

Montpelier Design Review Committee
October 14, 2008
City Council Chambers, City Hall

Approved

Present: Margot George, Chair; Stephen Everett, Vice Chair; Eric Gilbertson, James Duggan, Nancy Mears and Guy Tapper.
Staff: Clancy DeSmet, Planning & Zoning Administrator

Call to Order:

Margot George, Chair, called the meeting to order on Tuesday, October 14, 2008, at 5:30 P.M. Ms. George explained the advisory role of the Design Review Committee to the Development Review Board. Each member of the Committee reviews each application so they do a little more research than the rest of the members.

I. 155 State Street – CB-II/DCD/FP

Applicant: Vermont State Employees Association

Owner: Vermont State Employees Association

Replace 29 windows

Interested Party: Katie Boyd, State Employees Association

Ms. Boyd said the Vermont State Employees Association is looking to replace their windows for several reasons, one of which is on the application for energy efficiency. They have been told that the return on investment is not as great as some of the other changes they are planning. They are hoping to change their boiler and get some new insulation. They are a member run organization and they understand they are about to put in a lot of money to upkeep the building. One of the windows they want to do the windows with the aluminum clad is because one of their biggest problems is they don't have the maintenance staff at their business to do the maintenance. The windows they are looking to replace won't have to be painted every year and they won't require much maintenance. The sashes will be identical and all of the decorative features will remain. They decided to use Marvin Windows over another company because on the interior they were willing to stain the interior sashes to match the interior woodwork. They are looking to put a little more investment into their windows. Right now a lot of them don't have storm windows and a lot that have rotten window sills on the inside as well as the outside.

Mr. Gilbertson said he did a site visit and talked briefly with Ms. Boyd about the project. His observations are that the windows are original to the building. There are windows in the back that have been replaced during the rehabilitation that was done a few years ago. The other windows are varnished on the inside and painted on the outside, have painted aluminum storms. They are generally 1 over 1's, but there are a number of windows that have a pattern divided light with smaller window panes on the top section.

Mr. Gilbertson said Efficiency Vermont said it is generally not cost effective to replace old windows for energy saving purposes alone and because the cost of new windows is rarely paid back. They do a 40-year payback. If those windows are rehabilitated with exterior storms they would not have to paint them on a yearly basis. The windows he looked at certainly needed some work done to them, but they weren't in bad shape. In his view, replacing old windows is not a good idea in an historic building even if you duplicate them. Sometimes they just need to be replaced because they are falling apart, and there may be a few windows like that. Generally, the windows he looked at on the downstairs were in reasonable condition and could be rehabilitated. There are a number of people in Vermont that do window rehabilitation. That is his general observation.

Ms. George said she was glad he mentioned the massive restoration that was done a few years ago on this building, and at that time the Committee discussed window replacement. At that time they were told that the windows were in great shape. The architect came and said there wasn't any need to replace them as part of the project. She said right now she knows everybody believes, because the sales people are out there running ads, that this is the project that everybody should do. She never thought their windows needed to be completely replaced. There are certainly some properties that have been neglected for years, but this isn't one of them.

Ms. Boyd said the third floor windows didn't get touched in the renovation other than painted. What they decided to do instead is take a storm window and put it on the inside, and that is extremely inefficient. The lawyers who work on the third floor leave their windows open pretty much year round so she wanted to put something on that wasn't their choice. They would have a window that would be efficient and didn't have to install the storm windows themselves. A window on the third floor with some energy efficiency on it would prevent that energy loss. They are dealing with a lot of energy efficiency issues left over from the architect and the contractors. This was certainly nothing that Marvin Windows came to them for. She was asked by the Board of Trustees to get quotes and get the windows replaced as well as the boiler, insulation and a variety of things. One of their problems is that they are in an old house.

Ms. George said whenever she reads statistics about new windows they pretty much say they die and you have to replace them every 20 to 30 years, which leads her to believe that new windows just aren't made as well. What they are trying to work is the fact they have the original windows, and if they can just be rehabilitated with a storm window it would work.

Mr. Duggan said with the old wooden windows is that you can continue to repair them whereas with the replacement windows once the seal is broken you have to replace the entire unit.

Mr. Gilbertson said he would recommend contacting Efficiency Vermont about an energy audit. He works for the Preservation Trust of Vermont and they had a series of meetings with Efficiency Vermont about windows and energy efficiency in old buildings. They both agreed on windows. Their evaluation is the biggest problem is air leakage, and if you open the window you make the people downstairs cold. They do a blower test.

Ms. Boyd said they just had that done. They had an independent person from Vermont Gas come and do an energy efficiency audit. He said they wouldn't be the "bang for the buck" that they thought they were getting by replacing the windows. He said they would be better by replacing the steam furnace and radiator system, but her membership wants to do both. Knowing there isn't as much bang for the buck with replacing the windows, they still wanted to go ahead and do both options.

Mr. Duggan asked if they were switching to a different heat delivery system.

Ms. Boyd replied they didn't know right now because they are getting quotes from different companies. They are going to put baseboard heat in.

Ms. George asked if they had ever had someone who was an expert with steam taking care of their system.

Ms. Boyd said there was an expert. A guy who worked for Ultramar for many years took care of it, and he is no longer with them. They now contract out to a company called A Plus Burner who is not a steam expert. Part of the problem is the design for the new building calls for a heat exchange coming off of the steam boiler to get the third floor and conference room up to temperature. In order to keep that running the recommendation from the engineer was that they keep the main building thermostat set at 80 degrees and they put valves on the steam radiators, which are completely ineffective and they are boiling hot. She can't get heat in the board room. She has her Board of Trustees who authorized a half million dollars to renovate the building sitting in the board room cold unless she makes her administrative staff 90 degrees. The recommendation from the energy efficiency auditor was to replace the system.

Mr. Gilbertson said that was one of the pieces on the list. An efficient furnace was second on their list; moisture and air leaks were also included.

Ms. Boyd said they are going to be installing furnaces. They have an electrician who has set up electrical monitors. The recommendation from the blown in insulation is insulating the walls where it has settled as well as the roof which wasn't done to specifications. They had Tri-State Basement come in years ago to waterproof the basement and the auditor said it was amazing how much energy efficiency they were getting out of the waterproofing in the basement because they weren't losing it out of the foundation. They have done almost all of this except weatherizing the historic windows, which she needs to find a maintenance person who can do that.

Mr. Everett said he has the flip side argument for the windows because he has replaced 200 windows and has not regretted any of them because it does exactly what she says, that you eliminate the air infiltration by replacing it and it is very difficult to do with old windows. Several of the buildings they replaced the windows in he found that windows had been replaced over the last 100 years because there were different sizes, different sashes, different styles and designs, different thicknesses and seals. The main reason they did it was because on a nice day people open the storms and windows and forget about closing them. When you figure out the long range maintenance costs, to actually clean the windows you have to take the storms off and you need someone on a ladder outside. The new windows tip inside, and you never have to step outside the building to clean them. When the window is closed, it is closed. You don't have to worry about closing the storm window to maintain the efficiency. He has not regretted putting any Marvin clad windows in them because he has never had to paint them. He has 15 years of experience with the first ones. He has never had to paint them and they are easy to clean and seal perfectly. Even though you can make an argument that there is comparable insulative quality, when you go down the street and it is 10 degrees outside and there are three windows open there goes the argument for comparable insulation qualities.

Mr. Gilbertson said he understands that. He thinks as far as the criteria are concerned we need to look at that. The DRC takes other things into consideration. He would ask the applicant to get a window audit and get some pricing on what it would take to rehabilitate the windows and install new storm windows. He would not support replacing windows that are in easily repairable condition.

Mr. Duggan said he is in favor of retaining the windows and refurbishing them as necessary, but he would also be interested in seeing any cost benefit analysis they come up with.

Ms. Mears said she appreciates the maintenance issues they are talking about and the fact you don't always have control over what people are doing in the space. She would love to see a cost analysis because it is going to require a proactive maintenance plan and whether it is going to be reliable figures into this. The easy solution is going with the replacement window, and it is more difficult to have control over the other maintenance issues.

Mr. Tapper said he would agree that the original wooden windows would be preferable.

Ms. George said she would agree, also. There are a couple of good steam maintenance people in town. Ryal Plumbing specializes in steam, and it sounds like a lot of the problems do relate to the heating system. Maybe if they thought about tackling that first that maybe this would suddenly become so minor compared to 80 degree in the attic.

Ms. Boyd said she has to replace all of the trim around the windows because there has been a lot of water damage, particularly in the back of the house. They were trying to do this all at once.

Mr. Duggan said another option she could think about is putting better storm windows on. There are some storm windows that are all integrated. That would help with the air sealing issue.

Ms. Boyd said for her this was a one-stop solution. It was new storms, new locking hardware, insulation in the trim boards on the side, and they would also be able to replace the trim on the outside when they were doing installation.

Mr. Gilbertson said the paint and the rot over the window may be related to the insulation.

Ms. Boyd said they were also planning on getting the blown in insulation, too.

Mr. Gilbertson said that usually makes it worse because it traps water. If they have really gotten the basement dry, that is a major source of water. Any building with people in it generates a certain amount of moisture, and that is why he thinks it is good to talk to Efficiency Vermont about some ventilation system that will move the moisture out of the building in a way that doesn't push it out through the walls.

Ms. George said the DRC has some concerns about the replacement of the windows. There has however been some mention of the third floor windows being something they could compromise on or the back of the building. She has also talked about getting some numbers and coming back to the Committee. It is up to the applicant. If she wants the Committee to vote tonight she can see where their vote is headed. They are advisory to the Development Review Board and they may have a different feeling about this project.

Ms. Boyd said she would like to wait and get the cost analysis and come back.

Ms. George said they really appreciate their efforts with this building.

Mr. Gilbertson moved to table the application and the DRC will hold the application. The application was tabled by the applicant.

II. 41 State Street – CB-I/DCD/FP

Applicant: Kevin Casey

Owner: Jeff Jacobs

Add exterior door and deck onto Elm Street side of building.

Application tabled by the applicant.

III. 62 Ridge Street – HDR/DCD

Applicant: Neal Meier

Owner: Vermont College of Fine Arts

Signage for Stone Science Building.

Mr. Tapper reviewed the application. These are additional signs being put onto the Stone Science Building. The examples used here are from the Community College of Vermont. Basically, it is going to look the same. Mr. Meier said that was his plan because they are looking for symmetry.

Mr. Tapper asked if the placement of the sign posts will be on the other side of the walkway. They are going to leave the bench and ash tray on one side. The door is facing towards the Art Gallery and College Green.

Mr. Meier said the actual door they see is on the Community College of Vermont, which is the building next door to the Stone Science Building. They used their signs and photo shopped what they wanted on their signs so the DRC would have an example of what it is going to look like.

Ms. George said the post is new that is going in front of the building, but there is an identical post down the way at the other building. Mr. Meier said it about 100 feet away.

Ms. George said they are in an AIPUD zone, which is a special district just for schools, and there is an overall sign plan for the College that was approved as a whole. There is a specific post detail in the sign plan. Whether or not this post matches what is in the sign plan, but the fact there is an existing one already helps her to believe it is the right post. Ms. George said she is safe in saying if this matches the other one at the other building let's get by, but for future signs the DRC needs to look at that sign plan because that is the consistency that was applied to the school.

Ms. George asked if these were the first signs they have come to the DRC with for Union Institute. Mr. Meier replied yes.

Mr. Meier said it is divided up between Union Institute, Vermont College of the Fine Arts and the Community College of Vermont. There are three different institutions.

Mr. Meier said the Vermont College of Fine Arts owns the property and the Union Institute now leases back Stone Science Building and the Community College of Vermont leases Schulmaier Hall.

Mr. Gilbertson said it would be worth looking at the sign plan because he isn't sure with three different institutions that entirely consistent signs are necessary. Ms. George said maybe the brackets or posts could be the same and the sign itself gets to be different.

Ms. George asked if the signs he was asking for today are just the new standing sign and the one on the door. Mr. Meier replied yes. They are aluminum signs with vinyl lettering applied to the aluminum.

Mr. Tapper said he believed the hanging signs are aluminum on plywood and the other one is aluminum on the door. Ms. George said they are both aluminum signs with vinyl lettering.

Mr. Tapper asked if there was any lighting involved.

Mr. Meier said they have standing lights over the door and the sign by the sidewalk will be lit by a streetlight. They aren't installing any new lighting for the sign itself.

Ms. George said since there are no changes to what has been proposed other than clarifications, the Design Review Committee reviewed the criteria and found the application acceptable. It is consistent with the other signs on the campus. The application was approved on a unanimous vote of 6 to 0.

IV. Memorial Drive – GB/DCD/FP

Applicant: Champlain Farms, David Simendinger

Owner: David Simendinger

Signage re-imaging

Interested Party: Dave Thomas, General Manager, WESCO, Inc.

Ms. George explained the advisory role of the Design Review Committee to the Development Review Board to the applicant. The Committee is looking at its application as it relates to the criteria because it is in the Design Review District.

Mr. Everett asked the applicant to describe in detail what the application encompasses.

Mr. Thomas said so the Committee will understand what is happening in the marketplace EXXON is going away, and it is going away very, very quickly. They have probably seen some of the other EXXON stations in town apply for sign changes. Cumberland Farms had the distribution rights for EXXON for so many years. When they did the EXXON/Mobile merger, Cumberland Farms got the distribution rights. They have to pay so many millions of dollars per year for that right. They have opted very quickly to end it a year early so everyone is struggling trying to figure out to rebrand their locations with a brand that they currently distribute in-house with very little time. Their proposal here in Montpelier is simply taking the sign company that made the existing sign and simply replacing the plastic panels with Shell versus EXXON. There are no changes to the size. There are no changes to anything other than just taking the plastic and putting one in that says Shell. They have to do this in every single town across the state they have an EXXON station in. For them to make these changes is an extremely amount of work in order to do it on the scale they need to do it in. David Simendinger said he would come back with a complete plan because they have to change the canopy, store, etc. These are simply the ID signs that have to be changed. Their option is to put a bag over the sign.

Ms. Mears asked if EXXON was out of business.

Mr. Thomas replied no. There just won't be any EXXON in New England. EXXON and Mobile merged and there are so many years before EXXON can come back into the market direct. Nobody is going to have the distribution rights up here.

This should be a simple sign change. They went back to the same manufacturer who made the existing panels and asked them to make new panels that said Shell based on what the Shell criteria is for their logo and size.

Ms. George said there is the main monument ground sign and pump toppers.

Mr. Thomas said they are simply replacing exactly what is there today and on the pumps themselves where it says EXXON it will say Shell.

Mr. Everett asked if the other decals on the pumps the same. Mr. Thomas said it would just say Shell instead of EXXON.

Ms. George said he is amending his permit to add the pump decals because they aren't on the application.

Mr. Thomas said he would not amend the permit. He would not do anything other than what David Simendinger has here.

Ms. George said they have the materials. Mr. Thomas said he does say they have to do the pump. The pumps will have new decals in the letters.

Mr. Everett said he just amended the application itself to indicate pump tops and pump lower logos to be changed to Shell identification as amended and attached. The other thing that should be amended is that the width here shows 7 feet and here it shows 8 feet. The existing signs are 8 feet. Also, the current height of the sign off the ground, including the sign itself, is 13 feet. That should be amended also.

Mr. Gilbertson said he would include that the applicant intends for an exact replacement. We realize the logos are going to be different, but it is the same materials, same size, and same type wattage on the lighting. It is only going to be a logo and color change.

Mr. Thomas said they went back to the same manufacturer who made the original sign for ease and they are going to do the sign because of the conversion.

The DRC reviewed the criteria and found it acceptable. The Design Review Committee voted unanimously 6 to 0 in favor of the application for 5 Memorial Drive, Champlain Farms.

Approval of September 23, 2008 Minutes:

The minutes of the September 23, 2008 Design Review Committee were approved on a vote of 5 to 0 with changes.

Adjournment:

The Design Review Committee adjourned on a vote of 6 to 0.

Respectfully submitted,

Clancy DeSmet
Planning & Zoning Administrator