Subject to Review and approval*

**Present:** Margot George, Chair; Stephen Everett, Vice Chair; Vicki Lane, Soren Pfeffer, Guy Tapper and Daniel Richardson.  
Staff: Gwendolyn Hallsmith, Director, Development & Community Planning

**Call to Order:**

Margot George, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

**I. Design Review – HDR/DCD**

7 Jay Street

Applicant: Linda Pruitt

Owner: Christ and Linda Pruitt

Painting and new roof.

Ms. George explained the advisory role of the Design Review Committee and the process for reviewing their application.

Linda Pruitt showed the DRC a picture of her home at 7 Jay Street as it had been scraped by Marineau's Painting. The proposed colors are a flowering chestnut for the body of the house. The trim on the turrets are Portobello, and the accents and trim on the porch are plantation beige. The porch floor is dark green. The roofing is going to be shingled with the same size and shape presently existing. The DRC reviewed the cut sheets and paint colors attached to the application. The plantation beige just gets incorporated on the porch space.

Ms. George inquired if the applicant was leaving the lattice work, and whether it was vinyl. Ms. Pruitt said it is vinyl white lattice. Ms. George said the DRC could give them an option so if she decided to change it she could paint it. Probably, the original lattice was what is called a "boxed" lattice, which meant it had a frame around it and then the lattice was within the frame. The frame on the outside of the lattice could be one of the trim colors, and then the lattice could be another color. Ms. Pruitt said she would like to have the bottom of the lattice with the plantation beige and the other Portobello.

Ms. Lane inquired if there were any plantings. Ms. Pruitt said in the front of the house there are some plantings. She said they may have read about her house in the past issue of *The Bridge*. The Thayers illegally power washed 175 Main Street and their entire yard on the side of the house, her perennial garden, and the front of her home they haven't been on in 13 weeks because they aren't allowed on the property until the lead cleanup is completed. There are currently plantings here. Maidenhair fern appears at the front of the house and ligularia, which is an older broad leaf plant with a yellow flower. At this point she needs to get rid of all of her plants. They did topsoil removal and put a bobcat through their yard, so it is important to note today what the plantings are like.

Mr. Richardson said he believed it is the view of the DRC that if she were to restore the gardens she would have a certain amount of flexibility under the auspices of restoring so she wouldn't have to come back with a specific garden plan, especially since she had gardens there before. She would only have to come back if she was making a new landscaped area. The committee isn't in the business of micro-managing peoples' plant collections.

The DRC gave the applicant the option of using a wooden lattice instead of plastic if she wished.

The DRC reviewed the criteria and found the application was acceptable. The optional changes are that the lattice can be painted plantation beige, Portobello, or flowering chestnut from the California paint chart, and the lattice can be a wooden vertical or diagonal style lattice with a frame. The adjustment to the scope of the proposal is that the filigree porch balustrade is plantation beige.

The application was approved with optional changes and adjustments 5-0.

Ms. George turned the meeting over to Steve Everett, Vice Chair, to chair since she recused herself from this application.

**II. Design Review – HDR/DCD**

66 Main Street

Applicant: Kevin Casey, Montpelier Property Management

Owners: Jeffrey Jactobs, et al

Convert vacant lot to 7 parking spaces.

Mr. Casey told the Design Review Committee they would like to remove the concrete barriers that surround the vacant lot and provide seven spaces for parking. Originally, they had wanted to put eight spaces there, but the Planning Office suggested they remove the one closest to the sidewalk to eliminate any possible issues of people backing in and out onto the sidewalk. This is just to clean up the lot and to provide additional parking for their tenants.

Mr. Everett inquired if all of the barriers would be removed around the perimeter. Mr. Casey said they would. The city required they be installed after the fire.

Ms. Lane inquired if this would be public parking. Mr. Casey said it would be reserved for tenants.

Ms. Lane asked who would police the area. Mr. Casey said since it would be their parking it would be their responsibility for policing it.

Mr. Everett said if the surface is crushed slate or staymat, how the parking spaces would be delineated. Mr. Casey said part of the proposal is to paint lines to mark out the parking spots. If it is pressed down, the painted lines will stay. It will have to be relined periodically.

Mr. Casey said he also requested he could add signs so each parking space would be delineated by a sign.

Ms. Lane inquired if he was planning on any plantings. Since this is such a visible space, the city has been trying to get their parking lots to look nice aesthetically. Mr. Casey replied he had no plans for plantings.

Ms. Lane asked how people would enter the parking area. Mr. Casey said they would enter through the red light on the street.

Mr. Everett said the City of Montpelier zoning and subdivision regulations generally require standards under Article 7 for screening. It says the Development Review Board may require parking areas and other loading dock service entries to be screened from public streets and adjacent land uses. Screening may consist of densely planted landscaping, fencing, landforms, or a combination thereof. Screening areas shall be five feet wide at a minimum. Location, design and elements of the screening must be reviewed and approved by the Development Review Board. He asked Mr. Casey if he had considered adding any landscaping to screen automobiles from the street. Mr. Casey said they would consider it.

Mr. Richardson said he saw Article 7 as more than just a recommendation. He can't approve any proposal that wouldn't have some form of screening. This would have to be a year-round type of screening because the ordinance does require it. As a consistency within the standard he doesn't feel this will fit within the district if it is simply parking that goes straight up to Main Street.

Ms. Lane said there is only a couple in the district, and they are grandfathered.

Mr. Richardson said he believes there is an ordinance which doesn't allow them to pass a parking proposal that abuts a public street without the screening because they are going to have to review the screening as part of the proposal. Secondly, just the character and the broader charge the committee has for the Design Review Committee which is to make sure a use is compatible with the existing district. Right now a parking lot that

comes up onto Main Street is inconsistent with the rest of the buildings and the character surrounding them. Some screening would have to be in place if only to keep that use out of the public view. All of the parking on Main Street is hidden for the most part, except for on-street parking or parking lots behind the buildings. He doesn't see this as a consistent use with keeping within the character of the district.

Mr. Richardson said the screening is left open to a couple of different choices, i.e., densely planted landscaping, fences, landforms, or a combination thereof. He would be reluctant to just tack on some kind of promise to landscape. He would want to see a formal plan because that is not a great area to grow anything. Ms. Hallsmith said a fence with some public art might be a good idea. Mr. Richardson said it would have to be something that would tie in because it is a highly visible spot in the main intersection of downtown Montpelier. He can't approve anything with just parked cars, and he can't approve anything that is going to look ragged very quickly. It is going to require a lot of maintenance to keep the painted lines on the staymat. There needs to be some kind of semi-permanent solution because he is taking what was once a façade building area and transforming it into some other type of use that is inconsistent with the rest of the Main Street façade.

Mr. Tapper said if he was considering just putting up a fence that is an invitation for everyone putting up their signs, which is going on now with the buildings along the street. Something needs to be done not to just provide a big bulletin board surface.

Ms. Lane suggested perhaps a mural like the one on the back of Rite Aid, but it would have to be tastefully and artfully done.

Mr. Casey said he would have to discuss it with Jeff Jacobs to see what he wanted to do. Jessie Jacobs suggested perhaps a brick wall with plantings on the top.

Mr. Richardson said the DRC is going to be concerned in any of its recommendations that it be something that invokes the character of the rest of the Main Street.

Ms. Lane suggested they could erect a wall with a mural and put plantings on the top which would accent the mural.

Mr. Jacobs said a 5 foot wall is going to look a lot different than a 2 ½ or 3 foot wall with a bench.

Mr. Richardson said the committee is trying to present some ideas. The ordinance says something that is 5 foot tall. It should be something to screen the vehicles.

Ms. Lane said a concern with the height of the wall would also be a safety issue. Planters on a wall would be nice with some vines hanging down.

Mr. Everett inquired if there was a particular reason why they aren't replacing a building there.

Mr. Casey said currently one of the issues is the difference between a \$5,000 parking a lot and a \$500,000 building, which is significant. He said he couldn't speak directly to the issues surrounding it because that would be something Jeff Jacobs would have to address directly. It is basically getting some use out of a vacant lot and getting the concrete barriers out of the way.

Mr. Richardson asked about the proposed signs. Mr. Casey said there would be a sign at each parking spot. They are 12 inches wide by 18 inches high. It is a standard parking sign. They would be attached on individual posts for each spot.

Mr. Everett inquired if the Committee should table the application. He asked if the applicants wanted to talk with Jeff Jacobs and come back with a proposal for the screening.

Mr. Casey said they could resubmit the application.

Ms. Lane said she wouldn't be able to support the proposal in its current form.

Ms. Hallsmith said it would be nice to have a meeting on July 31<sup>st</sup> because there are issues with another project that need to be addressed before the August 6<sup>th</sup> DRB meeting. If the DRC decided to schedule the interim meeting, then Mr. Casey could come back to the group before they were approved by the DRB and get the plan approved. The Design Review Committee is an advisory board to the Development Review Board.

Mr. Everett said they could table the application to July 31<sup>st</sup> and see what Jeff Jacobs wanted to do and come back with proposals for screening. He is hearing from the committee that some screening in the area from the edge of the building to the travel lane and smaller signs.

**Other Business:**

Margot George said she received a phone call from Dan Clar, who is working on a project at Steve Hingtgen's property on West Street.

Mr. Clar said Steve Hingtgen had hired him to do some work on his house. They are rebuilding all of the porches on Steve's house at 7 West Street, which is the Dillingham Hall. This is a single family house. Steve's railing is about 27 inches high. The new building code says railings have to be at a certain height and they only want them at 27 inches. Mr. Everett said they should go to Historic Preservation and talk to Nancy Boone. She is their building code expert. Mike Desrochers is the historic variance expert, because there are historic variances involved here. This is outside the design control review area.

His driveway porch is 28 inches. The back porch is where there is concerned about the height.

Mr. Hingtgen said there is a big parking lot next to their house. This is the side porch at 28 inches, and the same architectural detail as the rear porch. This is a landmark house and built in 1897 and principally known as Governor Dillingham's home. It was actually built by a grocer along with Howland Hall. Ms. George said Dillingham only got his name on it because he came to town and lived there for about five years. In 1948, the house was sold to the college. It was a single family home and only had three owners up to that point. It was owned by the college up until about three years ago. During that time it was first used as a dormitory for 23 women to being used as offices. When they purchased it there were four or five desks in every room with fluorescent fixtures. Overall, the college was a good steward of the interior. With regard to the exterior, due to financial issues of the college it decayed. In 1991, the college went through the home and brought it up to commercial code, so they put in a lot of stiff fire doors. The Hingtgen's have been reversing that and bringing it back to what it was in 1948. They are now coming up against the issues where all they want to do is restore it and coming up against code issues.

Mr. Hingtgen said they did remove the large fire escape off the back of the building. They know this building is an asset to the community and they want to do it right. They just want to do the project beautifully and historically. Even in 1991, only half of its maintenance was done. Today, in 2007, there is another 16 years of neglect to reverse and these three porches are basically falling in. The footings are collapsing. There is a giant \$25,000 paint job ahead of them, and they need to do the work on the porches first. They are up against building codes now and need to ask for a variance.

Ms. George said she is concerned that he is applying the building code to a single family home. She said that Historic Preservation supports the concept of leaving the original porch rails and running either a pipe above or a cable. It doesn't force you to change all of your balustrades to a style that was never appropriate to the building to begin with. The key alternative to her is whether the building code can be enforced on a single family residence, and whether that should be looked into.

Mr. Richardson said he knew Mike Desrochers is in charge of historic variances. Nancy Boone from Historic Preservation will come up and label the railing as extremely important historic design elements. They would then talk to Mike about a historic variance which would trump the City of Montpelier's building codes. The Building Inspector can't grant historic variances but only enforce the building code. Mike Derosier has a good reputation

for being sensitive to these historic concerns. The fact this is a private residence gets into the legal question of its enforceability. The Montpelier building code does allow it to control private homes.

Ms. George said this committee only gives advice and send the applicants in the right direction. Nancy Boone is with the Division of Historic Preservation with the State of Vermont and Mike Desrochers is with fire safety for the State.

Mr. Richardson said this is something that should be mentioned to Glenn, that he is not being very good about mentioning the appeal process to applicants either in his written reports or in what he explains to various applicants.

Ms. George thanked Steve Hingtgen and Mr. Clar for appearing before the committee. She advised Mr. Hingtgen that he and his neighbors should work on getting 7 West Street placed on the National Register because only College Hall is on the National Register presently.

**Minutes of July 2, 2007:**

The minutes of the July 2, 2007 DRC meeting with changes were approved unanimously.

**Adjournment:**

The next meeting of the DRC is scheduled for July 31, 2007.  
The DRC adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Gwen Hallsmith, Director  
Planning & Community Development

*Transcribed and Prepared by:*  
*Joan Clack, City Clerk & Treasurer's Office*