

Montpelier Design Review Committee
July 29, 2008
Memorial Room, City Hall

Approved

Present: Margot George, Chair; Vicki Lane, Soren Pfeffer and Guy Tapper.
Staff: Gwendolyn Hallsmith, Planning & Community Development Director
Clancy DeSmet, Planning and Zoning Administrator

Call to Order:
Margot George, Chair, called the meeting of the Design Review Committee to order at 5:30 P.M.

- I. 1 National Life Drive – OP/DCD**
Applicant: Solar Works, Inc.
Owner: National Life Group
Install solar panels on main roof of building.
Interested Parties: Leigh Seddon, Solar Works, Inc.

Ms. George explained the advisory role of the Design Review Committee to the Development Review Board to the applicant. The application is for 73 KW photovoltaic generating system on the main roof.

Mr. Seddon presented pictures of the panels they hope to place on the roofs at National Life. Modules are about 175 watts apiece, so they are going to place hundreds of them on the roof to get to the 73 KW. Each solar panel is 175 watts. The pictures show what a commercial application looks like and it shows the height they are going to have at National Life, which is only 13 inches high. An important factor is that the modules only stick up 13 inches, which is for most wind loading so they don't have any wind problems. They aren't attached to the building but are ballasted so they sit there with blocks inside the array. They are ballasted to hurricane wind loading, and they get an engineer's letter that says they will stay. At National Life there will be three roof sections that will have the arrays going across them.

The National Life roof is a big complicated area. They are being placed on the two highest roofs. Their array of panels is going on the roof to the north of the cooling tower. This is the penthouse roof, or the highest roof. The south roof will also have the solar panels.

Mr. Pfeffer inquired if the buildings were facing south. Mr. Seddon said the buildings actually face south the long way. They will only be about 13 inches high, so you can't actually see them from the ground. They are placed back from the roof edge. The one place you might see them is from the interstate where you can detect a blue color to the roof. Instead of the white roof you'll see that it looks blue because of the solar panels. He went to Westview Meadows, up on Main Street, and from the High School you can't see the roofs.

Mr. Pfeffer asked if 15 degrees was low. Mr. Seddon replied that optimum would be about 30 degrees, but because they have to be ready for hurricane winds they could do it but it would be too heavy for the roof. 15 degrees is the tradeoff and it also works aesthetically and the modules really aren't visible from the ground.

Mr. Seddon said they were going to have rows in three areas and no moving parts. What they do see on the roofs right now are some antennas that were put in, and the antenna placements came before the Design Review Committee. The antennas pose an issue for them because they cause shading. Their array is actually built around the antennas and won't be continuous. There will be little blocks that aren't filled in because there is a shade pattern.

The modules are covered with a tempered non-reflective glass, so they don't actually reflect sunlight but capture it. At 15 degrees any light that would be reflected is going up. For some times during the winter they will be covered with snow. It is just a tradeoff of these commercial systems.

The power gets put to inverters inside the building so inside the top penthouse will be some electrical devices that will convert it to utility power and that will be fed into National Life, which will use it all. This will offset a small fraction of their use by maybe 5%. 73 KW is a large system. This will be the largest solar installation in the state of Vermont. 73 KW is about enough to do about 15 homes in Montpelier.

They are hoping to get started in September. Their equipment is arriving and hoping to receive zoning approval next week and have a 30-day appeal period.

Mr. Tapper asked how much did the roof recess from the edge of the building.

Mr. Seddon said there isn't actually much of a parapet. The setbacks are about 11 feet and 10 feet from the edge of the roof, but the edge probably has a 6 inch curve. Because of wind loading they have to keep their modules back 10 feet, so they can't be seen unless you are up on the roof.

Mr. Seddon said the equipment will go up with a crane and installation will take about a week on the roof and two weeks overall for the wiring. The construction on the roof will be done in about a week.

Ms. Lane inquired what the life span is for solar panels. Mr. Seddon said it is pretty much indefinite. They have a 25-year warranty on them. The panels on the Laundromat on Barre Street were installed in 1978. They are 30 years old and still working. They are hot water collectors.

The DRC reviewed the criteria and found the application acceptable. The application was voted favorably on a 4-0 vote.

II. Langdon Street – CB-I/DCD

Applicant: Grace Gilbert/Global Gifts

Owner: Leeds Brewer

Relocate current signs.

The application included pictures of the existing sign.

Grace Gilbert from Global Gifts said the only thing that is changing is the location of the sign. It is the same building, same landlord, same side of the street and same signs. She plans on detaching them and attach them at the new shop.

Ms. George asked if she had received approval for the prior sign. Ms. Gilbert replied yes.

Ms. George said the sign on the side of the building next to the river will be put it on the fascia of the side of the building where the Yankee Paperback sign was. Ms. Gilbert said it is going to be exactly the same as what Yankee Paperback had their side sign.

Ms. George asked if members of the Committee cared if the side sign hangs down and maybe covers up the bottom molding. Ms. Lane said she cares because the bottom molding is part of the building detail. It should stay within the sign band. Mr. Tapper said it depends on how much it is covered up. If it is only a couple of inches it isn't a big problem. Mr. Pfeffer said since it is hanging it doesn't seem like a big problem.

Ms. George asked Ms. Gilbert to explain her method of attachment for the sign. Ms. Gilbert said there are two chains. She is going to put the sign flat up against the building.

Ms. George said they got the application from Yankee Paperback Exchange back from the year 2000, and they were approved to hang a sign below the molding but covering up the crown molding below. It says it would be secured with two bolted hooks and hangers.

Ms. George inquired if there was going to be any lighting. Ms. Gilbert said there wasn't any in the application. The DRC gave her the option of having small spotlights directed at the projecting hanging sign which will be limited to 60 watts.

The side sign over the window will be installed within the sign band and the projecting sign will go where the brackets are.

The DRC reviewed the sign criteria and found the application met all criteria. The application for Global Gifts was approved on a 4-0 vote.

III. 27 State Street – CB-I/DCD

Applicant: Janice DeGoosh/Pink Shutter

Owner: Stephen Everett

Placement of a whiteboard sign in front of building.

The applicant proposes to put in a dry erase board between the two posts. The sign will be in the middle of two pink shutters that will close and open in the morning.

Ms. DeGoosh said the one concern she had is the dry erase board will be between the shutters. In order for the shutters to be closed they do overhang the posts by 2 inches on each side. Another option would be to trim the shutters down so they actually fit the size of the posts and have them stable.

Ms. DeGoosh said she was going to get a carpenter to finish the sign so it is aesthetically nice. They might be able to make this sign a little narrower so the shutters would come inside.

Ms. George said other than having a flat picture frame around the board, are there other concerns? The dry erase board is going to be stiff. Ms. DeGoosh said originally she would put something inside the shutters that she would take out every night. Once something like that is constructed it may be heavy and cumbersome to carry in and out and maybe not.

Ms. Lane said looking at the building and the entrance way with the posts, that is part of the entrance. Ms. George said the entrance way is outside the ramp. The owner of the building doesn't have any problem with the project. Ms. Lane said her concern is that when the shutters are opened and there is a dry erase board, if you are looking at the entrance way that is going to over power the symmetry of the entrance way. Ms. DeGoosh suggested they could put it back on the wall behind the post.

Ms. Lane said she thinks obstructing the posts is not a good idea. When they approved the other one the sign was within the post and not covering the post. The sign had to hang within the posts.

Ms. DeGoosh said the other option would be to put a frame on the dry erase board and do away with the shutters. Ms. Lane said she doesn't think it is appropriate to cover the posts. They are a part of the significance of that entrance.

Ms. DeGoosh said if she could keep her sign within the posts she could use the sign.

Ms. Lane said if you look at that building the posts are an architectural feature of the building.

Ms. George asked what Steve Everett said about the sign. Ms. DeGoosh replied he was fine with it.

Ms. Lane said she still has a problem with it.

Ms. George said they had done a great job of keeping that storefront and whole area looking great. She doesn't know how much it is going to catch anyone's attention. She said they don't like putting signage in the windows

because they use them as display areas. She believes they should stay within the board. She would like to see something that incorporated everything she needed.

Ms. DeGoosh said what she thought might work in that situation is if she trimmed the shutters and they were fixed to the front of the posts and not closing or opening them. She could then just take the dry erase board at night and put it back out in the daytime.

Ms. Lane said she believed they had the discussion about covering up the posts at Capitol Grounds.

Ms. George said they could table the application and come back with another alternative. The DRC can vote on it as it is right now, as presented, or incorporate any of the changes they talked about. Ms. DeGoosh replied she would like the Committee to vote on it right now as is. She would make sure the overhang wasn't there. Ms. George clarified that no matter what she will stay within the width of the posts and not extending beyond the posts. If she can work it out so they will close tightly she will close them in order to keep them from having any overhang. If she can't close them tight, she will affix them to the posts and take the actual dry erase sign in at night.

Ms. Lane said this is a case where isn't a complete application. There are too many unanswered questions.

Ms. George said these are the options and the DRC can vote on the options. The adjustment is that the shutters will not extend beyond the outside edge of the posts and if they need to be permanently affixed in order to have that happen.

Mr. DeSmet said if she wants to take them in she can. She is just asking for permission to display the sign.

Mr. Pfeffer said he didn't see how it matters to the Committee whether they are always open or open and closed.

Ms. George said the other adjustment is that they will put some sort of a frame around the dry erase board.

The DRC reviewed the criteria. The vote to approve the sign was favorable on a 3-1 vote, with Ms. Lane voting no.

Ms. Lane said she thinks the sign detracts from the symmetry of the architectural detailing of the building. She realizes it isn't a view corridor of the State House, but as you walk down the street it is a consistent pattern with the posts, and if you break up the posts with anything attached to them you have broken up the symmetry.

The Design Review Committee took a break to conduct a site visit at 39 Main Street and City Hall Plaza.

IV. 39 Main Street – CB-I/DCD

Applicant: Montpelier Downtown Community Association

Owner: City of Montpelier

RE: Landscaping City Hall Plaza

Interested Parties: Mayor Mary Hooper

Suzanne Hechmer, MDCA

Ms. Hechmer said one of the DRC's questions was concerning the cost of granite. The granite pavers are \$6.10 apiece, which comes out to \$12.54 per square foot. The concrete bricks are more like \$5.60 to \$5.25 per square foot. That doesn't include installation, but the granite pavers are actually more expensive to install, too, because the bricks are easy to cut. The granite pavers are really hard to cut.

Ms. George said her thought is that this is going to look like a plaza that ran out of money. If she looked at this plaza and saw that somebody went through a great deal of work to do a whole granite plaza, and names placed on some, and then suddenly have manufactured brick pavers in some areas it looks like a plaza that just ran out of money.

Ms. Hechmer said the actual intention of the brick was actually not about the cost. Beyond the cost it was to soften the look of the plaza. The brick was chosen because it matches with the brick buildings around it, so it ties in some of the space around it beyond the little enclosure. The color they chose actually matches the barberry trees right up against City Hall.

Ms. George said when you have really nice granite up against a building that is made out of granite to suddenly introduce fake brick. Ms. Hechmer said it's not a granite building. City Hall is a brick building. Ms. George said with all of the columns there is more granite at the base level of that building than anything. Ms. Lane said she agrees with Margot. If they were to put that much hard scape into this plaza knowing the discussion the community had around the trees and hard surfaces of the plaza that to have less green space on that plaza than we have now would not be a good thing. If they were able to make the green space level with the rest of the area so kids can't slide down it, and if the trees were higher so they couldn't climb the trees, then the grass would survive. The mounds are a perfect mound for kids to slide down, and that's why the grass dies. The trunk is higher so it's not as easily climbed as the crabapple trees.

Ms. Hechmer said in the short term they will be just as easy to climb because they are going to be small, and that is why the spirea is there.

Ms. Lane said the Council at one of their meetings mentioned the city should buy one of the sculpt cycles. She would like to keep the sculpt cycle out in front of City Hall.

Ms. George said it is going to be a shock not to have grass in this location. She is concerned about the brick. She is also concerned whether this is going to be a surface that is going to invite skateboarders. She doesn't know if creating something smoother with granite benches isn't going to be an invitation for that activity.

Mr. Tapper said kids don't skate in circles.

Ms. George asked if this was the tree that had the yellow berries. Ms. Hechmer said it has little cluster yellow berries. This tree isn't as high and substantial as she thinks it should be. She thinks they are looking for a canopy tree, one that gets up high enough so if people sat on the benches they would be underneath something with some height. She wants a substantial tree.

Mr. Pfeffer said in the original discussion of the plaza he was personally bothered about the amount of pavers and lack of vegetation and green space. He hates to see it get smaller.

Ms. Hechmer said it is a hard balancing act because her understanding of the goal of the original plaza design was to create a space that could be used for an event or gathering space.

Ms. George said she agrees. She thinks they are giving lip service to how much this space gets used, which is not a lot. Ms. Lane said it gets used by a lot of individuals.

Ms. Hechmer said it isn't changing that much because they have \$10,000. The original plan had more changes, and a city engineer looked at it and said it couldn't be done for \$10,000.

Mayor Hooper said the bottom line is there are one hole and one tree that really ought to come down. We can't leave it the way it is.

Ms. George inquired where the \$10,000 came from. Ms. Hechmer said the \$10,000 is in the capital improvements budget for the city. Ms. George said that was budgeted this year to deal with what we thought was going to happen out front. Ms. Hechmer said it was budgeted last year because the Tree Warden condemned these trees a few years ago. They have been rotting from the inside.

Ms. George said she believes it is under budgeted. Didn't we have \$200,000 that went into the last project? This looks cheap to her.

Mayor Hooper said it was hard to get the \$10,000.

Ms. Hechmer said it will be hard to get more money because people said this plaza was just redone. Why are you putting a lot of new money into it? They are looking at something where they can maintain trees in the plaza on a really limited budget where they aren't dipping into public coffers again for the same space.

Ms. Lane asked why couldn't they create the green space around the trees and put the trees in. Why move benches, etc.?

Mr. Pfeffer said he thinks it is a better design with the benches moved. Ms. Lane said she would hate to see the benches moved.

Mayor Hooper said what she understood the suggestion to be is to see if the grass area works, which would mean excavate, plant the trees and see if it works. It is a different contractor who puts in. But if the tree is growing and its roots are establishing themselves, and the grass doesn't work, then you put pavers on top you'll kill the tree. The roots come to a certain level within the soil column where it works, and then if you put something on top of it you'll kill the tree.

Ms. Lane said they are still going to plant the spireas around the tree. If the grass doesn't work, why couldn't we use mulch? Ms. Hechmer asked who was going to do that kind of ongoing maintenance work. Ms. Lane said there has to be maintenance. Last year it was Todd Law, Bob Gowans and a bunch of other people who pulled all of the weeks.

Mayor Hooper said there is an existing condition that needs to be relieved and there is this much money to work with.

Mr. DeSmet asked if having grass would impact the rain garden function.

Ms. Hallsmith said the point of the rain garden is to serve as a conduit for the runoff water. One of the concerns that the Department of Public Works has had about rain gardens in spots like this is that it serves as too good a conduit and then you have water getting under sidewalks and making them buckle. Grass actually is an alternative surface for this area might alleviate that potential problem. Part of the reason you need the rain garden is because of the amount of impermeable surface that is out there.

Ms. George said another alternative for her, if it isn't grass; you lay in tons of ground cover.

Ms. Lane said they should try grass first, and if the grass doesn't work they could use some mulch. It's not a big area. They have to mulch around the barberry trees anyway.

Mayor Hooper said she is part of the design committee here. She doesn't think the design committee would want to sit here and redesign this project like this. Jean Vissering and Paul Carnahan have been part of this, along with several other people who spent close to a year talking about this. She and Suzanne need to hear the DRC's concerns and bring them back to the committee.

Mr. Tapper said the DRC has the option of taking it back with suggestions or voting it as proposed.

Ms. Hechmer said she would like a vote on it because it gives her a chance to bring it back to the committee and for us to move forward because, quite frankly, if the trees don't get planted this September they won't be planted for a whole year. Ms. Hallsmith said fall is the best time to plant trees.

Ms. Lane said they still have to dig out the old trees before they can put in the new trees. Ms. Hechmer said there is work to be done.

Ms. Hallsmith said they are asking for a vote so they can move forward with the project.

The DRC reviewed the criteria.

Mayor Hooper said at the intersection of State and Main Streets there are brick pavers that will eventually be replaced because they are not durable.

Under landscaping were there issues regarding the planters? Mr. Tapper asked if that was supposed to be part of this discussion. Ms. Lane said nobody wants them.

Ms. Hechmer said the concern with the planters isn't that people don't want them. It depends on a single individual to plant them as a volunteer. There are 55 barrels around town and one person plants most of those. If Pinky were not to be around next spring they don't know how they would get 55 barrels planted. They haven't been successful in getting help.

Ms. George said Montpelier has never really gotten all of the landscaping people interested in having a garden club and maintain things the way Barre has, and it is because Montpelier as a government picks up a lot of things that if you let the citizenry pick it up they would. Montpelier just always assumes they have to do it themselves.

Ms. Hechmer said she puts out calls every spring to get help planting the flowers. They go around to every business and ask them if they will take care of the planter in front of their business. Some businesses do, but quite frankly it is only a quarter of them.

Ms. Lane said she was sad the planters will go, very sad.

Ms. George said the committee has talked about pavers, plants, tree heights and benches. Those are the materials we have.

Mr. Pfeffer said there is some concern.

Ms. George said she isn't going to be voting for it. Ms. Lane said she can't vote for it, either, because there isn't enough green. Ms. Lane said she observes how it is used in the evenings and she thinks the lack of green area is going to be missed a great deal. She thinks potentially pushing the benches up against the wall that people won't use them that much. Ms. George said those benches won't be under any kind of shade so this design gives people the choice of being shaded or being in the sun. Ms. Lane said the whole wall was designed for a sitting wall.

Ms. Hechmer said with moving the benches to the back people like to sit where they can watch everything that goes by so if they are at the far end of the plaza they get the best view of everything that is going on. There is a comfort level in that spot.

Ms. Hechmer said the DRC can disapprove it and it would still go to the Development Review Board for them to make the final decision. That leaves the applicant with the option of saying they will make changes. Or, the DRC can make a vote with the change to the project that we will consider it only if we keep the space in the design that is currently bricked in some sort of plant material. That would mean that the Design Committee of the MDCA would no longer have any discussion.

Mr. Pfeffer said they could table it and they could come back. Ms. Hechmer said they don't have time to table it because they won't make a September planting deadline. If it gets tabled the trees won't get planted until next year.

Ms. George said they have told us it is a cheap design and you are doing it with little money and the best you can. Is that what we want for the rest of our lives in front of City Hall? We spent \$200,000 to get it where it is today.

Ms. Hechmer said the thing about the \$10,000 is that there was a very large community process that went on how this plaza should look. There was a lot of money that went into it from both the city and the state and individuals.

At this point in time, is it responsible to go through that whole process again 10 years later and redesign the plaza? The MDCA is trying to keep it as similar as possible while dealing with the fact that instead of having a mounded space for the trees to have a flat space.

Ms. Hallsmith said regardless of what the Design Review Committee thinks could be an alternative, to clarify Suzanne's question about what are the paths from here, one path would be to go to the DRB on Monday and say the Design Review Committee didn't support the application and we want the DRB to overrule their decision and allow the MDCA to do what they proposed. Or, make the decision and set particular conditions on it, which is something else the DRB could do. That means by Monday they would have an answer as to whether it is approved or not. If the DRB doesn't overrule the DRC, then they would have to go back to the committee and come up with a new plan. Ms. Hallsmith said she couldn't predict if the DRB would overrule the Design Review Committee. She knows in her tenure that it is a very rare occurrence that happens. The reason they restructured the meeting schedule is that it is quicker.

Ms. George said her problem is she disagrees with the removal of the green surface and the use of concrete pavers rather than brick, or granite pavers which are more quality pavers which match the existing pavers.

Ms. Hallsmith said Clancy reminded her that the DRB is only a bare quorum on Tuesday, so if all 4 don't vote for the project then it fails. That is another issue.

Ms. Hechmer said can the Design Review Committee then vote on this with the change everyone has mentioned which is a condition that instead of brick there be grass.

Ms. George said she could give in on the grass as long as the pavers are real brick. The only reason she worries about the grass situation is that when she travels to big cities where they have parks they consistently cover one area and let the grass grow back and rot and rot. If we are going to have a hard surface then she wants it to be real materials and not phony concrete. She wants quality.

Ms. Lane said she didn't think they should give up on grass so easily.

Mr. Pfeffer said he feels the whole space is very cold. He would be happier with either real grass or real brick.

Mr. Tapper said the idea of using the pavers doesn't bother him and having grass there doesn't thrill him, either. He thinks they are going to look nice with a different color and nice pattern with the trees and shrubs. He is satisfied with the proposal as submitted.

Mayor Hooper said there may be a question to the city as to whether we want them to vote on it and vote it down, which is where it stands right now, or it could be tabled?

Ms. Hechmer asked if it would be voted down if an alteration was made to it that it had to be a green material instead of the concrete pavers or real brick, instead of concrete pavers.

Mr. Pfeffer said he didn't think he would vote against it in general. He isn't happy with the plaza in general. He would rather have brick and grass, but he isn't sure he would vote against it. He doesn't feel as strong as Margot does.

Mr. Tapper asked if Jean Vissering ever talked about having grass.

Ms. Hechmer said the reason grass isn't used in a plaza is because people feel given the amount of grass there is no way the grass would survive. You would end up with a space which would be mucky a lot of the year.

Ms. George said she recognizes the grass problem because she knows it will get beaten to death.

Mr. Pfeffer said there are weeds growing through the granite pavers out there which probably bothers some people, but he thinks it good.

Mayor Hooper asked for the DRC to vote on the notion of using brick and set the grass issue aside.

Ms. Hechmer asked if the alternative could be either real brick or some sort of plant material because it leaves them the option of going back to the experts and ask them why real brick and grass wasn't considered. It allows the MDCA the flexibility of having someone say it won't work or we can work with it.

Ms. Lane said she could only vote for green.

Ms. George said the option is real brick pavers or green plant material. The application passed on a 3-1 vote, with Vicki Lane voting no. The opposing vote disagrees with the removal of the green surfaces if brick is used.

Other Business:

Gwendolyn Hallsmith, the Director of Planning and Community Development attended the meeting. There were several items discussed:

1. A new grant that was received for public outreach and education activities, to raise people's awareness of the need for Design Review.
2. Broadcasting meetings on the public access channel, which will begin at the next meeting in August.
3. Reconsidering the demolition sections of the zoning ordinance, to insure that historical character and preservation are taken into account. The committee discussed having this as a project over the winter.
4. DRC meeting procedures and support that the Planning Department could offer to make them work more smoothly. It was agreed that no applications that were incomplete would be added to the agenda, that the department would explore issuing signs to people with design review permits, that the full property file would be brought to all meetings, and that a more simple checklist for people would be developed to help them understand all the submission requirements. In addition, each member of the DRC would take responsibility for one of the projects each meeting and would come prepared with proposed findings for each of the criteria. The assignments would be posted on each agenda.

Since the meeting, there have been a couple of developments which should be reported. Vicki Lane has resigned from the DRC. In addition, it has come to the department's attention that neither Clancy or Gwen will be available to staff the first DRC meeting in August, so Audra Brown from the office will be staffing the meeting. Gwen will be at another meeting in City Hall if needed.

Respectfully submitted,

Clancy DeSmet
Planning & Zoning Administrator

