

**Montpelier Design Review Committee**  
**August 21, 2007**  
**Memorial Room, City Hall**

*Approved*

**Present:** Margot George, Chair; Stephen Everett, Vice Chair; Guy Tapper, Soren Pfeffer, Eric Gilbertson, and Vicki Lane.

Staff: Clancy DeSmet, Planning & Zoning Administrator and Gwen Hallsmith, Director, Planning & Community Development.

**Call to Order:**

Ms. George called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

**I. Design Review – HDR/DCD**

60 Ridge Street

Applicant: Susan Walter

Owner: Susan Walter

Replace roof.

Ms. George explained the advisory role of the Design Review Committee to the Development Review Board. She said the Committee would ask clarifying questions to see how it fits with the guidelines for the district.

The applicant is replacing an asphalt shingled roof with a metal roof. At the last meeting the committee did not understand if it was standing seam, corrugated or channeled. The application has been amended to state standing seam metal roof. The committee also couldn't tell what the color of the roof was. Ms. Walter stated it is a natural metal. The applicant provided samples of other roofs in the vicinity, which are galvanized standing seam metal roofs.

Mr. Everett asked if there was any reason the applicant chose the galvalume over any of the colors. Ms. Walter said she liked it and it went along with the house. The house is yellow and all of the other houses in the neighborhood have the same color.

The committee reviewed the criteria and found the application acceptable. The committee voted unanimously on the application 5-0.

**II. Design Review – CB-I/DCD**

90 Main Street

Applicant: Classic Signs, Inc.

Owner: TD Banknorth

Four new signs.

Paul Tripp, Classic Signs, Inc.

Ms. George said the applicant wants to put a sign band which wraps around the edges of the building and incorporates some new signage. There currently are signs on the building, one on the State Street side and the Main Street side. There is not one on the Langdon Street side presently. The sign presently is a grey color with the logo. Now they want to do the sign band in the corporate dark green color with a light green stripe. The signs will be aluminum with acrylic letters and mounted.

Ms. George asked Mr. Tripp to define the method of attachment to the granite. Mr. Tripp said they will install the aluminum at an angle to the granite with standard black shields. Mr. Tripp presented photographs of what the signs would look like attached to the bank building. They would be drilling a hole in the granite and then the aluminum sign would be affixed.

Mr. Tripp said TD Banknorth designed the sign, and it looked like they had Montpelier in mind when they designed it because it is 6 square feet. It is exactly what Montpelier's ordinance is trying to achieve here in town.

He said his company does signs for TD Banknorth in New Hampshire and Vermont. He showed samples of signs his company had done for other buildings.

Ms. George said our (DRC) goal is to have internally lit signs or illuminated letters. There are illuminated letters elsewhere in the district, but just the letters and not the whole sign. Community National Bank is a good example of this.

Mr. Pfeffer said there is only 30 square feet of sign but he is actually putting an aluminum band around the entire building, which is 250 linear feet. Mr. Tripp said they are essentially wrapping the façade. Mr. Pfeffer said if you look at the color scheme of the building there is nothing remotely like this, so in his mind the entire thing reads as a sign. Visually, the whole thing appears to be a sign because it doesn't look like part of the building. He personally feels that a continuous band all the way around really changes the character of the building because it looks like the columns are holding up the green band. He doesn't feel the continuous band works with the building.

Mr. Tripp said there is no other place to put the band. Mr. Pfeffer said the existing signs aren't completely covering the building in terms of the architectural character and are just signs.

Ms. Hallsmith said she believed Soren is right under the definition, that extending the green band around would add to the sign's area.

Mr. DeSmet read the definition. The definition states:

*Any structure, display, device, or representation designed or used to advertise, or call attention by visible communication to any thing, person, business, activity or place.*

Ms. Lane said Soren is right in the rough cut granite is on the detailing around the top of the building and on the corners of the building, so it is echoed throughout the building. It is a sign band, but she doesn't believe the building was ever intended to be completely covered with a sign. It is part of the architectural details of the building with the rough cut granite showing.

Mr. Everett said this building is different in many ways from most of the other buildings which have facades in town where there is a sign band that is built on the face of the building. Those are more often than not made of wood and trimmed in wood. They were set up to incorporate a sign and the sign is made and painted and placed within the band. In some cases there are actually just letters that are placed on the band itself, but the band is part of the building both in terms of architectural design and color schemes. In this particular case you have a color scheme of the building, which is brick and granite, so there is grey everywhere. He agrees with Soren that by placing what amounts to a sign all the way around it changes the whole appearance of the building.

Ms. Lane said the rough cut granite is really is an architectural detail of the building. The applicant's sign is an attractive way to do a sign, but it doesn't really fit within the district.

Ms George said other buildings were built with plate glass windows and sign bands so a sign could go into it. This building was always built as a bank. Mr. Langdon built this building plus two other buildings that looked just like it, and he planned on building a fourth. This building was his pride and joy and was the key building. The granite is called rusticated granite, and he brought all of the granite over from Barre by oxen. It is an architectural component that was never meant to be a sign band and covered. Indeed, over the years, signs have been attached to it. Over the years the city has allowed signs to identify the banks. Signs have been allowed to be attached, but they have never been so large they actually covered a whole component of a building. The DRC's goal today is to try to work with the applicant to find some other compromise.

Mr. Tapper said he agreed with what the rest of the committee said. How are the little signs on the bank attached now?

Mr. Tripp said they put something over the pre-existing sign. What they have behind there now is very similar to what he is proposing. Obviously, they had to drill into the granite.

Mr. Tapper said he was interested in the amount of drilling that would have to be done. Ms. George said that is a big concern of hers as well.

Ms. George said the committee would have some discussion about what alternatives there were for the sign. It is good to know what is there presently because the placement of the signs has been approved and accepted. If the committee can make changes to those signs in those locations, the sign should be okay. Currently, there is a sign between the two columns on the Main Street side and there is a sign on the State Street side. There are just those two signs with nothing on Langdon Street. There is no overhanging sign as well. That is what pre-exists.

She noticed on the sign the applicant wants to incorporate that TD Banknorth has an ATM, and that appears on the Langdon Street side. Mr. Tripp said that is proposed for all sides of the bank.

Mr. Pfeffer said he feels the sign going over the posts is very bothersome and detracts from the quality of the building. He thinks the signs should be moved away from the corners. If the applicant could size the "24 Hour ATM" and "TD Banknorth" so they would fit between the columns, he would prefer that. The sign should not go past a column.

Ms. George said when there is a sign ordinance there is a maximum size for all signs, but the ordinance considers the building and the architecture. You could have some building that doesn't even have a sign band that is more than x feet and that is the maximum you could fill in. It is more a case of what is the appropriate sign for each individual building and then the ordinance applies to the building.

Mr. Everett said a lot of the buildings have wooden sign bands which are clearly designed as sign bands. They are made out of wood. This is true for the smaller individual stores. The applicant literally proposed a green stripe that runs a very short block. It covers three sides of the building, which is a lot of green and a color that doesn't go well with the granite.

Ms. George said just because the Bank wants to have a certain level of signage, and it works for them on a drive-up facility, shopping center, but it has to work for this historic district in downtown Montpelier.

Mr. Gilbertson said something that is considered in the sign guidelines is that downtown Montpelier is really a walking place. You don't have to draw the attention of people to the sign. Ninety percent of the people who come into downtown know exactly where they are going and not looking for a particular sign.

Mr. Tripp said he would assume Montpelier would have a large contingency of vacationers and travelers that come through town and they don't know where the bank is. Ms. Lane said they usually walk a lot downtown because there is no place to park. Ms. George said the bank is the most prominent building on the corner of State and Main Streets.

Ms. George said the Committee could agree tonight to have a more updated TD Banknorth logo applied again onto the existing signs. The Committee could approve that today. Her question is whether there needs to be more than two signs. What is considered excessive signage?

Mr. Gilbertson suggested the applicant look at enhancing the signage on the windows where the ATM actually is located. In the downtown eye level signs are really effective by the windows. He believes putting the ATM signs up on the band will not lead people to the ATM machine.

The committee reviewed the previous applications. Mr. DeSmet said the present signs are 8'6" x 1'4".

Mr. Gilbertson suggested to Margot the committee table the application. All of the dimensions can be worked out with the staff.

Mr. Tripp asked if he comes back with designs that replaced the signs with two at 22 square feet each that would simply look like the sign here would be more acceptable?

Ms. George said she thought the earlier discussions were centered around the fact the committee has a real problem with something that looks like the columns are holding up a giant green sign. Mr. Gilbertson said the placement of the signs has to respect the architecture of the building.

Ms. Lane said for the purposes of the masonry on the building it would be preferable to maintain the location of the existing signs. We don't want additional drillings in the granite. With the way the banking industry seems to have evolved she would hesitate having that many holes drilled in the building. The Howard Bank was the "Howard Bank" forever. Ms. Lane said it would be better for the appearance and historic nature of the building to actually have the sign placed on the original sign. That is what we consider the sign band for the building.

Mr. Gilbertson suggested maybe there would be a way to achieve the same thing with a smaller background. He said he would rather not see the hanging sign because it doesn't give anybody any direction. Ms. Lane said everybody knows where the door is.

Mr. Tripp said "everyone" is not people who have lived here for 40 years. It is the traveler and the vacationer who come to your town.

Mr. Gilbertson said he would vote against an overhanging sign. It breaks up the arch, which is an important architectural component of the building.

Ms. George said the district allows an overhanging sign. Whether or not an overhanging sign is appropriate to the building is the committee's decision. Ms. George said the ordinance has to cover the whole district. There are a lot of properties in the district so the city designed a sign ordinance that fits the bulk of the properties, but within the district every building is treated separately. Eric is referring to the placement of the sign and not just the design. The fact that it is in the middle of an arch, which is a prominent architectural feature, isn't acceptable.

Ms. George said there are a couple of options. The DRC could agree on an alteration to the permit today and vote on it. The DRC could table the application and the applicant could go back to the company. Mr. Tripp agreed to further discussion by the DRC.

Ms. George said the DRC could talk about the adjustments to the scope of the proposal. There will be just two signs in the existing locations to be no longer than the space between the two major turned columns and centered between and no taller than 18 inches and not to exceed 25 square feet each. Materials and colors are fine. The sign will include the TD Banknorth logo, the words 24 Hour ATM and the green stripe, which is on the bottom of the design. All other design elements remain the same. Placement between the columns maintains the architectural design elements of the buildings as prominent features. The visible rusticated granite band/lentil is an important element that should be maintained and visible below and around the sign. This building is at a prominent intersection. There will be no hanging sign.

The Design Review Committee voted favorably to approve the proposal 5-0.

Mr. Tripp inquired what his next step would be after tonight's DRC review.

Ms. Hallsmith said if the DRC is agreeing with the proposal the next step would be to go to the Development Review Board for the final review.

**Other Business:**

Ms. Hallsmith said at the last meeting some questions came up about quorums and procedures. Clancy found the Montpelier Design Review Rules and Procedures, which were adopted back in 2000 by the City Council. She guessed they are outdated. What they need to do, at a minimum, is update these. Ms. Hallsmith said she just wanted to go over a few issues as they relate to the rules and procedures. It is interesting in the roles of the members of the Design Review Committee it actually outlines step by step how the meetings shall be run, and the Chair tells each applicant how the process works before each meeting.

Under the other city she looked at they have a different rule about quorums. A quorum is three members, and then a determination shall require the concurrence of a majority of the committee. If there are only three members left, all three have to agree; it's not just two out of three.

Members of the DRC said they thought they understood that. Ms. George said it is very rare that only three members show up.

Ms. Hallsmith said regarding the rules and regulations that she would be happy to draft them so they would meet the city's current standards.

Ms. Hallsmith said another issue they covered in the conduct is they actually put a time limitation. They say: "Regularly scheduled meetings of the Board shall conclude by 9:30 p.m. unless a majority of the board agrees to extend the meeting." One of the members said he didn't think that was really an issue with their committee. Ms. George said when they have a big project they know they have to finish their review.

Ms. Hallsmith said she wanted to speak a little about the way they present themselves to the applicants. She has sat through their meetings and the longer they go the harder they get. She said it is important to keep the amount of side comments and things that could really get under an applicant's skin to a minimum. Tonight when the applicant was talking about the exterior sign, a DRC member said that would be a great target for eggs at Halloween. That is a comment that is going to make someone feel really uncomfortable because it gives the impression that you are saying something almost derogatory about him, even if that wasn't your intent. Even though the intent was to be lighthearted, this kind of comment is inappropriate to the discussion. We need to really be on point and not have a lot of side comments that could be interpreted to illustrate some type of bias. There are court cases on biased boards. She told the DRC members they work very hard and she isn't trying to be critical.

It worried her at some of the meetings she sat through because some things were said that seemed chatty. Everything is recorded and transcribed as minutes so it is important to stay on point and try to limit the amount of chit-chat comments and keep the meeting very professional and to the design issues.

Mr. DeSmet that is the danger of an informal proceeding that it can turn out to appear to an applicant that there is partiality and the Planning Department can't have that. It's great to be informal, but we need to have a little bit of order. When somebody is sitting there trying to propose a project they aren't experts on this. The public is coming before the city and deserve a certain respect.

Ms. George told Gwen Hallsmith and Clancy DeSmet she appreciated their comments. Luckily, the nature of a design review process is that you have the ability to talk with the applicant in a more casual way because the Development Review Board way is the exact opposite. If members are bringing up their own personal experiences it should be right on point and not wander away.

Ms. Hallsmith told Ms. George she does a very good job of running meetings. There were just a few things she noticed that she thought she would raise for discussion.

Mr. Tapper said in the past there have been times when there has been less of a feeling of working together between the DRC and the DRB, and in those times they were more likely to want to send applicants to the DRB because the board might ignore their recommendations.

Ms. George said one of the DRC's frustrations, in the past, was that they felt that their recommendations were succinct, but when they watched the televised meeting of the DRB the results played out differently.

A member of the committee inquired what was happening with Candy Moot's application.

Ms. Hallsmith said the applicant had started installing the windows against everybody's recommendation without a permit so the Planning Department is sending her an enforcement letter today. She didn't go to the DRB. Mr. DeSmet said he counted seven windows on the back of the building that were new. Ms. George said when the DRC conducted their site visit they did not observe the violation because they didn't notice the installation of windows on the rear side of the building.

Mr. Gilbertson said this process makes it very difficult to deal with somebody who has already bought the windows, and more difficult if they have installed them. They are putting themselves and the DRC in a very difficult position basically saying "to hell with the city." That particular building is about as good a case as we can have.

Ms. Hallsmith said the Planning Department didn't know they have purchased the windows. When they came to the Planning Department for the permit she told them about the divided lights and muntins. She told them if their dimensions weren't where they exactly were now the application wouldn't get approved.

**Approval of August 7, 2007 Minutes:**

The minutes of the Design Review Committee of August 7, 2007, with minor changes, were voted unanimously 6-0.

**Adjournment:**

The Design Review Committee adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Clancy DeSmet,  
Planning and Zoning Administrator

