

**Montpelier Design Review Committee**  
**November 24, 2009**  
**City Council Chambers, City Hall**

*Subject to Review and Approval*

**Present:** Stephen Everett, Chair; James Duggan, Vice Chair; Eric Gilbertson, Jay White, Steven Burkholder and Muffie Conlon.  
Staff: Clancy DeSmet, Planning and Zoning Administrator.

**Call to Order:**

The November 24, 2009 meeting of the Montpelier Design Review Committee was called to order by Stephen Everett, Chair, at 5:30 P.M. Mr. Everett explained the advisory role of the DRC to the Development Review Board who makes the final decision on the application.

**I. 89 Main Street – CB-I/DCD**

Applicant: David Wendt  
Owner: City Center Associates  
Two new signs for Village Pizza

Mr. Wendt said he wants to replace the two existing signs, one on East State Street and one on Main Street. The sign on Main Street is going to be pretty much the same. It won't say Free Deliveries. It will be white and he has included pictures of what it would look like. It is going to be man-made materials and won't rot. The sign on East State Street is going to be about half the size of the current sign. It is one piece and pretty simple. He is going to have two gooseneck lights over the East State Street sign. They are similar to what AT&T has and will be black in color.

Mr. Gilbertson asked if the lights are different.

Mr. Wendt replied they are. The Skinny Pancake has white lights. He wants to have black.

Mr. Gilbertson inquired how big a light bulb is he going to use. The Committee usually recommends 40 or 60 watts, and for the smaller size lights 40 watts would be plenty. He is going to have the lights on a timer so he can adjust it during the winter. It will be from 5:00 until 9:00 P.M. and then shut itself off for the evening.

Mr. Everett said one thing he might want to consider in when putting the bulbs in that usually the recommended wattage is a 60 watt maximum. When the signs are being made the background of the sign should be a satin or softer color as opposed to a glossy. A glossy sign sometimes will reflect the light so it isn't as legible.

Mr. Wendt said energy efficient bulbs will be fine. He uses them outside his house.

Mr. Gilbertson said he doesn't want the sign very reflective because of glare.

Ms. Conlon asked if the lighting would be on both sides.

Mr. Wendt replied it would be on the East State Street sign above their entrance.

Mr. Duggan asked if the signs would be affixed to the concrete or on the sign band.

Mr. Went said it would be below the concrete. That's wood and that's where it will be like the Skinny Pancake and AT&T. The metal conduit that comes out of the wood will be black. It won't come out of the concrete.

The Design Review Committee reviewed the sign criteria and found the application acceptable. Mr. Everett said the two additional recommendations are the gooseneck light fixture bases are located on the top of the wood sign band and the maximum wattage of the light bulbs is 60 watts. The application was approved on a vote of 5 to 0.

**II. 181 Barre Street – CB-II/DCD**

Applicant/Owner: Bruce Haines  
Construct ADA Ramp.

181 Barre Street is a four unit apartment building and they would like to construct an ADA handicapped ramp at the front of it. There is a 28 inch rise; therefore they need to go 28 feet. There is a drawing that shows a ramp and then a flat turn area on the ramp that goes the other way. It will be approximately 3 to 4 feet from the side of the existing sidewalk to conform to all of the ADA requirements. It is a one on 12 pitch handicapped rail on each side with a roofing material to cover pressure treated plywood for a non-skid application.

Ms. Conlon said the whole stairway area will be an exit and an entrance.

Mr. Haines replied it will. The ramp itself would come on the left side. There is a center partition that separates the two entry ways right now which needs to be cut back approximately 3 feet so it will also give access on the left side to also use the stairs rather than having to go down the ramp.

Mr. White inquired if there were stairs to both doors now.

Mr. Haines replied yes. Those are granite steps that go all the way across the front end. They are approximately 8 to 9 feet wide.

Mr. Gilbertson asked if he was going to cover those with a platform.

Mr. Haines said on the left side only.

Mr. Duggan asked if he could describe how he was going to construct this a little more. He sees a note for rolled roofing. Did he say he was using plywood?

Mr. Haines said it is all pressure treated lumber with plywood decking.

Mr. Duggan asked if that was pressure treated as well.

Mr. Haines said yes, everything is pressure treated.

Mr. White said it says on here there is a 42 inch high railing but there isn't a hand rail at handicapped height.

Mr. Haines said he believes the handicapped height is 42 inches.

Mr. White said he has several issues he has problems with the design. One is that the height of the handrail that someone must grasp needs to be between 32 and 34 inches high. The 42 inches is actually for a guardrail to keep someone from falling over the side. The diameter that someone needs to be able to grasp needs to be an inch and a quarter. You do not get that with the pressure treated rail he has called for here. It has to be a certain diameter and has to be offset 2 ¼ inches from the post. The pressure treated handicapped rails are among the ugliest in the town and he would like to see a whole other method of gaining handicapped access. It could still be a ramp, but it needs to be a rail design that is more attractive and not just 2 x 4 pressure treated wood, which is not an attractive feature and certainly not in a historic area like Barre Street. He would propose that he come back with a different rail design that meets ADA requirements and is a material that is more in keeping with the character of the building they are getting access to. He does commend him for making it handicapped accessible; it's a very good thing to do.

Mr. Gilbertson asked if he had looked at any alternate locations for the ramp.

Mr. Haines said they had.

Mr. Gilbertson said some of the most successful ramps have actually been put inside a porch. He doesn't know how much property he has there.

Mr. Haines said there is not enough. The ramp itself goes all the way to the end of the existing porch now. The 14 feet, which is one direction, with the landing comes to the end of the porch, so the porch itself is basically only 18 feet to the center and you need 28 feet. The only other access to this unit is on the side and that is about a 38 inch lift so you would have to have over 40 feet of length because there has to be a rest area half way which would put it all the way out to the sidewalk and not give access to the upstairs on that side with a set of steps.

Mr. Duggan asked if he had looked at taking this and bringing it around the corner so he would enter at the same plain as the front of the porch going back, and then he could turn around and come back up and then enter onto the side of the porch. There is a bush over there. He wondered if that would be an option.

Mr. Haines said it would only be half the height if you leave from the walkway to the stairs.

Mr. Duggan suggested he would have the same design but just bring it around the corner so there would be a rest area half way up, switch back and come back the direction you went in.

Mr. Haines said they would be on the walkway for the access to the side of the building.

Mr. Everett asked how far from the corner of the building as you are facing the building to the left hand corner of the porch is the property line.

Mr. Haines replied it is approximately 15 or 16 feet.

Mr. Gilbertson asked if there was a driveway there.

Mr. Haines said no. There could be granite slab walkway that goes from the sidewalk where the crosswalk is. It follows the side of the building all the way to the back stairs.

Mr. Everett said if he had a ramp on the side if he took 7 feet for the ramp he would still have 8 to 9 feet left.

Mr. Haines said he would be on top of the walkway to the back entry where people go in and out from upstairs. It has been suggested by Glenn Moore that they need both accesses. If there is a handicapped ramp they also need stairs for the upstairs tenants.

Mr. White said he could do a different shaped ramp that started at the sidewalk and ramped in part of the porch area and had steps at the landing that went back down the other side to the existing sidewalk. The other problem he sees with coming off the front of the building is that the porch roof looks like it drains on what would be the ramp. Several years ago he actually developed a series of handicapped accessible lectures on how to make a historic building handicapped accessible. He had many examples of ramps that didn't work. One of the problems he photographed was at the Warren Town Hall where their handicapped ramp was directly underneath the drippage of the roof and on Town Meeting Day it had about 2 to 3 feet of ice on the whole thing. The ramp was completely useless. The same kind of thing occurs when you build a ramp underneath the drip edge of a roof anywhere in Vermont that you end up with the ramp being basically unusable for many months or weeks of the year. He thinks the rolled roofing is not an appropriate surface to put on a plywood ramp nor does he think plywood is an appropriate material to use. He thinks it needs to be rethought completely as how to approach this.

Mr. Duggan said he would agree with a couple of Jay's comments. If he is going to use pressure treated wood a better design might incorporate 2 x 6's and then finish them with a sand type finish to give the no-slip surface. Even pressure treated plywood tends to break down a bit more rapidly because the glues often will begin to fail if it is not protected so he will have to paint it. His concern about the location or design is that there is such a tight amount of space between the sidewalk and the primary façade of the building. Part of its design is its symmetry and this would stand out a bit between the house and the street. He would encourage him to look for a way to refine how that could be placed.

Mr. White asked if there was another entrance that they could look at as being accessible rather than the front one.

Mr. Haines replied no.

Mr. Everett asked if there was someone there now who needs the ramp.

Mr. Haines said they are scheduled to move in on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month. They are subject to cost limitations and the amount of railings they are talking about now it is totally unfeasible.

Mr. White said it doesn't need to be 42 inches high as a hand railing.

Mr. Haines said he understands that and he understands you need to be able to put your hands around it. He talked to Glenn Moore after he handed that. The owner of the building is leaving for out of the country and things had to be negotiated before he left. It is somebody that the Vermont Land Trust wants to put into the building. They are paying to have the ramp done and they are on a very low budget.

Mr. White said the Vermont Land Trust should be doing things correctly and this is not.

Mr. Haines said they own the building besides this building.

Mr. White said this design does not meet ADA standards. At a minimum it should do that.

Mr. Gilbertson said it doesn't really meet preservation standards, either.

Mr. DeSmet said he wanted to remind everyone they are not in charge of ADA standards.

Mr. Gilbertson said he wasn't going to approve anything that doesn't meet the standards.

Mr. White said he would hate to have an applicant go forward and spend more money investing and drawing a design that doesn't meet the standards. If the DRC said it needed more information so he spent time to have somebody draw up a plan that was still not meeting the standards he thinks they shouldn't have applicants go off in directions that isn't the correct direction of what the law is as far as handicapped accessibility standards.

Mr. DeSmet said he agrees. They are under a time pressure and the person is supposed to move in and they wanted to build it next week.

Mr. Gilbertson said he would think about looking at a ramp at the side moving it away from the building.

Mr. Duggan said having some more detail as to how this is going to be constructed would be helpful.

Mr. Gilbertson said if they are going to do a ramp on the primary façade of the building it has to be well designed. It can't just be the most economical materials he can put together. What he has seen when they use roofing for floor it isn't designed for that and the minute you shovel the snow or ice off it won't last because it isn't designed for that kind of traffic.

Mr. Duggan said it tends to trap moisture underneath it as well which could cause the wood to deteriorate a little quicker and it typically gets pierced by shovels and ice choppers.

Mr. White said there are companies that make aluminum safety treads that screw on to ramps.

Mr. Haines said the cost is extreme.

Mr. White said it is more expensive to do a ramp that fails in just a few years than it is to build one that will last longer. Often if you use a smaller scale lumber than a 2 x 4 designed to build stud walls but 2 x 2s would be half the material costs there and it would have a more sensitive design. He doesn't think he can use the argument that what the DRC proposes is always more expensive. This is a fairly expensive ramp. It's just not a good ramp.

Mr. Everett said it sounds like it is the consensus that the application as proposed would not be approved. The DRC can review the criteria, it would not be approved, and then he would have the choice of going to the Development Review Board.

Mr. Haines said it would be too late by then to do anything. The gentleman who owns the building won't go forward with it and the Land Trust won't. They have a set amount they can spend on this and they wanted to help the people out.

Mr. Gilbertson said he understands the handicapped access and thinks it is great to provide a unit for people. As the Design Review Committee they can't really be constrained by what people are willing to spend on something for the primary façade of the building. If he could find a way to do it on the side he would be less concerned about all of these things.

Mr. Gilbert moved the DRC table the application and then he can come back.

Mr. White said he would like to add into the record that he will look at some other alternatives that might include raising the grade in some areas so they don't have to go up as much with the construction. There are some other ways to do it. It might be something that could be considered for long term.

Mr. Haines said he would pass it on to the owner.

Mr. Duggan seconded the motion to table the application. The vote was favorable on a vote of 5 to 0.

**III. 175 Barre Street – CB-II/DCD**

Applicant/Owner: Paula Curtis

Replace 10 windows.

Paula Curtis said she wanted to put in some energy efficient windows because the windows have been in that building since it was built and there is a lot of air loss with cold air coming in and hot air going out. Sears came and measured. She wanted to save some energy and keep the fuel bill down.

Mr. Gilbertson asked if she had an energy audit by Efficiency Vermont.

Ms. Curtis replied she hasn't.

Mr. Gilbertson said that is way low on their list to replace windows to save energy for a couple of reasons. One is that the replacement of windows is expensive. Secondly, windows can be weather stripped and that system is just as energy efficient if the windows are weather stripped on the inside. That is just as energy efficient as a new window. That is what the research shows.

Mr. White said it is at a much less cost than the new windows would be.

Mr. Gilbertson said the window people love to sell you new windows. He would go to Efficiency Vermont and have an energy audit. That isn't a design review issue except as it impacts the windows because he worked with a committee with Efficiency Vermont and Historic Preservation. One of the things they said is most frustrating for them is to have somebody call up and say what can they do to make their house more energy efficient and they have done all of the obvious things like replacing the windows. That's a 20-year payback. If it isn't a high quality window the windows are done by that time so you have to start over again. He doesn't know what kind of condition these windows are in. They get loose, but there is modern weather stripping you can put in and spring counter balances that go in to make them operate right and she would just need someone who knows what they are doing to do it.

Mr. White said that normally is much less expensive than replacing the windows and you get the same energy efficiency.

Mr. Gilbertson said that might enable her to do some other energy efficient things. They look at air infiltration from all over the building, including the roof and through the attic, as the first thing to address and then moisture problems secondly. Windows are way down on the lists because of the costs.

Mr. Everett said the other thing he noticed here in the application is that it is a double hung window. It is a vinyl window. For 10 windows you have a construction estimate of \$8,900. That is \$900 a window for a vinyl window that you can buy for \$160.

Ms. Curtis said she was wondering about that herself when she was figuring it out. That is a lot of money for a window.

Mr. Duggan said she should be able to button up the structure with that money and get a far better energy rating out of it by doing some of the air sealing and weather stripping, and for a lot less cost. There is the potential that some of this work could be subsidized if she is eligible for certain programs with Efficiency Vermont. There is Energy Smart through the Central Vermont Community Action Council and she could check with them as well. That could be very helpful. He asked which 10 windows she was replacing.

Ms. Curtis replied it was the 10 front windows.

Mr. Duggan said something that has come to his attention recently is she could save the money and not buy new windows and upgrade from the aluminum triple tracks to a higher quality.

Ms. Curtis said they were put on the building by Community Action about 30 years ago.

Mr. Duggan said storm windows are eligible for the energy efficiency tax credit that a lot of people are clamoring to get through buying windows, but there are approved storm windows that make the credit available as well. She mentioned the windows were there since the building was built and for the DRC that is an important consideration. They like to keep the original building materials as much as possible. Just from the sidewalk he took a look and her window sashes do look pretty solid. He bets most of her infiltration is just some settling and shifting through the sides so by calking around the window surrounds she might be able to achieve without the high cost of replacing windows.

Mr. Gilbertson said \$900 a window is really expensive for vinyl windows.

Mr. Everett said you can buy a top quality storm window with installation for no more than \$100 to \$150.

Mr. Duggan said for that price she could get a very nice high quality wood window that would match what is there, but he thinks she can retain her windows and still get good performance out of them. He would encourage that.

Mr. Everett asked what she would like to do at this point. Traditionally, because it is a historic building vinyl windows have not been approved so if she wanted to replace them she would have to come back with a different proposal. Based on the fact that the vinyl would not be approved she would either have to come back or at her option she could check with Efficiency Vermont to come in for a whole lot less money have the energy audit done and probably save herself \$7,000 or \$8,000.

Mr. White said she should properly weather strip her existing windows and she will find it warmer, spend a lot less money and like it better.

Mr. Gilbertson moved the application be tabled. If she repairs the windows and existing storms she won't have to come back. The application was tabled on a vote of 5 to 0.

#### **Approval of November 10, 2009 Minutes:**

Mr. Gilbertson recused himself from consideration of the minutes.

Upon motion by Mr. Duggan and Ms. Conlin the minutes of November 10, 2009 Design Review Committee were approved on a vote of 5 to 0.

**Adjournment:**

Upon motion by Mr. Gilbertson and Mr. Duggan the meeting of the Design Review Committee adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Clancy DeSmet  
Planning and Zoning Administrator

Transcribed by: Joan Clack