

NORTH LITTLE ROCK HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

**506 Main Street
North Little Rock, Arkansas 72114
Telephone (501) 371-0755**

**MINUTES
NORTH LITTLE ROCK HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
September 12, 2024
506 Main Street
North Little Rock, AR
5:30 P.M.**

Commission Members Present:

**Tom Marr
Charlie Hart
Mason Toms**

Others Present:

**Sandra Taylor Smith, Director
Kelli Peters, Staff
John Gaudin
Yvette Smith**

Commission Members Absent:

**Susan Markman
Debra Roberts**

Commission Chairman Tom Marr called the meeting of the North Little Rock Historic District Commission to order on September 12, 2024 at 5:30 P.M., and quorum was established.

CORRECTION AND ADOPTION OF MINUTES

Mr. Marr asked if Commissioners had read the minutes of the May 9, 2024 Historic District Commission meeting. Charlie Hart moved to approve the minutes of the May 9, 2024 HDC meeting as written. Mason Toms seconded the motion and it was approved 3-0 in a roll call vote.

New Business:

A. 101 W. 8th Street – Paint fish mural on south wall of building; install vertical mural over existing sign at 8th & Main

John Gaudin described the sign/mural project at 8th & Main, pointing out that the artist would be the same one who painted the murals attached to the brick walls at 4th & Maple. The mural would be attached to the existing sign with PVC pipe. The fish mural would be painted directly onto the metal building, but will probably include more fish. Charlie Hart asked about the small sign that's already on the building; Mr. Gaudin said that the sign

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would remain, and would not pose a problem for the mural. Tom Marr asked when the building was constructed. Kelli Peters answered that it was built in the 1990s, and that the building in question is actually a parking shelter. Mr. Gaudin added that about 25,000 cars a day pass through that intersection.

Mr. Marr asked Sandra Smith if there would be a problem with the vertical mural because it has wording on it. She answered in the affirmative, and clarified that she considers it to be a sign, since it has wording on it. Mr. Marr agreed. He then added that it would require approval by the Planning Department. Mr. Gaudin stated that it will definitely have wording on it.

Charlie Hart told Mr. Gaudin that the fish mural is fine but the vertical sign is a problem. Mr. Gaudin asked if he could get approval from this Commission so that he won't have to come back. Mason Toms asked if the sign would go to the ground, or go any higher than the existing sign, to which Mr. Gaudin answered yes to the former, and no to the latter. He added that it would be landscaped around the bottom. Mr. Hart asked how tall the letters would be. Mr. Gaudin wasn't sure but he said the sign would be less than 10 feet tall.

Mr. Gaudin then asked that if Planning approves it, does he still have to come back before the HDC. Ms. Smith said that Planning would want the HDC to approve it before they would consider it.

Mr. Hart said that we approve signs for businesses all the time but this being a free-standing sign, not really advertising a business – it kind of is, kind of isn't. Mr. Marr said that he personally doesn't have an issue with it being a sign but this is new territory. Ms. Smith suggested that they vote on the mural & the sign separately. Mr. Marr asked for any questions or comments but there weren't any.

Mr. Marr asked for a motion about the mural. Charlie Hart moved to approve the mural that would be painted on the building, and Mason Toms seconded the motion. Mr. Gaudin asked Ms. Smith if this building & corner were in the district, and she answered that it is, but barely. Since Ms. Peters had stepped out to escort the second applicant into the meeting, Ms. Smith took the roll call vote and the fish mural was unanimously approved by a roll call vote.

The commissioners then returned their discussion to the sign proposed for the corner of 8th & Main streets. Mr. Gaudin brought up some murals at the bus depot at 9th & Maple, and said that this would be done by the same artist. Mr. Hart pointed out that those are murals, and not signs, and that's the difference. Mr. Marr then clarified that they have never reviewed a free-standing sign that wasn't advertising for a particular business. Mr. Toms said that he doesn't have an issue with the idea of a sign as long as we apply the same rules to this sign that we apply to other signs. Mr. Marr clarified that it won't be a

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backlit sign, and our ordinance limits the height of the lettering to 18 inches. Ms. Peters then read the section of the ordinance regarding signs:

Free-standing signs may be used where necessary but should be low and small, and constructed of wood or a non-reflective finish.

Mr. Marr added that this would simply be applied to an existing sign, as opposed to being a new sign.

Mr. Hart then asked what staff thought about the proposed sign. Ms. Smith answered that she wishes it was located at the beginning of the district, rather than at the end of the district, as you're leaving (the district). Mr. Gaudin added that he is looking at erecting sign(s) at the beginning of the district as well. Ms. Smith stated that it's an attractive, colorful sign which will get a lot of attention.

Mr. Hart asked what the City has to say about this but Ms. Smith wasn't sure. Mr. Gaudin added that Mayor Hartwick is fine with it. Mr. Hart then asked if we could delay their decision until we see what the City says about it, or do they have to make a decision now, based on what they have now. Ms. Smith said that she would call the City and find out. Mr. Gaudin clarified that he would like to get approval contingent on what the City says, so that he doesn't have to come back (to the HDC). Mr. Hart added that he thinks they should wait, and he moved that they table it until we get the City's recommendation. Mr. Toms asked for clarification on whether this is Planning's call, or our call. Ms. Smith answered that it's our call, and that's why they usually have us review things first. Mr. Marr added that he thinks their concern would be whether or not the sign causes confusing from a directional perspective. It was then agreed by all parties that the sign issue would be approved, but tabled, until Ms. Smith can get the City's opinion about it.

B. 315-317 Main St. – Mural on rear (west) wall of buildings

The applicant, John Gaudin, described his mural project. The mural would span both of the Manees buildings – one-story and two-story. The mural on the two-story section would start out very simply, as a path toward the more complex mural on the one-story section. Charlie Hart asked if he has a ten-year plan for maintaining the murals. He said that the artists do maintain the murals. They've had only one graffiti incident in the five (5) years that they've been painting murals, and that mural was repainted. They also draw up contracts with the building owners that state that they can't change the murals for five (5) years unless a new tenant wants to change it. Kelli Peters added that the owner of Blackberry Market (315 Main) said that he is in favor of the mural.

Ms. Peters raised a question about the doors. Her concern was making sure the fire department can locate the doors easily, in case of a fire. Mr. Gaudin assured her that the

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doors will be evident, even after the mural covers them. Tom Marr asked if there were any windows on that elevation; Ms. Peters stated that there are windows, but they've all been bricked up.

Mr. Marr asked for public comment. Yvette Smith said that she approves of it. Mr. Marr then closed public comment and asked for comments or questions from the commission. They clarified that the mural will be painted on a brick wall that's already been painted, which is allowed. Mr. Marr added that because this building has recently been renovated, the wall is in good condition, as opposed to the south wall at Flyway Brewery, which wasn't tuck-pointed before their mural was painted. The interior of that wall is in horrible condition because the water goes where the mortar is missing, and the wall is buckling. Mr. Marr added that that's something Mr. Gaudin needs to keep in mind going forward, when planning other murals. He needs to work with a good substrate first.

Since there were no further comments or questions, Mr. Marr asked for a motion to approve or deny the application. Mason Toms made a motion to approve the application. Charlie Hart seconded the motion and it was approved 3-0 in a roll call vote.

C. 400 Main St. – Remove second story windows on front (east) elevation, and replace with metal & glass windows

Sandra Smith began the discussion by clarifying that the space on the second floor is going to be a dance studio. Charlie Hart asked what business occupies the space now. The applicant, Yvette Smith, told him that it's now vacant. She added that the new tenant signed a lease on September 1 but because of the construction, they are to take possession of the space on September 16.

Sandra Smith showed the commissioners and Yvette Smith some photos of the building that originally occupied the site – built in 1900 – which was destroyed by fire on New Year's Eve in 1936 when a bunch of fireworks, which were stored in the building, blew up. She also showed them some early photos of the Ellis Building – built in 1946 – that currently occupies the site. She added that the rear part of the building, which includes the parking area, was built in 1951. She told them that the windows on the south side were changed, but she's not sure when, but they had been changed sometime before the 1992 survey. She added that various changes occurred to the front elevation. At one point a stone veneer was added, and the Carrera glass was broken, but the front elevation has since been restored very close to its original 1946 appearance. Tom Marr added that the Carrera glass was changed to the blue tiles because the glass was no longer available.

Mason Toms said that the issue is that the original steel windows are a defining feature of the building, and changing them to something simpler would possibly change the building's status to non-contributing. Sandra Smith then explained to the applicant that the purpose

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of this commission is to look at the structures downtown, and review any proposed changes to the exterior, and make sure they adhere to the guidelines. And since the proposed change of the windows would be such a major change to the primary façade of the building, she encouraged the applicant to try to repair the windows, rather than replace them. She added that she knows they want to put a sign in the windows, but that's a whole other thing.

Yvette Smith told the commission that Alyson Courtney is the new tenant who wants to put the dance studio's business logo in the window, to mimic an existing sign in a nearby building. The building's owner, Nick Theopolis, wants to replace the windows for aesthetic reasons and for insulation purposes. He has had a structural engineer look at the windows and has recommended that the windows be replaced. The new windows would be double-pane, well-insulated, and would keep out water which has been getting into the building. They are currently remodeling the interior and would like to protect the building from further damage.

Mr. Marr pointed out that the steel lintel is what is supporting the windows. The applicant pointed out that the water is coming in where the steel lintel is located, and there is evidence on the inside of the building. She said that it has been fixed already. Mr. Marr said that may often be caused by some missing mortar. Yvette Smith said that it could also possibly be caused by some weak spots on the roof. It was speculated by the group that the building may have a low parapet.

Mr. Marr expressed his concern that these windows are original to the building, and they appear to be in good condition, so he suggested that, for insulation purposes, they might consider an interior storm window behind them which would provide both sound insulation and thermal insulation. The applicant said that they would certainly discuss their various options.

Kelli Peters asked if they might consider another kind of sign, perhaps a long sign above the windows, or along the tile. Sandra Smith gave as an example the ACT II sign in the parapet above the windows at 317 Main Street. Ms. Peters pointed out signs that had previously been used on the Ellis Building as an option to use for their new sign.

Charlie Hart pointed out that they do not allow the replacement of the historic windows in the historic district. Yvette Smith said that she would take this back to the current tenant and the building owner, and get more information together for him and give him the various options that were presented to her. Mr. Marr told her that typically, the storm windows would be put on the inside so that they can be removed, should they want to open the windows. Ms. Smith agreed that doing that would not change the appearance of the windows on the outside, it would solve the problem of the water getting in, and it would satisfy Alyson's concern about sound insulation. They would just need to determine where

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the signage would go which they will determine later.

Mr. Toms told that applicant that she has three options. Mr. Marr told her that she could 1) hold her application and withdraw it tonight, and come back, or 2) we can vote on it tonight, but she would have to have a unanimous vote since there are only 3 commissioners here, but 3) if you don't get unanimous vote, the application can't be brought back for a year. Sandra Smith pointed out that they don't deal with anything on the inside so they could put in the storm windows on the inside and it wouldn't need commission approval. Mr. Hart added that they always encourage them to rehab their windows instead of replacing them so they retain their historic integrity. Yvette Smith clarified that they can only change them if they're replacing them with the same kind. Mr. Toms listed some of the ways people can rehab their windows such as stripping the paint, patching any damage, and replacing the glazing compound, which gets old and brittle over time, and is the big part of sealing the windows. Mr. Hart said that they should probably check the roof, that the likely culprit is the parapet.

Yvette Smith, the applicant, chose to withdraw the application so that she could discuss the situation with the building owner and tenant. She asked how much time she had before she could come back with an application. Ms. Peters gave her a copy of the meeting schedule which included the application due dates.

Mr. Marr expressed his concern about a lot of wood rot close to the front doors which the applicant wasn't aware of, but she said she would bring that to the attention of the owner. Sandra Smith then added that they might want to consider doing a tax credit project.

Staff Report/Comments/Discussion:

Sandra Smith told the commissioners that Allen Engstrom wants to install 18" letters over the Church Clinic on Maple Street. He wanted to backlight them at first, but it got to the point where he said he won't backlight them after all. They'll start renting out their surplus office space to others. She pointed out that he has done a good job with the Manees House, and that he owns quite a bit of property in the district.

Ms. Smith reported that they're still working on the house at 406 W. 5th Street. They've taken the siding off the columns so now the columns are just square columns. She was hoping they would be more tapered.

The house at 501 W. 5th Street is now happily occupied with flower pots on the porch.

Mr. Marr asked for updates on the Mobley-McAninch House at 417 W. 4th Street. Ms. Smith said that it's just a matter of time before Code starts up again. Carl Miller is a good friend of John Hornecker, the owner, and has tried to advise him on fixing up the house but he just won't listen. It's not fair to the neighborhood to keep it boarded up. He claims

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to love the house but he won't fix it up. If Code gets involved, they'll push for demolition. The garage apartment will probably have to be demolished at this point. Mr. Toms added that it's just a matter of time before someone starts a fire that burns it down. Mr. Marr added that it's the last abandoned, problem property in the district. Mr. Hart said that Code will push for demolition but we know how to fight that. Ms. Smith added that the Lymans, who live next door to it, would fully support demolition of the house.

Ms. Smith reported that she hasn't heard anything else about the townhomes that are being proposed next to the Presbyterian church building.

Mr. Hart asked if we had heard anything about the vacant lot at 8th & Maple. Mr. Marr said that he & Ms. Peters had discussed it. Ms. Peters reported that she had sent them an email about the project that didn't give them much hope of it being approved, and that she hadn't heard anything back from them.

Ms. Smith told them that the new owner of the house at 301 W. 8th Street has already painted the house white with black trim, and that the brick had already been painted. She said the owner has contacted us about putting in an outbuilding but there doesn't appear to be any place big enough on the lot to put it.

After Tom Marr determined that there was no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 6:31 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sandra Taylor Smith, Director