

Montpelier Design Review Committee
July 15, 2008
Memorial Room, City Hall

Approved

Present: Margot George, Chair; Vicki Lane, Eric Gilbertson and Soren Pfeffer
Staff: Clancy DeSmet, Planning and Zoning Administrator

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order by Margot George, Chair, at 5:30 P.M.

I. 2 Mather Terrace – MDR/DCD
Applicant: Carolyn & Dan Desch
Replace 30 windows.

Ms. George explained the advisory role of the Design Review Committee to the Development Board to the applicant. At the last meeting they attended they decided she was going to replace the window sashes. Ms. Desch said replacing the sashes is cheaper than doing what she originally intended to do. She wants to replace the windows with the ultimate clad insert double hung. Actually, she would like an option for all three. She would like the option to do Marvin Ultimate Clad insert double hung, option to not do new construction, and the option to do sash.

Ms. George said the committee had talked about only a sash replacement. Mr. Gilbertson said he thinks they are talking about the replacement window. Ms. George said she is retaining the trim around all of the windows. Mr. Gilbertson said there are two ways she can do that. There is the sash only or a Marvin Tilt Back.

Ms. Desch said the new construction essentially takes all of that out and replaces it with the same thing. These are the same windows she requested before, but she just wants the option.

Ms. George said she is not making the opening smaller by doing any of the three. Ms. Desch replied no. Mr. DeSmet said the thing that precluded her from doing exactly what she wanted was the DRC adjusted the scope to resash only. Her application had different options of cut sheets of what she wanted.

Ms. George said there are three options: the sash only replacement, or replacement unit(sash and frame). Ms. Desch said it is ultimate clad insert; it's a double hung. It comes in a frame. The third option is new construction. Ms. George said if they were going to new construction, would they be replicating the existing window. Ms. Desch replied yes.

The DRC reviewed the criteria and found it met all of the criteria. The DRC voted in favor of the application on a 4-0 vote. The DRC said if they use new construction they should maintain the same size and trim details on the exterior.

II. 39 Main Street – CB-I/DCD
Applicant: Montpelier Downtown Community Association
Owner: City of Montpelier
Landscaping City Hall Plaza
Interested Parties: Jean Vissering, Landscape Architect,
Emma Lynn Melvin, UVM Extension
Paul Carnahan, Chair, MDCA Design Committee

Ms. Lane said she doesn't know what their plans are for the planters in front of City Hall. She may have to abstain. Ms. Vissering said she felt she should participate.

Ms. George explained the DRC is advisory to the Development Review Board. They will review the application and applying it to the criteria for the Design Control District and have them describe the project to the committee.

Ultimately, they will take a vote and she will ask the applicant whether they want to vote on the application as submitted or with changes. The vote will be inserted on the page along with the DRC's comments and forwarded to the Development Review Board.

Ms. George said so far they are out front of City Hall and we're missing a crab tree.

Paul Carnahan, Chair of the MDCA Design Committee, said the MDCA started reviewing this several months ago with several needs in mind. They knew the crab apple trees were sick. Secondly, the whole area under the crab trees was weedy and not terribly attractive. Third, they were looking to soften and make that grey granite space a little softer and more attractive all seasons of the year. They approached Jean Vissering who has generously donated her time to help them come up with different ideas.

Ms. Vissering said they had some budget realities as well.

Ms. Lane asked if they had communicated with the Memorial Committee that set this up originally. Mr. Carnahan said he had not personally. He doesn't know if Suzanne from the MDCA office has, though. They aren't touching the Memorial on the side and the pavers that have peoples' names on them are not going to be removed. If they are disturbed they are going to be reinserted.

Ms. Lane asked if they had talked with the maintenance of City Hall.

Mr. Carnahan said they want to remove the trees down to human level.

Ms. Vissering said they started with the idea of a couple of larger trees, mostly so people could walk underneath them. The crab apple trees work now because they are up on the mounds. The advantage of having the two larger shade trees would allow circulation throughout the plaza. If possible, they wanted to add a little bit of red brick color just for a warmer color in the space because one of the comments had been was that it was very grey. The space where the mound is now they would integrate some red brick concrete pavers in an oval pattern underneath. The other way of introducing some color is to use some shrubs around the trees which would be a gold foliage color. What they are proposing is gold mound spirea, which has both flowers but also some spring, summer and fall color. That would do two things. It would protect the tree from people getting closer to it and add a little texture and color into the space. The other aspect of that area around the trees is that it would be a rain garden. Emma can explain that a little more. Instead of the water running off into the streets, it allows it to water the tree as well as keeping the water on the site so you are reducing runoff.

Ms. Vissering said she is going to talk about the back benches against the retaining wall. Right now there are three granite benches around the trees. They would like to move them closer into the space so they would be closer to the plantings. The uncertainty is they have been told they may not be able to be moved because of their weight and the way they were installed. She suspects they will be able to move them. They have left the two benches in the plan left up next to the sidewalk. The other two are moved back against the wall. Generally, it tends to be a more comfortable place to sit with something at your back.

In the back there are some additional shrubs to add a little color and texture. They would be reddish color foliage and the benches sit in there with a little red brick set underneath them to carry the color. If they have to leave the benches in place that area becomes more difficult in terms of people just being able to move through there.

The trees they selected were Little Leaf Lindens. They had originally thought Honey Locust. They need something that will survive in an urban space like this. The advantage of the Little Leaf Lindens is they flower and have a nice scent. They have a slightly more compact form so it allows the building to be seen a little better. They are a formal tree and have a fine texture. She thinks of them as quite a nice tree for an important public space. One of the bigger ones is over in front of Pioneer Apartments next to the round-a-bout.

Mr. Gilbertson said they had several long discussions about the landscaping at the Main Street School. In terms of historic photographs, were there trees in front of City Hall?

Ms. George said the last time they did this plan they had the original plan and they consulted the original design to City Hall at the time they did the plan in place now.

(Break in meeting while Clancy went to Planning Office for original plans for City Hall)

Ms. George said they found a postcard which was probably prior to construction, but it had the original plan. The history of this is that over the years the stairs went up through the middle. They did away with the whole front plaza. If they go back to 1998 when the first proposal was made, there was going to be a Veterans' Memorial in the middle of the plaza. The pavers were only going to be in the center section. There were also little benches that were like chess tables in place. The benches weren't located as they are now. Then, if you read on, you'll discover people didn't have the money to build the Memorial, so there was a final revision that the currently approved plan in 1999 was that the present crab apple trees were going to remain at their present grade level with a 14 foot diameter planting bed with the tree lighting eliminated to minimize the disturbance of the roots. The two benches proposed in the center were going to be removed, but the benches around the trees would stay. The granite pavers would be throughout the plaza instead of the center. The chess tables were removed. All planting and maintenance would be overseen by a certified arborist. The DRC actually approved that 4 to 1. The committee stated that the nay vote was based on the design elements which block off access to City Hall, and two committee members were of the opinion that the design would be optimized with a different pattern of pavers in the center to accentuate and break up the unbroken patterns proposed. Ms. George said they have now created a new wall system.

Ms. Lane said the plan was for the wall to be a sitting wall, and it was. When the planters went up, it was because it was a temporary fix because there were issues with the words, a lawsuit, and she came down to City Council said the solution is easy, just put some planters with some mums. That was in late August or early September. The planters were picked up at the end of the season. All of the supplies come from Montpelier businesses, and every spring and fall there are plantings in the planters and various others in the area. It will be 7 years this September the planters have been out. They do not get moved in the winter.

Ms. George asked Ms. Vissering if the planters were part of the plan any more. Ms. Vissering said they are not part of this plan.

Ms. George said the proposal here is to move the benches up against the wall and have permanent plantings on either side of the benches and do away with seasonal plantings. Ms. Vissering affirmed that is the proposal they have submitted. Ms. Lane said the wall was meant to be a sitting wall, and that is why the benches were put out. They wanted people to be able to sit around the plaza. Ms. Vissering said there is some engraving in that center panel, and it has to stay.

Ms. Lane said one of the things that got removed and was put in storage is the kiosk. There is a cornerstone dedicating the kiosk to Cathy Quigley, and it would be nice since this is the Memorial Plaza, and it is a lot more than just the veterans but a lot of people who have paid to put pavers in, it would be nice to have the kiosk put back. There was some sentiment from the City Council that the kiosk never be forgotten and it must be placed somewhere in honor of this woman.

Mr. Carnahan said the kiosk is now up in Hubbard Park by the new shelter. That was something the city and the Parks Department did.

Ms. Lane said the whole plaza was dedicated as a memorial plaza. There is a little marker that says it is dedicated to Cathy Quigley. Ms. George said the money for the kiosk came out of the 1981 Bicentennial Celebration for the City of Montpelier, and that was how the kiosk was built. Ms. Lane said it was dedicated to her and the granite footer is down along here and it gets covered with dirt.

Ms. Vissering inquired if one could take it up and put it in a more prominent place. Ms. Lane said it would be nice if they are going to redo some of this to incorporate it in there. Those granite benches were purchased with donated money.

Ms. Vissering said the benches positioned at the back only have names on one side. The others have names on both sides, which is another consideration.

Ms. Lane said it is very difficult for some people to walk on those granite pavers. Mr. Carnahan said they had some plans which were more radical.

Ms. Vissering the red brick pavers would be easier to walk on because they are smooth. It increases the flexibility of circulation through there.

Ms. Lane inquired about maintenance. Mr. DeSmet said he didn't think that was Design Review Committee's purview, and they have talked to Public Works.

Mr. Carnahan said they aren't changing the pavers. The granite pavers were a design decision that was made years ago, but they don't have the money or inclination to disturb those. He asked Vicki if it was her recommendation to leave the benches and the pavers kept close to the sidewalk so people can get to them. Ms. Lane said there are a lot of people who have difficulty walking who use the benches.

Mr. Carnahan said this plan will actually improve the usefulness of the benches where they are because right now you can't sit on the other side of them because of the mound.

Mr. Gilbertson said one of the thoughts he had with plantings like this is there should just be a plan to replace these trees every so many years when they get too big. There should be a replacement plan.

Ms. Vissering said the reality is that in urban settings you are lucky if the tree survives 20 years just because of the stresses on them.

Ms. Lane said they don't want any trees that will hide the front of the building. The front of the building is quite attractive.

Ms. George said she is a big fan of Elm trees. Was there any thought there should be taller trees that are a little more grandiose? This is a building that does lend itself to actually having some pretty amazing trees if they had a chance of survival.

Ms. Vissering said they thought quite a bit about what the trees should be. In terms of salt tolerance you are limited in terms of what you can plant. Red Oaks are very majestic trees; they are huge. She has heard enough concern about people wanting to see the building. Obviously, they don't want to use Norway Maples. The Elms are a possibility but they are not proven at this point.

Ms. Lane said City Council last week was discussing the sculptcycles. One of the Counselors brought up the fact they would like to purchase one of the sculptures. Ms. Vissering said the one in front of City Hall is really cute. The other thing to keep in mind about this space is that it is a public gathering space, and that was one of the reasons they decided to leave it largely open. It is a multi-purpose space. Ms. Lane said she spends more time out there than anybody, and it gets used a lot. It gets used and appreciated a lot.

Ms. George said she wanted to say for the record that she is really glad that there is the recognition by the City of Montpelier that they do have to go through the full process to actually do something with their building and not just do what they want.

Ms. George said they have discussed the application and now know the plan, trees and paving. She would like to talk a little about the red brick pavers concrete. There are real granite pavers out there. She personally would like to see real red brick instead of concrete pavers. Ms. Vissering said they are very much like a traditional brick. What they do have in their favor is they hold up much better. One of the huge parts of the cost of this plaza had to cut the granite. The other thing they looked into was making it staggered.

Mr. Carnahan said it looks like they will have to return to the DRC on the application.

Ms. George said they need a sample of the concrete pavers. Maybe by then they will know whether they can move the benches or not. Mr. Carnahan said the cost of moving the benches may be prohibitive.

Ms. George said she thinks the DRC is okay with the trees. Ms. Lane said she isn't sure she is. She would prefer to see something more in line with what was there most recently. Ms. George said to Mr. Carnahan that their alternative was to get a more substantial tree and then surround it at the bottom with flowers. Ms. Vissering said the crab apple trees branch too low. Ms. Lane said the Parks Department was giving an explanation to City Council one night on the trees. One of the problem was the trees out front of City Hall weren't properly maintained over the years and were allowed to split. If they were maintained properly they may have survived. Ms. Vissering said the apple trees take a lot of pruning. They have to be pruned annually at the very least. Ms. George said she would rather have some shade. This town needs shade trees that people can be under. During the parade she couldn't believe how people were so happy because it was cloudy, 70 degrees, and it is because it was tolerant. Ms. George asked if they could bring in a picture of the tree in flower at the next meeting.

Ms. George said this plan was originally funded by an AOT enhancement award; that is how they got the money to do this.

Ms. George said she is a little concerned that once the trees have flowered they are over. Is the spirea going to be doing something all summer?

Ms. Vissering said the spirea has gold foliage. It flowers for a very long time and then has a nice fall color. It is the same with the weigela. They have red foliage so there is color all summer and reddish in the fall.

Ms. George asked if the city decided they wanted to plant some annuals at the base of the spirea would that be a possibility.

Ms. Melvin said she would like to speak to the rain garden. Rain gardens limit your tree selections, so there are certain trees that are appropriate for rain gardens and plants that aren't appropriate for rain gardens. There are a lot of perennials that are appropriate for a rain garden.

Ms. George said they understand what they are going to be doing in a couple of weeks. Ms. Vissering said they are going to bring in a sample of the concrete bricks, picture of the trees flowering, pictures of the spirea and weigela. They will bring in ideas for alternative flowering trees that might be rain garden tolerant.

Ms. George said they are going to table the application. The vote was favorable with a 3-0 vote.

Approval of June 24 and 30, 2008 Minutes:

The Minutes of both meetings were tabled.

Adjourned:

The DRC adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Clancy DeSmet
Planning & Zoning Administrator