



City of Aurora

2nd Floor Council
Chambers
44 East Downer Place
Aurora, Illinois 60505
www.aurora-il.org

Historic Preservation Commission Meeting Minutes

Thursday
August 12, 2021
7:00 PM

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Miller called the meeting to order at 7:12 p.m.

ROLL CALL

The following Preservation Commission members were present: Justyn Arnold, Fernando Castrejon, Amber Foster, Matt Hanson, Seth Hoffman, Kristin Ludwig, Dan Miller, Simon Munoz, Al Signorelli and Mike Walker. Jen Del Debbio was absent.

OTHERS PRESENT

The following staff members were present: Mrs. Morgan and Sue Jackson.

Others Present:

Ken Van Kley (First Presbyterian Church) and Britta Wallbaum (First Presbyterian Church).

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

21-0498 Approval of the Minutes of the Historic Preservation Commission meeting on June 10, 2021.

A motion was made by Mr. Signorelli , seconded by Mr. Castrejon, that the minutes be approved and filed. The motion carried by voice vote.

COA REPORT

21-0623 June 2021 Historic Certificate of Appropriateness Report

There were no questions on the COA report.

This COA Report was discussed and filed.

21-0624 July 2021 Historic Certificate of Appropriateness Report

There were no questions on the COA report.

This COA Report was discussed and filed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

My name is Ken Van Kley. My residence is 72 Red Fox Run in Montgomery. We both attend church at First Pres.

My name is Britta Wallbaum and I live at 2320 Wyckwood Drive in Aurora and also attend First Presbyterian Church. I'm sorry we don't have enough copies for all of you. I'm just going to walk through the handout briefly and then we'd love to hear your comments and feedback on how we can move forward with this. If you flip to the first page, we just wanted to comment that we love the history of this town and of our church. Our church has been here since, I think, 1902 was the date this building was built. We just love the architectural details that can be found all over Aurora, specifically at our church. As we've been approaching this signage project, we've definitely been keeping the historic character of our church building in mind. We recently introduced a new brand and logo for our church. You'll see the logo on the second page there. But we decided that would be too modern and colorful for an exterior sign, so we decided to more take into account the architectural details. If you move to the next set of pages, there are some pictures from our church. We have many semi-circular arches, both in the windows and the chancel. The cross detail on the next page can be found throughout the church. So those were two details we really wanted to bring into our signage. If you flip to the next page that has the example of what we are hoping to do for our signage, you'll see those arches and the cross detail. We are currently proposing that they would be made of aluminum, which is I believe is the problem that we need to discuss today. It is our goal to make them look historical. I have a sample. This is a sample of the powder coat we are proposing. It is a bronze color. Moving onto the next page, our understanding is that this design has been rejected because of the material that we are proposing, aluminum. We've been told that aluminum is not a traditional material. I will refer to the historic guidelines, page 125, point F says signs should be of traditional materials such as finished wood, glass, copper, bronze, or plywood. So I think that's kind of the point we are here to discuss. What does that such as include? Is it only limited to those materials listed, or are we able to use something like aluminum? I would argue that aluminum is a historical material. It was first extracted in 1825, used as an industrial material in the early 1900's and it is a very common signage material, especially since the 1940's. A specific example of aluminum signage is the Illinois State Historical Society makes their historical marker signs out of aluminum. Then moving to the last page, we would argue also that aluminum is a better investment in our city, a longer term investment in something that is going to look good for many years. If we are comparing it to wood, you can make essentially the same sign out of wood or aluminum, but aluminum is going to last much longer.

Mr. Van Kley said the other advantage to aluminum is that it is a conductive material. The sample that you are passing around now is for a powder coating that only works on a conductive material. It would not work with wood. If you went with wood, it would have to be painted with epoxy or something which wouldn't last nearly as long as a powder coating. That's the only comment I wanted to make.

Ms. Wallbaum said so we are requesting that you consider this proposal and give us your feedback and ideas. Thank you.

Mr. Hoffman said what is the current street signage?

Ms. Wallbaum said we had some wood signs, but they deteriorated very badly and have been removed, so we don't currently have anything.

Mr. Hoffman said I recognize the church driving by and it always stands out to me. It is a beautiful building over there. I can't picture the signs.

Mr. Van Kley said the signs were so rotten and deteriorated that they were embarrassing, so we tore them out.

Mr. Hoffman said do you have any knowledge of what the original signage from 1902, what that looked like in terms of the configuration?

Ms. Wallbaum said I don't. I brought our church's history book. I can see if there is anything in here. I'm not seeing anything. So far, all I see in here are signs mounted on the building itself.

Mr. Hoffman said there are currently some signs on the corner in looking at the picture.

Ms. Wallbaum said there is.

Mr. Hoffman said perhaps they never did have any (inaudible) on the signs.

Mr. Van Kley said another reason the signs are needed, we have a recreational building across the street. It is a lot across the street from the main building and one of the signs is a directional sign to where the (inaudible) center is called. We do a lot of community events there, so it is not just people from the church that use it. A lot of neighborhood kids use it for basketball and there is a summer youth program there every year. People come to the church. They need to be able to see where that building is because if you just don't see the sign, you'll go in the main church parking lot and get lost.

Chairman Miller said I don't know if freestanding parking lot signs would have been common in 1902, but I don't know who had a car in 1902. We are a lot more car dependent now.

Mr. Signorelli said so am I correct then to say that staff's concern is the material, the aluminum? Is that the only concern?

Mrs. Morgan said my concern was the material. While aluminum is historical, it does date back, but I don't feel that it was traditionally used as a sign back in the early 1900's. I did reach out just to a couple of other Commission members to get their take on that aspect for a clarification. I think some other Commission members also felt the same, but then I told them that they could bring it before the entire Board as well to get the entire Board's thoughts on it. My one thought is our guidelines do allow plywood. I don't even know if that was a traditional historic sign material either.

Mr. Hoffman said I wouldn't say in 1902. Generally furniture didn't begin to use plywood until the 1920's. I don't think it really became popular for structural or exterior building until post war era. What do we have for precedence or other churches or public buildings in the districts? I know we have a few other churches. Otherwise, it generally doesn't come up very often.

Mrs. Morgan said most of the other churches I could think of tend to have more of a traditional church monument sign, kind of the brick.

Mr. Hoffman said I think there is one in Tanner. They had some other violations that we've been working on recently, a siding issue.

Mrs. Morgan said they have plywood. That one did get approved by staff. Technically that followed this plywood. That was one of the signs I kind of feel like I don't think signs like that look any better than like this aluminum sign, but since it did say plywood is allowed, that got approved. The signs I was thinking of like Catholic churches where they have more of a traditional like brick and they have like something in the middle. Some of them even have changeable letters.

Chairman Miller said that doesn't sound terribly historic either.

Mrs. Morgan said no.

Chairman Miller said I don't know if it's real common for churches in our historic districts to have parking lots with directional signs, so this could be kind of a one off do you think?

Mrs. Morgan said true. I can't think of any that have...

Chairman Miller said I would agree that an aluminum sign, it was not invented after it existed at that time. We don't know that they made signs out of it. My question would be the bronze look finish. Would that address the concerns of the Commission, if it doesn't look like aluminum?

Mrs. Ludwig said to me, I think, because I've reviewed it when Jill sent it out and I think the only reason we couldn't really say definitively like yes that's okay, it's aluminum, was just because, again, we're not here to make the rules. We interpret and enforce the rules. That's why we couldn't say yes go ahead, aluminum is fine because aluminum isn't listed here. Personally, a finish that is a bronze or copper or fill in the blank appearance that is made to look historical personally doesn't bother me, but I'd appreciate hearing what other people think. To me it is more about the shape and the imagery and the style, so if you were coming in with something very flashy and colorful, I would agree, but you are keeping it very simple.

Mr. Signorelli said now is the sign material on the signs that are up on the church already currently, are those aluminum?

Ms. Wallbaum said the only sign that's currently on the church, I believe, is a backlit panel with vinyl on it.

Mr. Signorelli said and is the frame around it bronze in color?

Mr. Hoffman said from just how it appears to be constructed, I would guess it is steel and aluminum, painted or powder coated.

Mrs. Ludwig said is that the one that's on the corner of the building?

Mr. Hoffman said yes. It blends in pretty well.

Mrs. Ludwig said yes. It is right down the street, so I walked down and we reviewed it before and it blends nicely.

Mr. Signorelli said my thinking kind of goes along with what Dan was just saying that this seems to be sort of a one off and the shape and the size to me is attractive and appropriate and if the aluminum was made to match the other signage around the church in the bronze finish, I think that I could feel okay to approve it at some point.

Mrs. Ludwig said are we setting a precedence that's going to set up for a problem down the road for other people wanting aluminum signs? That's the only devil's advocate, since we are talking churches, that I could potentially think of. Is anybody else going to have an issue?

Mrs. Morgan said I would say the Commission needs to layout exactly why it is permitting it in this instance, what is unique about this situation, this property, this sign, to allow that variation so that you don't have a precedent with why we wouldn't allow it in a different situation, or why we would allow it in another situation that was similar to this one.

Mr. Hoffman said in my opinion, I think this is a more appropriate construction and color than painted plywood.

Chairman Miller said I would agree with that. As far as reason, this would be viewed as a variance of sorts. It doesn't say here in our guidelines that aluminum is specifically prohibited. It just doesn't list it. I would say parking lot directional signs are kind of unique. This seems like a good effort. Thank you. This is a really nice presentation. It is an effort at making it look historic and the finish is making it appear as if it wasn't aluminum.

Mr. Hoffman said it's also not a feature of the structure itself. This is going to be out some distance away from the building. I think that is a distinction from what we are usually working with. How often does a church sign come up in the historic district? Once every 5 or 10 years maybe? There's not that many. Also, not to be a rabble rouser here, there's an aluminum "No Parking" sign right in front of the building here in this picture.

Mr. Signorelli said also, I think we should take into account that this will look good for a very long time with probably little to no maintenance and it will last for years and years and years where, obviously, a wooden sign would not.

Mrs. Ludwig said I think the big differentiator, which if you are saying I want to put up a bright blue aluminum sign with red stripes and whatever, but the fact that it's bronze finished, to me that's what makes it a differentiating feature. It is not a silver aluminum sign. It's been made to look bronze.

Chairman Miller said I agree. That's a differentiator for me.

Mrs. Ludwig said to me, that's the differentiator as far as like why it's okay. Not to say that aluminum's okay, but that it's made to look bronze.

Chairman Miller said it's not what I call the spaceship aluminum or real shiny. That's the issue I really have with aluminum in the historic districts. This does not appear to be that.

Mrs. Ludwig said I had a thought, depending on how far you are on this specific design, Amber and I recently did a project where we were researching historical fonts and the actual types of letter and type-facing that was used on building signs throughout

specific eras and we do have the fonts that would go with the age of your building if you are interested in having that because that would also give it, I think, more of a historical looking sign if you used a historical font with it as opposed to this, which is a very modern font. So if that's on the table, that's something we could provide that. Amber or I could provide that and there's like probably at least 5 or 6 options, so you could pick what you like, but that might help to really give it the historic feel that you are looking for.

Ms. Wallbaum said yes, that would be great. Thank you.

Mr. Walker said Jill, for signs and graphic designs, it says generally sign lettering should be 8" to 18" and these letterings are all going to be 5". Are we saying that smaller is fine because it won't be on top of the building and you're trying to read it much closer through car windows and such?

Mrs. Morgan said I think that smaller is fine. It is more with going with the larger where it takes up the entire sign with font is one of the things we try not to do.

Chairman Miller said otherwise Jill, these sign, I assume, meet our point A here where it says signs shall follow regulations subject to provision Chapter 31 of the city's Zoning Ordinance.

Mrs. Morgan said it does. I worked with them on the size requirements per the zoning code. It kind of sounds like the Commission is leaning to possibly accepting it. Maybe if you guys send me those fonts, I can forward that along to the applicants and next month have you guys officially back, finalize any changes and discuss it with a vote then.

Ms. Wallbaum said perfect. Thank you. I appreciate it.

AGENDA

PENDING

COMMITTEE REPORTS

A) Grants

No Report.

B) Near Eastside Historic District

No Report.

C) Riddle Highlands Historic District

No Report.

D) Public Awareness

No Report.

E) Landmarks

No Report.

F) FoxWalk Design Review

No Report.

G) Tanner/Palace Historic District Committee

No Report.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chairman Millers said the only announcement I would have is I may work on a reminder letter to remind our Mayor and City Council of a letter we did that this Commission approved back before COVID. I can send that out to the Commission again. It has to do with requesting funding. I saw an article in the newspaper that had to do with restoring city staffing levels to pre-economic crash condition, meaning pre-economic crash 2008. The Preservation staff is not back to that level. Just a reminder.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Mr. Castrejon, seconded by Mr. Signorelli, that the meeting be adjourned. The motion carried by voice vote. Chairman Miller adjourned the meeting at 7:40 p.m.

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