

City of Concord, New Hampshire
Architectural Design Review Committee
April 11, 2017 Minutes

The Architectural Design Review Committee (ADRC) held its regular monthly meeting on April 11, 2017 in Council Chambers at 39 Green Street.

Present at the meeting were members Claude Gentilhomme, Jay Doherty, Elizabeth Durfee-Hengen, Doug Shilo, Jennifer Czysz, and Margaret Tomas. Craig Walker of the Code Administration Division; Heather Shank of the City Planning Division; and Lisa Fellows-Weaver Administrative Specialist, were also present.

The ADRC met to provide recommendations for the April 19, 2017 Planning Board meeting with regard to the proposed design of certain sites, buildings, building alterations, and signs subject to the provisions of the City of Concord Zoning Ordinance

Sign Applications Requiring Design Review:

- 1. Loudon Way, LLC, requesting ADR approval to install a replacement sign on an existing freestanding structure at 122 Loudon Road in the General Commercial (CG) District. MBL: 116/7/5**

Mike Lawry of Sundance Sign Company was present representing TrueBlue, Inc. He explained that this proposal is due to a branding change. A discussion was held regarding the need for permits for vinyl lettering.

On a motion made by Mr. Doherty and seconded by Mr. Gentilhomme, the application was unanimously approved as submitted.

- 2. HDC-192 Loudon Road, LLC, requesting ADR approval to install two new monument signs at 192-194 Loudon Road in the General Commercial (CG) District. MBL:117/D2/9**

Allen Johnson from the Hodges Company and George Gagnon from Classic Signs were present for this application. Mr. Johnson explained that the proposal is for two new signs for the property; a pylon sign and a monument sign. He added that the site was designed for the Dairy Queen, a sit down style restaurant, and a bank. However, no tenants have been identified, so the actual mix of the development and the number of sign panels needed is unclear.

Mr. Walker noted that all applicable variances have been granted.

On a motion made by Mr. Gentilhomme and seconded by Mr. Shilo, the application was unanimously approved as submitted.

- 3. Chickadee Lane, on behalf of Harold Exstrom requesting ADR approval for replacement of a hanging sign at 25 Main Street in the Central Business Performance District. MBL:35/4/4**

Ann Cardigan was present along with Glenn Shadlick of NE.OP.CO Signs. Mr. Shadlick explained that the proposal is to replace the existing overhanging sign and to remove the existing wall sign. He noted that they are allowed 21 sq. ft. of sign and the request is for much less. The intent is to simulate the existing bracket and expand across the arch and mimic what exists. They would like to use the same anchor points.

Ms. Tomas questioned the width of the sign, noting that it is much wider than the previous sign. Mr. Shadlick stated that there is a sign behind it that extends out fairly far as well and they wanted to have some visibility from that direction.

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On a motion made by Ms. Hengen and seconded by Mr. Doherty, the application was unanimously approved as submitted.

Municipal Projects Pertaining to RSA 674:54

- 4. Gerry Blanchette, on behalf of the City of Concord, requesting ADR review for renovations of the parking structure at 17 School Street in the Civic Performance (CVP) District. MBL: 45/1/5**

Matt Walsh Director of Redevelopment of Downtown Services and Special Projects, and Doug Proctor of HL Turner Group were present. Mr. Walsh explained that the proposal is to replace the two stair towers, which were built in 1985. The new structures will be enclosed with glass, easier to maintain, and safer as they will be lit. The structure is currently concrete, steel, and brick. He noted that there will also be a more efficient traffic pattern.

Several members recommended taking advantage of this opportunity to make the area more engaging and less utilitarian, as this is a thorough fare utilized by many pedestrians in a location envisioned as a potential art district. Members suggested that art work could be incorporated in some way, that colored glass panels could be used in the stairwells, and/or that the railings and stairwells could be painted bold or varying colors to add a more exciting or creative element. Mr. Walker noted that there had been discussions in the past pertaining to art features in this location and there still might be some possibility for that. Members were supportive of the fact that stairwell lighting was proposed.

Several members expressed concern that the stairwell might become very hot. Mr. Proctor explained that there will be vents to create airflow. One suggestion offered was to remove glass from certain locations to open up the space and help with air flow. Mr. Proctor also noted that there are no proposed changes to the existing landscaping at this time.

Mr. Walsh thanked the Committee for their input.

Major Site Plan Applications Requiring Design Review:

- 4. Chris Carley, on behalf of the Merrimack Superior Court House, requesting ADR review of a proposed retaining wall and encroachment into the N. Main Street right-of-way, as part of a Major Site Plan submission to demolish an existing structure and construct a new Courthouse at 163 North Main Street in the Civic Performance (CVP) District. MBL: 46/1/1 (2017-07)**

Chris Carley and Ari Pollock presented the proposal on behalf of the County. Mr. Pollock noted that the State would eventually be responsible for the wall and that they had not yet reviewed the proposal.

Ms. Shank stated that the proposed wall is needed in conjunction with the redevelopment of the Superior Courthouse and associated parking lot. The County requires a minimum of 150 parking spaces, which the design team provided. However, the retaining wall allowing for the parking expansion requires footings that will encroach into the City's right-of-way. In addition, the wall will reach six (6) feet in height along a significant portion of the frontage. As part of the license agreement with the City for the encroachment, staff recommended that the retaining wall be approved by the Committee and the Planning Board, and that a piece of civic art be provided somewhere along the wall.

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Mr. Carly presented renderings of the proposed retaining wall. The wall will run the length of the block and step up in a linear fashion to six (6) feet in height as it follows the grade for the parking lot. The wall is proposed to be a green wall with a lattice type structure supporting vegetation, to extend up and over a lattice type fence along the top of the wall.

Mr. Carley explained that the proposed retaining wall would be constructed with Redirock, a ledge stone precast material, which comes in a variety of colors, finishes and styles. The style they chose is one most similar to a granite type treatment. MS. Durfee-Hengen suggested a more gray color than a brown, to be more reminiscent of granite. Further discussion ensued regarding the appearance and texture of the Redirock. The Commission requested a color/look that was more formal. Mr. Carley stated that he will look into color options, and possibly other affordable materials to see if he could find a more formal looking option.

Mr. Gentilhomme suggested adding steps from Main Street in the center of the wall along the axis with the entrance to the Courthouse to allow more visual and physical accessibility to the building. Mr. Carley and Mr. Pollock noted that they considered this option but that it would cost at least one parking space and they did not have it to spare.

The options for plantings were discussed. A 3-foot planting bed is proposed in the right-of-way for vegetation that will grow up the wall. Mr. Carley explained that plantings are to be installed along the trellises and used to soften the impact of the wall and screen the parking area at the top of the retaining wall. The Commission expressed concern with deciduous plantings since they would not be attractive or function well in winter months. Ivy was suggested as an evergreen option. Mr. Carley said he would check with the landscape architect if there were any appropriate evergreen options. In addition, salt and sand on the sidewalk may affect the plantings. The Commission suggested using a raised bed at the bottom of the wall, or relocate the planting strip to the top of the wall and allow the plantings to grow downward toward the sidewalk. Mr. Pollack noted that moving the planting strip might cause the wall to be pushed further into the right of way. Another member noted that the plantings would then need to grow up over the fence and then down along the wall. Ms. Shank noted that it was her understanding that curbing was to be provided, which would help keep plowing and salt impacts away from the planting bed.

Ms. Shank asked the Committee to weigh in on whether there should be a modification to the wall to designate space for a civic art installation, or whether the Committee was comfortable leaving the wall continuous and allowing the location and orientation of the space to be designated at a later date. Mr. Carly was uncomfortable designating a space since there is no specific art piece identified, and the location could be horizontal along a wider stretch of the wall, several panels in a series, or a single piece. Mr. Gentilhomme stated that if a space were designated, part of the direction to the artist would be to fit the space. After discussion, the Committee was comfortable leaving the space open, to be determined at a later date.

Mr. Doherty noted that trees were added to the parking area, which was a nice addition.

On a motion made by Mr. Gentilhomme and seconded by Mr. Doherty, the application was unanimously approved with the following recommendations:

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- If it is feasible to lose one parking space, consider adding a set of stairs on a central axis with the front entrance, for aesthetic and functional purposes;
- Consider adding a raised planting bed at the bottom of the wall, or relocating the grass strip to the top of the wall to increase the effectiveness of the planting bed and address any seasonal issues;
- Consider choosing a more granite hued color and texture and a more formal appearance for the Redirock wall; and
- Construct the wall such that the ability to install public art is retained.

Building Permits for Exterior Modifications in Performance Districts

5. Jonathan Halle, on behalf of Associated Enterprise, Inc., requesting ADR review for removal of two (2) windows and installation of French doors and a balcony at 66 N. Main Street in the Central Business Performance (CBP) District. *MBL:45/6/2*

Johnathan Halle was present on behalf of Associated Enterprise. Mr. Halle provided an overview of the proposal explaining that the applicant wishes to change the existing windows to French doors and add a balcony with a glass railing for a four bedroom apartment. He stated that he is trying to maintain the arches and the character of the building.

A lengthy discussion was held regarding alterations to the façade of the building. Members stated that the brick work is more of a concern than the balcony and expressed concern with tampering with architectural components. Members ultimately agreed that no changes should be made to the brickwork, and that the window panes should just be removed and replaced with doors.

Ms. Shank asked if the Committee was comfortable with the concept of the balcony in general, both on Main Street, and as an architecturally modern element. She noted that additional applications for balconies may result in a lack of uniformity in style and treatment without something like a design guideline or more formal policy for balconies on Main Street. The Committee discussed the need for guidelines for balconies so that there is some clarity of what the community is looking for. Ms. Hengen felt that a broader community discussion should occur about how balconies should be handled. However, it was agreed that the Committee needs to look at each building individually and address balconies on a case by case basis. Most members did not have a problem with the current proposal in particular or the fact that it was modern in style. They also did not want to hold the applicant accountable for guidelines that are not yet in place.

Ms. Shank stated that this application would also need Council approval for a City license to extend over the right-of-way.

On a motion made by Mr. Gentilhomme and seconded by Mr. Shilo, the application for the balcony was approved unanimously with the condition that the existing brick openings for windows remains unaltered, and that only the window frame and sash be permitted to be removed.

Ms. Hengen stated that she is concerned with the balcony issue as discussed on a wider and broader perspective. She added that this particular balcony is less problematic in that it is transparent, the deck is simple, and the balcony could be removed.

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Conceptual Plan Review

6. Chris Carley, on behalf of Harold Ekstrom, requesting conceptual review of a site plan and building elevations for property off Warren Street.

Chris Carley and Tim Bernier were present along with property owners Harold and Jeff Ekstrom requesting a conceptual review for a new multifamily apartment building on Warren Street in the Civic Performance District. Mr. Carly explained that the design team met with City staff on several occasions to review concepts for a senior housing development. The current proposal is a result of those meetings. The design team felt that it was appropriate to get feedback from the Committee before pursuing the concept further. There is no Planning Board application submitted for this project at this time.

Mr. Carley presented renderings of the project, explaining that the apartment building will be 4 stories high and consist of 38 units for citizens over the age of 55 with apartments ranging from studios to 2-bedroom units. The materials will include masonry, brick, and there will be a metal roof in contrasting colors.

Mr. Bernier explained that the parking area will be in the rear of the property and some spaces will be covered. He noted that they are adding landscaping in the front of the building and are trying to be more efficient with more green space.

Mr. Carley added that the entrance of the building will be in the rear of the property with an area for an administrative office. There will also be a common space onto Warren Street.

The six existing structures were discussed, which support a mix of uses totaling 22 residential units, a commercial office, and one single family residence. The existing structures would need to be demolished to allow the current proposal.

Mr. Walker noted that the height requirement in the Civic Performance District is 45 feet, which the proposal satisfies. He also stated that the height requirement for the Downtown Residential District immediately adjacent is 35 feet. Members commended the effort to mitigate the visual impact of proposing a large building by offsetting portions of the building, articulating architectural features, and providing a mix of colors and materials to enhance the neighborhood character and minimize the scale.

Mr. Carly noted that balconies were proposed; Committee members expressed support for the balconies and the added livability they could bring. Ms. Shank asked whether any variation in building height could be provided to further break up the appearance of the structure as one continuous building. Mr. Walker noted that the height of rooftops is taken as an average between the top and bottom of the roofline, so there is some possibility there.

Mr. Carly noted that they would likely need several variances, including for garage structure setbacks, buffers for multifamily buildings, and possibly setbacks from property lines for the interior shared driveway.

Mr. Ekstrom stated that a place for the older residents in the City would be welcomed. It will encourage them to walk downtown and utilize the businesses on Main Street. He believes that it will enhance the

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area. Members also felt that it was an appropriate location for the use and provides Concord with more affordable housing options.

Ms. Shank thanked Mr. Carly for sharing their plans with the Committee.

As there was no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting adjourned at 11:00 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Heather Shank, City Planner