

The following minutes are from the Historic Commission meeting on Tuesday, April 12, 2022 in the Abita Springs Town Hall. The meeting convened at 6:01 p.m.

Commissioner Blitch called the meeting to order, and all stood for the Pledge of Allegiance. Commissioners in attendance included Ron Blitch, Thad Mancil, Andre Monnot, and Paul Vogt. Otto Dinkelacker was absent. Kristin Tortorich and Mark Fancey were also present.

The Commission reviewed the draft minutes from the March 15, 2022 meeting. Commissioner Vogt motioned to accept the minutes of the March 15, 2022 meeting as presented. Commissioner Mancil seconded the motion. All commissioners were in favor.

Certificate of Appropriateness 22190 Level Street

The request is to rebuild the rear wall of the Montessori School. The applicant presented two different options for the wall. Option A has a brick base with hardie plank siding and new windows. Option B has hardie plank siding only and different spacing for the windows. The applicant would prefer Option B as that is more cost-effective and would prefer to include a different window spacing. Commissioners Blitch and Mancil expressed preference for Option B. Commissioner Mancil said that either window spacing presented was acceptable.

Commissioner Monnot motioned to approve Option B with window spacing to be provided to the Commission. Commissioner Mancil seconded the motion. All commissioners were in favor. Commissioner Blitch is assigned to the application.

Certificate of Appropriateness 71484 Warren Street

The request is to add a door and window at the rear of the building and construct a pergola. A new window would be installed in the hayloft window on the rear of the house. The applicant provided a revised drawing of the freestanding pergola.

Commissioner Mancil motioned to approve the request with the revised pergola design. Commissioner Monnot seconded the motion. All commissioners were in favor. Commissioner Mancil is assigned to the application.

Certificate of Appropriateness Hickory Street and Andrews Street

The request is to construct a new residence with an accessory building. Commissioner Monnot reviewed the construction checklist.

Stewart Eastman said the property borders the Tammany Trace which is a corridor into town and the Commission is not considering how the rear of the building looks from the Trace. Commissioner Blitch responded that the rear of the building looks like the front of the building with no windows. He said the commission considers the design appropriate.

Commissioner Mancil motioned to approve the request. Commissioner Vogt seconded the motion. All commissioners were in favor. Commissioner Monnot is assigned to the application.

Certificate of Appropriateness 22364 Level Street

The request is to renovate an accessory building as an ancillary residence. Renovation includes removal of several doors and windows and construction of a new entrance. Commissioner Mancil reviewed the construction checklist. The applicant suggested changing the direction of the exterior board and batten siding from horizontal to vertical. Commissioner Blitch said the change would emphasize the vertical design of the building. Commissioner Mancil motioned to approve the request subject to the change in the board and batten

siding. Commissioner Monnot seconded the request. All commissioners were in favor. Commissioner Blitch is assigned to the application.

Certificate of Appropriateness 22139 Level Street

The request is to replace the roof on Trinity Lutheran Church. The applicant said the existing shingled roof would be replaced with metal roofing designed to resemble shingles. The shingles would be charcoal grey. Commissioner Blitch said he has seen satisfactory results using this product.

Commissioner Blitch asked if the curved feature to the roof would be retained and shingled. The applicant replied that it would be retained. Commissioner Blitch asked the applicant to submit a catalog copy of the selected roofing material.

Commissioner Mancil motioned to approve the request subject to submitting information on the roofing product selection. Commissioner Monnot seconded the request. All commissioners were in favor.

Certificate of Appropriateness 22315 Main Street

The request is to change the height of an existing bay window at the front of the house and install a flowerbox beneath the window. The window height would be lowered from 58 inches to 50 inches. No final design drawings were provided.

Commissioner Mancil motioned to approve the request as submitted with final approval pending submittal of the final design. Commissioner Monnot seconded the request. All commissioners were in favor. Commissioner Vogt is assigned to the application.

Certificate of Appropriateness Hwy 59 between Millar Street and Southwind Subdivision

The request is to review additional changes to the building design approved at the March 15, 2022 meeting and review the proposed monument sign. Changes to the original design include an updated color scheme for the building, an addition to the parapet on the south side of the building, relocating the ice machine to make it less visible, adding hurricane shutters, adding landscape islands in the parking lot, and adding gooseneck lighting on the building.

Commissioner Blitch asked if a lean-to awning could be constructed to cover the ice machine. Commissioner Mancil suggested the monument sign be reconfigured with brick extending around the sign rather than large brick columns on either side. Commissioner Blitch said the sign area needs to be limited to 40 square feet and needs to be adjusted.

Commissioner Mancil motioned to approve the request subject to the construction of a lean-to awning for the outdoor equipment and the changes to the design and size of the monument sign. Commissioner Vogt seconded the motion. All commissioners were in favor. Commissioner Mancil is assigned to the application.

DISCUSSION

Public Comment

Robert Fos said he is concerned about setbacks on the south side of the building and stormwater impacts from the Dollar General development. Commissioner Blitch said the determination regarding building placement is for the Planning and Zoning Commission.

Cindy Sale said she has recently moved to Abita Springs and described the Dollar General design as “lipstick on a pig”. She said the building is a big-box store and does not fit with the Abita Springs philosophy.

Adrian Juttner said the Dollar General is not appropriate and provided a handout concerning the impact of Dollar General stores on small towns.

Terry Sipas said she is “grossly disappointed” in the Commission. She said people can’t build their dream home because of the Historic Commission requirements.

Scott Sirgo said the Dollar General store belongs on the portion of Hwy 59 south of Dog Pound Road. He said the Commission is supposed to look out for the town. He described the Dollar General design as a monstrosity.

Catherine Barbieri said she lives across the street from the proposed Dollar General store and said she will never be able to have a dog or fire pit in her back yard. She asked how far back the building would sit from Hwy 59. Commissioner Blitch responded that the questions is a Planning and Zoning issue.

Mary Battaglia provided pictures of the Dollar General store on Hwy 36 showing items for sale and an ice machine in the front of the building. Commissioner Mancil said the Commissioner never reviewed the store design on Hwy 36 and the Commission’s authority is limited to exterior building design only. He noted that for the proposed building under review the Commission required that the ice machine and propane sales area be moved to the side of the building and covered with a lean-to awning.

Commissioner Mancil said the Historic Commission is responsible for reviewing building designs not deciding which businesses locate in town. He said the building designers approached the Commission about how to make the building meet the design requirements. He said this is a fine design and not typical of a Dollar General store.

Commissioner Mancil also addressed the contention that the Commission had rejected residential designs. He said he could not recall a single instance where the Commission had rejected a housing design. Commissioner Blitch said the commission has rejected ranch-style home designs using stucco or brick. He said no decisions of the Historic Commission have been appealed to the Town Council. He said he can’t believe the amount of junk in front of stores however these are violations of commercial codes. He suggested taking this issue to the Planning and Zoning Commission.

Jonathan Schaeffer presented a copy of the Design Review Guidelines and said the Dollar General building design does not meet the requirements for new commercial construction from the Design Guidelines. He noted the façade and entry guidelines and said the flat roof design is not historic and the building design should have been rejected. Commissioner Mancil responded that the location of the building as a stand-alone structure calls for a different design treatment with a corner-entry design.

An unidentified speaker said that Dollar General has constructed 80 stores “higher-class” stores that have a better design. He said the proposed building does not look historic.

Gail Ledet said this is a big-box store and should have been publicized. She has written may letters to various representatives this week. She said Hwy 59 is a two-lane road and trucks are constantly in the ditch.

Jonathan Taglia said the Historic Commission does not seem to be hearing residents.

Mary Battaglia expressed concerns over the building design. She said she had recently traveled to Maine to a and saw a residential district where the homes had been converted to businesses. She suggested elevating the design review standards.

Lynne Congemi said she served on the Historic Commission for six years. She said the Dollar General building size is disproportionate in any area of residential dwellings. She said the store will generate truck traffic and the Department of Transportation and Development is not helping residents.

Jeanne Thibodeux asked if there will be stormwater detention. Commissioner Blitch responded that rules have changed in recent years and developments are required to provide stormwater detention. He noted the nearby Walgreen’s was constructed prior to the rules change.

Terry Sipos asked if it was possible to redesign the building to look like a residential structure. Commissioner Blitch said the commission doesn’t redesign buildings. Commissioner Mancil said some downtown commercial building designs are not appropriate for a stand-alone commercial building. He said creating a fake façade that looks like a series of residential structures is something that belongs in an amusement park.

EJ Boudreaux said the building should be designed to look like Abita Lumber.

Stewart Eastman said ordinary people can see the design for the Dollar General store is not historic. He asked if the company should consider coming into a town with so much opposition.

Melissa Copeland said she is grateful to live here and appreciates the hometown feel and wholesome values. She said the approval of the design for the Dollar General building feels like this organization is recognizing the value of greed.

Monica Gomez said that this would be the third Dollar General store within 2.75 miles. She said there is no need for so many stores within a 4-mile radius.

John Preble said the building design looks like a Walgreen’s store. He likes seeing nothing along the highway as he drives into town.

Patricia Templet said the traffic on Highway 59 is horrendous. She said she has taken photos of Dollar General stores in other locations, such as Bay St Louis, and the designs are more compatible with the local community. This design is not appropriate for a residential area. She said the property developers should host a public meeting to hear local concerns.

Commissioner Monnot motioned to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Vogt seconded the motion. All commissioners were in favor. The meeting adjourned at 7:53 p.m.

Kristin M. Tortorich, Planning and Zoning

Date