

Montpelier Design Review Committee
June 14, 2011
Community Room, Montpelier Police Department

Subject to Review and Approval

Present: Stephen Everett, Chair; James Duggan, Vice Chair; Eric Gilbertson, Kate Coffey, Jay White and Zachary Brock
Staff: Clancy DeSmet, Planning & Zoning Administrator

Call to Order:

Stephen Everett, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:30 P.M.

I. 575 Stone Cutter's Way – RIV/DCD

Owner/Applicant: Connor Brothers Stonecutters LLC
Design Review for construction of a new building

Fred Connor said he would like to review the changes that have been made to the project in response to the Committee's comments. They have redone their color sample. They are showing the siding with the flat side exposed. Previously it was a 6 inch wood grain. The window trim is black frame and sash. The revised casing is a flat casement. They previously proposed a different casing. They have revised the cornice treatment as suggested and it is shown on the elevations. They similarly revised a little bit of the trim at the front entry to be more in line with cornice. They have deleted a Marvin door assembly at the front entry and have substituted a door front glass front entry including side lights. On the south elevation to respond to the comments regarding their relationship with the Coop they have deleted the service door that was there and now added a second main entry door. They have added a covered porch which has a standing seam roof on that end of the property. As Didi Brush will point out they have added an additional planting bed area to the right of that covered entry. On the north elevation they added a covered porch which is 48 feet which is a substantial porch that fronts on the park. Again, it has a standing seam roof. They have added a second door that holds the storefront glass to tie in with the front entry door. On the park side they have added an additional two planting beds on both sides of the covered porch.

Didi Brush said there is very little change with the landscaping except where Fred just mentioned on the north end facing the Turntable Park there are small planting beds that contain some of the same plants that are planted in the Turntable Park area. They added some woodland type shrubs and don't get tall. Everything else has remained the same. They also eliminated one of the evergreens they had at the front entrance because there is a right-of-way that it was bumping into. That is just a slight adjustment.

Mr. Everett said the area between the building and the parking lot and the river between the plantings which are shown on the diagram is that all grass area.

Ms. Brush replied yes. There is an existing vegetation that is right on the edge of the bank which she believes the Connors intend to clean up and clean out any of the dead wood, etc. They need access to get to the back of the building for maintenance, etc. Everything is grass except a planting that is indicated as a future planting around a possible generator. Depending on whether that is built or not will determine whether there is a planting.

Mr. Duggan inquired if there was any exterior lighting?

Mr. Connor replied yes. It is on the site plan. With the porches there is recessed lighting under the three covered entries. It is security lighting with sharp cutoff lights to give them a back elevation. For light poles there are two in front of the building, two in front of the park area and two at the rear of the park area. They are all high efficiency LED lights.

Mr. Everett said there were some diagrams in the packet showing some fencing. Is that the fencing which is enclosing that area at the back of the building?

Mr. Connor replied it is fencing for the dump truck loading. It is fiberglass fencing on a steel post frame.

Mr. Everett asked what color it was.

Mr. Connor replied it is white.

Mr. White asked if there was a cut sheet on the light fixture and the pole light fixture.

Mr. Connor said there is a photograph of the lamp and the pole in the packet.

Mr. White said he was concerned about the color temperature of the light. His preference is to get it warmer and closer towards an incandescent color. The 5100 is a really cool light. He would move he change it to 3500. That is the only objection he has to the lighting.

Mr. Connor replied he thinks it is acceptable.

Mr. White said the cutoff ones are the security lights he refers to and the pole lights are in the front.

Mr. Connor replied yes.

Mr. White inquired about the color of the windows.

Mr. Connor said the windows will be black sash and frame. There will be no red trim.

Mr. Everett asked if the doors were also black

Mr. Connor replied yes.

Mr. Gilbertson inquired what color the metal on the porch roofs was.

Mr. Connor said it is black.

Ms. Coffey said she would be inclined to leave the contrasting out and to make the building simpler. She is concerned that the building still doesn't seem to look at the river and respond to it in any way. That is one of the guidelines for the Riverfront District. It is undistinguished on that side. She feels like in that site the building should really respond to the river.

Mr. Connor said the elevations are a little difficult.

Mr. Everett asked if there was enough width for a walkway behind the building.

Mr. Connor replied there is but it wouldn't go anywhere. There is no walkway behind 535 or the Coop. It is grass.

Mr. White said he actually likes the simplicity of the elevation on the river side. That is the more visible side for people driving by. It has a more traditional look and not try to show more of what is inside the property with a lot of glass. You end up with a lot of clutter looking through the windows. He likes the simplicity. The design is organized and very straight forward. The porches are balanced over the windows. It's a good solution for that spot.

Mr. Brock said there are several criteria in Montpelier zoning. There are 8 criteria. He thinks the building meets 1 through 7. It has an appropriate historic style for the district. He thinks the harmony of exterior design meets with similar buildings in the district. He thinks the exterior materials are similar to historic materials in the district. He doesn't see anything wrong with the landscaping. It would be nice to soften the parking lot but maybe that's not possible. Prevention of uses of incompatible design buildings there is no problem and the same with location and appearance of utilities. Recognition and respect for view corridors he has no problem with. It seems like this building is very adaptable to many different uses and he could work with a lot of tenants. The 8th criteria dealing with design standards established in §604.B.3 for the Riverfront District, there are a few things with that he is a little concerned about. The pedestrian scale and orientation – the thing about this section is that it is subjective. It's not easy to describe and approach. In his professional opinion he doesn't know if this building necessarily is very successful with pedestrian scale and orientation. The visual access and enjoyment of the river he doesn't feel that the building meets all of the criteria in that section. Beyond the criteria his feelings about the site is that the site has potential and a great public and commercial space. He doesn't know what the market studies are and what people are demanding in the city. This could be a great space where people could have dinner by the river. There is only one spot in the city where that is possible. This building has a minimum lifespan of 50 years and it could be a lost opportunity to something that will fit every use. It could be a great building if it had a more distinctive use and something that many people in the city would be attracted to and be very successful at that spot. That is his personal opinion. In his professional opinion he doesn't feel it meets everything in the Riverfront District criteria.

Mr. Gilbertson said he is fine.

Mr. Duggan said he thinks what Mr. Connor has come back with is definitely a step in the right direction regarding scale and compatibility. He does, too, have some concerns about this particular project. The massing and form of this building and the way it is laid on the site limits it in some ways and doesn't present a strong enough a case for what could be happening there. He thinks there is a rhythm and regularity that is certainly found in the district but on a scale that is a little smaller. To him it seems like there could be an opportunity to make this building a little more exciting while still being compatible with what's there. Similar to what Zachary mentioned it certainly does meet a lot of the criteria in a much better way than the first presentation. Simplifying some of the lines helps a lot. It is hard also to design without a defined use and a defined client and he understands the difficulty in trying to offer something for that. One question he would have is will the construction go forward without the spaces rented out, or is it a wait and see endeavor?

Mr. Connor said he doesn't believe that is up for review. The plan is that it is a spec shell.

Mr. Duggan added that is still one of his problems with the project, that this is a really unique site. He feels it is compatible with the rest of the district but not perhaps capitalizing some of the special elements of the district.

Mr. Brock said this is a section of the Riverfront District that the historic turntable is intended to be a centerpiece of the area. He doesn't think he has ever seen anyone sitting there before. He wishes he knew what the city's Master Plan was for that area. It would be really great if the building could help liven that area because otherwise it is just a dead area. As a centerpiece of the Riverfront District right now it is backed up into two corners and he doesn't feel this building would encourage anyone to walk into that turntable area. The city's efforts to make the Riverfront District a unique place could fail based on a project. He doesn't want to say the building is poor in any way and he feels there are great things about it. He just feels this site is sensitive.

Mr. Connor said he wanted to remind the Committee has been unutilized for about 10 years. It is the last development site. It is one of two sites to come under Riverfront regulations, the other one being 535. Within the district definitions it does state that the city wants to encourage development and enhance the eastern riverfront approach. They have asked for a number of uses and now have curtailed that with the DRB to be office and business services and three conditional uses such as an eating and drinking establishment or catering and retail. They are trying to have the flexibility to be able to do that. From a leasing standpoint if they don't have that flexibility then they will go back for a two or three month program for each of the other two users. They couldn't tie themselves up doing that so they would probably focus on the office use. They do hope to have a mixed use. The building is identical to the square footage of the building that is there now. They are half the footprint of what was there as far as the river view.

Mr. Brock asked if they knew who their tenant was in the first floor would the building be different.

Mr. Connor they have carefully did a study for Labor and Industry and they would have a separate entrance with an elevator and could possibly get by with two stairwells for a single occupancy. They have kept the flexibility to have an indoor corridor on either the first or second floor.

Mr. Brock said he could imagine the area between the river and the Turntable Park if it were a restaurant with outdoor seating would be a great use of the space and it would pull the public into the area. He thinks it would be successful. There is a lack of good restaurant spaces in the city. That is what he feels is missing. How are people going to act with that space? How will that space be successful in the big picture? Otherwise he has no problem with the building.

Mr. Connor said with the porch they have on the Turntable Park end certainly a restaurant would be pleasant at the park.

Mr. White said in the future if he had a restaurant tenant and he wanted to do something like Sarducci's it would be a tremendous success and asset to the town. This building lends itself to that. What he likes about it as a spec building is that it is a very simple structure, easy adaptable both interior and exterior to a number of other uses. He might be able to do some additional porches. If you think developing it as a spec building will move it forward to encourage economic development in Montpelier then it is a good step. He doesn't think they can always wait for the perfect solution because the financial economy is never right for that. Sometimes you have to do a step by step piece and he doesn't think it is anything that is damaging the site. It is clearly better than the Salt Shed that has been there forever and is rotting and ready to fall down.

Mr. Connor replied this has been a two year effort from the acquisition of the property and most of the tenants.

Mr. White said he thinks the simply straight forward 2 over 2 double hung windows would be very traditional for the area and would stay consistent of the rhythm that Sarducci's has.

He thinks he is proposing another building that also could be adapted to another use in the future. He doesn't think it has to be clearly decided now.

Mr. Everett asked what was the height of the peak of the roof of the Salt Shed.

Mr. Connor replied 32 feet. This building is 29 feet in elevation.

Mr. Everett said this building is actually 3 feet shorter than the existing building. talking about views of the river from any point this building is lower than the Salt Shed so at any point you might be on Barre Street it is actually lower than the existing building.

Mr. White said it is an appropriate height but the corners are taller than the existing corners it actually may obstruct more.

Mr. Everett said he is just looking at it in terms of the massing of the building. They have gone from 225 down to 142 and the height of the building has gone from 32 to 29. Just in terms of exposure of the river that building actually presents less of an obstruction to the river than the existing building by quite a bit. That is parking area but it is now clear view to the river. From that point of the building all the way to the edge of the Coop building that entire area now is pretty open to the river. He doesn't see anybody in Turntable Park. It doesn't seem to be used. If there is a commercial building there with people, whether they are out for lunch or just on a break, he thinks the Turntable Park will see a lot more use with the building there. He thinks there will be a lot more use of the Turntable Park which was the goal of restoring it anyway.

Mr. White said the comment on the landscaping of the parking lot he thinks the difference between the Coop lot is they have more depth.

Mr. Everett asked Members if they wanted to go through the criteria or just see if the project is generally acceptable.

Mr. Brock said one thing is missing is number 8 on that list.

Mr. DeSmet said that should be included.

Mr. Everett asked why it hadn't been included in the past.

Mr. DeSmet said because there have only been two projects that have ever been subjective of it.

Mr. White said he believed they could just do an overall review. He doesn't think it is necessary to go through each item in the criteria.

The DRC reviewed the criteria. This is a new building that doesn't relate to anything he has seen for the first criteria is non-applicable. Under harmony of exterior design with other properties in the district they found acceptable. Compatibility of proposed exterior materials with other properties of the district it is acceptable given the siding with the both reveal and smooth side. Compatibility of the proposed landscaping with the district, he would certainly call it acceptable. It's a big improvement over the weeds there now. With regards to prevention of the use of incompatible designs, buildings, color schemes or exterior materials, he finds that generally acceptable. Location and appearance of all utilities – one of the adjustments to the proposal as originally set forth was the outdoor lighting. They adjusted the spectrum to 3500. That criterion is acceptable.

Mr. White said he had one comment on utilities. He read the gas tanks are buried but he also saw they were screened.

Mr. Connor replied it is just a service cap.

Recognition of and respect for view corridors and significant vistas including gateway views of the city and State House – acceptable.

No. 8, the design standards established in §604.A.5 for the Riverfront District and §604.B.3 for development within the Riverfront District is applicable.

Mr. Everett asked if members of the Committee felt those standards are generally acceptable for the project.

Ms. Coffey replied no.

Mr. Everett took a straw poll for the application.

Mr. White said it is.

Mr. Brock said it is complicated. He understands their difficulty in not having a defined use, and he believes that is the weakness. That is why number 8 is weak. He's not sure if they can actually have a defined use for this building so with this current iteration he doesn't find acceptable. If the building could potentially in the future with a more defined use with tenants it has the potential to be acceptable. Section 604.B.3. He thinks criterion 8 is a pretty subjective thing.

Mr. Everett said it says buildings and uses that locate there should be of pedestrian scale. It is probably more of a pedestrian scale actually than the existing building which is larger and occupies more of the lot and obstructs the river more than the proposed building.

Mr. DeSmet said they have actually completed the pedestrian facilities that start on the end of Main Street and connect the rest of the sidewalks to the bike path.

Mr. Everett read: Buildings and use should be of pedestrian scale and orientation, insure the public's visual access and enjoyment of the river (which this actually improves the visual access of the river), evoke appealing of the industrial and transportation history of the area, include design orientation both to the river and to the public way, and integrate public outdoor activity. It actually ties in fairly nicely with the Turntable Park. The historic turntable is intended to be a centerpiece of an area reserved for public use and enjoyment. Adverse impacts to the surrounding neighborhood such as excessive lighting or noise must be avoided or mitigated. The area's configuration is linear and narrow and provides limited potential for on-site vehicular circulation or storage. It is an area primarily served and occupied by people, not vehicles, although some provision has been made for public and private parking. Uses in the Riverfront District are not to be automobile oriented or dependent. However, parking requirements will need to be addressed by the developer. The purpose of the district is to help increase the economic vitality of the downtown, enhance the eastern riverfront approach, provide opportunity for new mixed use development, provide for the public's use and enjoyment, and to provide for the protection of the river bank.

Mr. Connor said he would suggest they cover all those.

Mr. White said he thinks so, too and thinks the project does that.

Mr. Brock said the public's visual access does improve. There is no defined use.

Mr. White reminded him that the use part of the paragraph is not applicable. The building lends itself to a number of different uses and with the windows facing the river you could enjoy the river from inside building where you can't now from inside the Salt Shed.

Mr. Brock said he doubts the project hinges on his opinion. He votes no.

Mr. Gilbertson said it is okay and meets the criteria.

Mr. Duggan said it is an ambitious guideline and there is a lot that is subjective. He thinks it falls a little short in a number of areas but he doesn't feel it fails. He would vote for it.

Ms. Coffey said she thinks it would be appropriate for another site.

The vote on the proposal was 5 to 1 and received approval.

II. Review of May 10, 2011 Minutes:

Upon a motion duly made by Mr. Gilbertson and Ms. Coffey the Minutes of May 10, 2011 were approved with a minor revision on a vote of 5 to 0.

III. Other Business:

Mr. DeSmet said the owner of the Savoy is supposed to be present at 6:30 to talk about a sign possibly informally.

Terry Youk from the Savoy Theatre said they are trying to make a sign that people can read on either side as they are driving or walking. Right now there is a flat wall sign and it is hard for people to see. They can't see a marquee because it is on the inside. The language in the ordinance is not clear. They have a couple of different signs which would be 9 feet wide and essentially the same as what they have on the wall sign except it would project out 3 feet. They would use gooseneck lighting.

Mr. DeSmet said there is something in the ordinance that Terry and he talked about. It says situations not covered. The ordinance talks about wall signs, ground signs and projecting signs. If this body can get their heads around this style of sign he thinks the DRB can either waive or alter the requirements for a situation that is not covered. In reality if the DRC can review the sign they might be able to get something.

Mr. Gilbertson asked if he was just going to use surface letters that hook up there.

Mr. Youk said similar to what the Capitol uses. It's a hook up wire; it's a track and hooks right on.

Mr. Brock asked how the gooseneck lights were attached.

Mr. Youk replied they are on the building. There is wiring in there. When they did the renovation they put stud walls in there so it will be reinforced. There would be two per side.

Someone asked if it was a lighted sign.

Mr. Youk said it used to be a very ancient LED and they took it out. It hasn't been lit since he owned it and for quite some time to that it hasn't been operating. Jon Miller put it together.

Mr. Gilbertson asked how reversible was it going to be. How is it going to be fastened to the building? He is in favor of it. He thinks it is a great addition. He doesn't know what the square footage is that they need to review but he likes the idea of putting up something different downtown and something that will attract people. He thinks it is fantastic that there are so many movie choices in Montpelier. He thinks having another marquee kind of thing would be a really good thing. Knowing the change in business it needs to be reasonably able to be removed.

Mr. Youk said it won't become a permanent part of the building but surface attached. The sign that is in there now if you back it out it is just a panel that used to exist there. What they did behind it was take out all of the rotting wood and put in a new stud wall to reinforce it. There is new plywood in there already. It would essentially be attached to the stud wall through the plywood. It will be a metal frame and attach to it.

Mr. Duggan inquired if that particular version have similar goosenecks to illumine it.

Mr. Youk said he liked either one.

Mr. Duggan said he agreed with Eric's comments and thinks it would be a nice addition. He is all for projecting signs and thinks it would be appropriate.

Mr. White asked if he had considered doing internally traditional marquee that he can just change electronically without the gooseneck lights on to have it lit up.

Mr. Youk replied it isn't allowed. The state objects to that.

Mr. Gilbertson said the state regulations deals with existing historic marquees and they can remain and keep their chasers going like the Capitol does. He doesn't think it allows for new ones. He doesn't know about the city's ordinance.

Mr. DeSmet replied it is in there. No internally lit plastic illumination.

Mr. White said he thinks it is a good thing and adds vitality to the life of the town. If it is flashing it's even better if it is a movie theater. He thinks sometimes they get so staid to make sure everything is historically correct and perfect that we lose vitality that needs to happen.

Mr. Gilbertson said he is fine with either one. He thinks it is great.

Mr. Brock said maybe instead of having goosenecks he has seen signs that have the letters raised on the surface and a lit backup behind them.

Mr. White said they could treat it as a marquee and not as a sign and judge the criteria for the design of the marquee and not get locked into it being a sign. Anything they can do to increase vitality and economic of downtown Montpelier is a good thing.

Mr. Youk said anything would be an improvement over what they have now which is just that fluorescent internally mounted sign. He said they also have to put up a sign over the video store.

Mr. DeSmet said there is something in cityscape that says you can call out what your trade is.

Adjournment:

Upon a motion duly made by Mr. Gilbertson and Ms. Coffey, the meeting adjourned on a vote of 5 to 0.

Respectfully submitted,

Clancy DeSmet,
Planning & Zoning Administrator

Transcribed by: Joan Clack