

Montpelier Design Review Committee
June 7, 2005
Memorial Room, City Hall

Subject to Review and Approval

Present: Margot George, Chair; Stephen Everett; Guy Tapper, Vicki Lane, Soren Pfeffer
Staff: Stephanie Smith

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Ms. George.

I. Design Review and Site Plan Review

Property Address: 3 Corse Street
Applicant: Paul Dovovan and Johanna Petersen
Zone: HDR/DCD

- 14' x 20' addition of family room on lower level of house including 14' x 20' deck above

Ms. George noted that the DRC had recently reviewed an application on this site. Ms. Petersen said that modifications were now proposed to the original design. She said that the geological study came in over budget so the room over the addition would be eliminated. She said that the project would now consist of the addition to the family room, a deck above the addition and either sliding glass doors or a glass bay at the deck level. She said that she would like the bay, but wanted to keep the option of reverting to a simple glass sliding door if necessary. Mr. Pfeffer said that this was basically a scaled down version of the earlier application. Ms. Smith advised the Committee that they only needed to review the changes from the prior application. Mr. Everett suggested that the applicants might want to include the option of wall sconce exterior lighting at the deck and lower entrance. Ms. Petersen said that she would request that option.

The DRC reviewed the evaluation criteria. The DRC voted unanimously to recommend approval of the application with the following options:

- Sliding glass doors may be substituted for the window bay
- Wall sconce lighting may be installed at the deck level and the lower entry level.

II. Design Review

Property Address: 22 State Street
Applicant: Carlo Rovetto
Zone: CB-I/DCD

- Installation of exhaust ventilation
- Exterior painting and new awning

Mr. Rovetto explained that the existing awning, which is ripped, will be replaced with a black awning. He said that the exterior cement on the front of the building will be repaired and painted black. He added that he wanted to have the words "Pizza, Pasta and Lounge" printed on the fabric at the front edge of the awning. He said that he would not be changing the existing light fixture on the building. Ms. Smith said that the printing would actually be a sign and would require a separate application. Ms. George said that the DRC would just deal with the awning at this meeting.

Mr. Rovetto said that an intake and exhaust ventilation system for the pizza ovens is also proposed at the back of the building. Ms. Smith asked whether the equipment would fit into the existing window frame. Mr. Rovetto said that they would. Ms. Smith asked the Committee whether they would want to have the window retained for possible future reinstallation. The Committee members agreed that the window should be clearly

labeled as something to be saved and stored. Ms. Lane said that, while it is not an issue for the DRC, the applicant would have to address the decibel level at the property line for the DRB.

The DRC reviewed the evaluation criteria. The Committee voted unanimously to recommend approval of the application with the following adjustment:

- The window that is removed will be retained in a storage area of the building for future reinstallation if ever needed and tagged appropriately.

III. Design Review

Property Address: 28 Elm Street

Applicant: Lucy Ferrada

Zone: CB-I/DCD

- Alterations to pathway
- Installation of wrought iron or wood arbor

Margot George recused herself from the application and left the room. Mr. Ferrada described the proposal to use tumbled cobblestone for a new pathway and to install a wrought iron or wooden arbor. Ms. Smith explained that the original approval of the project required that the pathway material would be the same as the existing. Ms. Ferrada said that the company that made the original pavers is no longer in business. She said that she has tried to match the existing bricks as closely as possible with the proposed tumbled cobblestone pavers.

Ms. Ferrada said that she is proposing to install an arbor at the start of the pathway. She said that she prefers the wooden arbor that is pictured in the application materials and would leave the wood with a natural finish. Ms. Lane said that it appeared that a ground light is at the location where the arbor would be placed. Ms. Ferrada said that the light has been knocked out. She asked for the option to relocate it if it interferes with the arbor location. Ms. Smith asked whether the arbor will require any anchoring. Ms. Ferrada said that it does not require anchoring, but that she will probably anchor it for security.

The Committee reviewed the evaluation criteria. The DRC voted 4-0 (Margot George recused) to recommend approval of the application with the following optional changes:

- The option to add appropriate plantings and climbing vines at the arbor and the option to add ground cover, low growing shrubs or flowering plants along the pathway.
- The option to move an existing ground level light fixture adjacent to the pathway at the entrance to pathway for clearance for the proposed arbor location.

IV. Design Review and Site Plan Review

Property Address: 22 Court Street

Applicant: Vermont Mutual Insurance Co.

Zone: CB-II/DCD

- Demolition of residence and parking lot expansion

Interested Parties: Brian Eagan, Rick DeWolfe

Mr. DeWolfe said that he had brought copies of revised plans. He said that the applicant proposes to demolish the last house on Court Street before the large Vermont Mutual Insurance parking lot. He said that the applicant would excavate then excavate an extension to the parking lot and add eleven new spaces. He said that a precast concrete block retaining wall with a maximum height of 5 ½' would be installed. Mr. DeWolfe said that two triangular green areas would be created. He said that stormwater would be directed into the existing drainage system. He said that eight sugar maple trees would be planted to break up the

visual impact of the parking lot. Ms. Smith asked what would happen to the existing, large (30" diameter) maple tree. Mr. DeWolfe said that it would have to be removed. He said that a 6' high cedar fence was proposed to screen the adjacent property. He added that the proposed guardrail will be a typical "w" roadway guardrail. He said that, as a professional engineer, he could not propose a material that is not approved by NSTHA. Ms. George asked whether there was some other material that could be used. Mr. DeWolfe said that a weathered steel coating or a weathered tube steel could be used. Ms. Smith said that the TRC did discuss the barrier briefly. She said that she understood that wooden posts could be used. Mr. DeWolfe agreed.

Mr. DeWolfe said that E.F. Wall provided an economic analysis of the structure to see what kind of return could be realized from the structure. Mr. DeWolfe said that, based on his own inspection of the structure, he determined that there is extensive damage to the structural members in the roof, less damage on the second floor and the first floor is sound. Mr. DeWolfe said that the building is not in a safe condition. Mr. DeWolfe reviewed the E.F. Wall analysis which was done for both a residential use of the building and an office use. He said that the estimated cost of renovations was \$254,000 for the residential use and \$256,000 for the office use. Other soft costs bring the total costs to \$287,000 and \$299,000 respectively. He said that the economic return analysis yields a net operating loss of \$16,000 (residential) and \$14,000 (office).

Ms. George noted that there had been an application in 1999 to tear down this building and an adjacent building. Mr. Pfeffer asked what was to be done with these buildings six years ago and asked whether the cost had increased greatly. Mr. Eagan said that Vermont Mutual had pursued off-site solutions for the parking at that time. He said that the company wants to stay downtown, but it is presently going through an expansion and needs parking to accommodate the expansion. Ms. Lane asked how long Vermont Mutual has owned the building. Mr. Eagan said that he thought the company has owned the building since 1990. Ms. Lane asked why it was left vacant. Mr. Eagan said that the company chose to not rent it. Ms. Lane said that the company has not maintained the building during that time. Mr. Eagan said that the roof drainage system has been maintained. Ms. Smith noted that there is no provision in the zoning ordinance that requires maintenance of vacant buildings or occupancy of buildings.

Ms. Lane said that she would like to have the tree warden look at the large maple tree that would be removed to assess its age and health. Ms. Smith said that the tree is too large to be relocated. Ms. Lane said that she was concerned about the loss of trees and the encroachment of pavement in the downtown area.

Ms. George asked what parking controls are currently employed by the company. Mr. Eagan said that the employees are given parking decals. He said that illegal parking is monitored and stickers are placed on illegally parked cars asking them not to park in the lot. Ms. George asked if the illegally parked cars are towed. Mr. Eagan said that towing has not been used. Ms. George said that it seems a shame to tear down a building to gain only 11 spaces when those spaces could probably be found if the company enforced parking and towed violators. Mr. Eagan said that the company does not tow vehicles, but it does monitor parking and the drivers usually get the message when the stickers are placed on the cars. Ms. George asked whether the company uses incentives to get the employees to carpool. Mr. Eagan said that there are a lot of employees who carpool, but Vermont Mutual does not use incentives.

Ms. George said that, if the property went on the open market, many of the costs would not occur. She said that the sprinkler system was an example of such a cost as it would not be required. Ms. Smith said that the sprinkler system would be required for a change of use, but the sprinkler system would not be required if the property was to be renovated and the use would remain the same as the use that was on the assessor's cards. Mr. DeWolfe said that has not been his experience with the city. He said that extensive renovations would be necessary and he believed that a sprinkler system would be required.

Mr. Pfeffer said that he agreed with Ms. George that there are a lot of expenses in the cost estimates that are not required for a renovation of the building. He gave the examples of the architect fees and survey fees. Mr. DeWolfe said that he took exception to that conclusion. He said that the survey would be required for title insurance and that Vermont Mutual would want that insurance. Ms. George said that there are a number of unrealistic costs in the estimate. She added that she believed that a duplex in any condition in Montpelier would not sell for less than \$200,000. She said that the applicant must demonstrate that it is not economically feasible to maintain the house. Ms. Smith said that the DRC could recommend that the DRB require that another economic analysis be prepared at the applicant's expense. Ms. George said that she also questioned the use of a 15-year amortization schedule since 20 to 25 years is the current norm. She said that the renovated building could be rented for more than \$750 per month. Mr. Eagan said that Vermont Mutual just asked for an analysis and did not direct what numbers to use.

Ms. George said that she did not feel that the Committee had enough evidence to say that there is no alternative to demolition. Ms. Lane said that she was not comfortable that demolition is the alternative for the building. She said that she was also concerned about the loss of the large tree and about the increase in pavement. She said that she would like to see the inside of the building in order to have a basis for considering the estimates. Ms. George said that there has been concern expressed in the community that demolition to create parking lots was not in the City's interest. She said that she felt that the building is architecturally significant. Mr. Tapper said that he would like to see another analysis of the numbers. He said that it bothered him that the house was allowed to fall into disrepair for so long and that he expected that the costs of renovation would not have been as high if the property was maintained. Mr. Everett said that he wanted to see Vermont Mutual's needs met so that the business stays in the city, but he also questioned the estimate. He said that he is in the middle of similar renovations and the costs in the estimate are two to three times higher than his actual costs.

Ms. Smith asked whether the DRC was recommending technical assistance, saying that they are recommending denial or is it being left up to the applicant to ask if he wants the DRC to act on the application as proposed. Ms. George responded that it is always the applicant's decision. She said that she was clearly hearing that the Committee members are having trouble with this application. Mr. DeWolfe said that he understood that the options were to table the application or to ask that the DRC act on it as proposed. Ms. Smith added that the DRC could request technical assistance from the DRB for another estimate. Mr. Pfeffer said that he was not looking for technical assistance. He said that he did not believe the numbers in the estimate and was not likely to be convinced by a similar analysis. He said that there are several members of the Committee with extensive experience in this area who found the estimate to be excessive. Ms. Smith said that the only number presented in the application are those in the analysis. She said that the DRC may want the technical assistance in order to have another set of numbers.

Ms. Lane said she was bothered by the fact that the goal from the start was to get more parking and the house was not maintained. She said that she would like to see another estimate and to inspect the house. Ms. George said that the company chose to not maintain or rent the building. She said that she has extensive experience with maintenance and renovation costs and can say that these costs are high. She noted that the company would also be eligible for a 10% State tax credit.

Mr. Pfeffer asked for the wording of the ordinance. Ms. Smith read Article 5, Section 505.g which says that all available alternatives must be considered and found infeasible. Mr. DeWolfe said that he would prefer to have a decision that night and to take the application on to the DRB. He said that he was not hearing that there is different information that could be provided that would sway the Committee. Ms. George said that she did not want to see the application go to the DRB without more information than currently provided. Ms. Lane said that she would like to see the interior of the building. Mr. Pfeffer said that, while it was unlikely, it was possible that the site visit would show that the building condition was so poor that it cannot be

renovated. The Committee and the applicant agreed to visit the site. The meeting was recessed at 7:50 for a site visit.

The meeting was reconvened. Ms. George said that it had been discovered that some lilacs and other bushes would be lost and some trees along the property line with the post office would be lost. She said that the Committee had inspected the house (but not the basement). She said that the condition was not all that bad and that she could not say that the building needs demolition due to poor structural integrity. Ms. Lane agreed. Mr. Tapper said that the building needs a great deal of work, but it has architectural integrity and he would expect that a lot of people would be willing to do the work.

Mr. Pfeffer said that the Committee had discussed the possibility of adding parking in the yard while retaining the house. Mr. DeWolfe said that was not possible due to the dimensional requirements of the ordinance. He said that he had tried every design layout possible and found that the minimum aisle width and turnarounds could not be provided. Mr. Pfeffer said that it looked like three or more spaces could be provided if the house were sold as a condominium. Ms. Lane said that it seemed that there was a compromise plan that would achieve four or five spaces.

Ms. Smith said that the applicant had requested that the DRC vote on the application. The DRC reviewed the demolition and evaluation criteria. Ms. Smith said that the site is on the National Register and that she would provide the historical sheet on the house. The DRC discussed the guardrail. It was agreed that the weathered tube steel was preferable to the proposed "w" beam guardrail. Mr. Eagan agreed to that adjustment to the scope. The Committee members discussed plantings below the sidewalk and above the entrance ramp. Mr. Eagan agreed to the adjustment. The Committee discussed the height of the proposed fence. Ms. Smith said that the fence was proposed as a buffer to the adjacent residential uses. Mr. Eagan agreed to an option for the fence.

The Committee voted 5-0 to send the following recommendation to the DRB:

"Committee recommends technical assistance under Section 407. A reduced cost to renovate by an owner overseeing a less extensive project would allow the building to continue to exist and provide housing or offices. A site visit by the Committee revealed not obvious structural damages that warrant demolition in their opinion. There is nothing that is beyond repair or prohibitively expensive."

The recommendation included an adjustment to the scope of the proposal for the use of a weathered, tubular steel guardrail and lilacs or low evergreens along the bank below the sidewalk and above the entrance drive. The recommendation included the option that the applicant will consult with the owner of 20 Court Street on the preferred height of the fence.

Minutes

The Committee deferred action on minutes to the next meeting.

Other

Ms. Smith said that she needed to respond to Mr. Rabideau on the changes to the windows. She said that he is proposing to use a different window than originally proposed. The Committee generally agreed that the window was acceptable.

Ms. George said that she wanted the entire DRC to go to the DRB meeting because they would not allow the individual members to speak for the Committee. Ms. Smith said that she would check the procedural rules. She said that she thought that the Chair can represent the Committee.

Adjournment

The Committee voted to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephanie Smith
Administrative Officer

These minutes are subject to approval by the Design Review Committee. Changes, if any, will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting at which they are acted upon.