

Historic and/or Architectural Advisory Board
City of Cortland
February 13, 2012

A regular meeting of the Historic District Commission was held on February 13, 2012 at 8:00 a.m. in the Mayor's Conference Room at City Hall.

Present: Chair Kline, Comm. Abbott, Delaney, Dineen, Kane, Smith and Wineburg

Staff Present: Zoning Officer Bruce Weber, Deputy Chief Knickerbocker and Cheryl Massmann, Deputy City Clerk

Item No. 2 - Minutes - January 9, 2012

Motion: Comm. Dineen
Seconded: Comm. Kane
Abstain: Comm. Smith

Motion passed.

Comm. Wineburg arrived.

Item No. 1 - 15 Central Ave. - (Loomis)(CB) - Signage

Josh Payne was present to answer questions. Chair Kline explained that his new business is a tattoo parlor and gallery on Central Avenue. He submitted plans for all window pane signs made with white vinyl and no other colors. It was noted that there will be four (4) window panel signs plus one (1) door sign. Zoning Officer Weber stated that the proposed signage is in compliance.

Chair Kline noted that they will not be using the space on the façade for signage at this time. Mr. Payne noted that they can't do anything in the winter and they will leave the façade as is for now and do something in the summer. Comm. Smith noted that she liked the amended smaller signage proposal that was sent out late last week. Mr. Payne noted that the amended proposal was in compliance with Code.

Chair Kline and others discussed the possibility of the front façade signage being added to this proposal. Zoning Officer Weber felt that the square footage of the signage must meet requirements and he felt that any proposal should be reviewed. Mr. Payne noted that a façade sign would be the name of his business with a graphic. Mr. Payne stated that he would also like to ask for an external hanging sign. Chair Kline recommended that he put together a proposal for the façade and a hanging sign and submit that with an application

Mayor Tobin hopes that communication will improve and he and Mack Cook have discussed having business owners meeting with the City to talk about this commission, but also to discuss the goals of downtown and to come up with what's best for the community as a whole. All agreed that communication was a positive step.

There was lengthy discussion amongst the Commission members regarding the signage at the Pita Gourmet, Historic District guidelines and the availability of grant monies for being within that District and the work done by the Historic Commission. It was noted that even before this Commission was formed there was a committee which made decisions on signage and that dated back about thirty (30) years. It was noted that realtors and landlords did not always inform incoming tenants about the Historic District process. It was also noted that letters have been sent out to those building owners advising them of the process, but it was not always conveyed to incoming tenants.

Mayor Tobin noted that he understood that confusion had occurred with the awning situation at the Pita Gourmet and the need to maintain the integrity of downtown, but they also needed to bring people into compliance in a manner that is not damaging to business. His hope was that the time frame regarding resolution of this situation would change so as not to be damaging to Mr. Karam. He further explained that Mr. Karam explained to him last week that he would be willing to change the façade colors so as not to clash with the new awning and that he felt the new awning and the color was improving his restaurant traffic. Mayor Tobin noted that Mr. Karam wanted a resolution to this situation and he wants to do the right thing. Mayor Tobin felt that more time should be given, such as a year or two. There was more discussion between board members regarding the Historic Board's decision on this application and the current timeline for resolution.

Mayor Tobin noted that the awning gave the restaurant a better presentation and the awning provided a better way to be noticed by passing traffic. Chair Kline and the commissioners discussed with the Mayor some alternatives that Mr. Karam could choose. Mayor Tobin explained that Mr. Karam considered the awning advertising more valuable than the façade advertising.

Mayor Tobin explained that there were many people coming to the public hearing, but he hoped that a compromise could be reached before that February 27 hearing. He noted that the intent of Mr. Karam was to make things look better and that perhaps he was misguided by some information given to him and he hoped that the Historic Board would see that his intent was good and that they considered giving Mr. Karam some more time. He felt that this was an opportunity to help everyone. He indicated that he would like to have Adam Megivern be more involved in the process and he wanted business owners to understand the process.

Comm. Delaney shared with Mayor Tobin that many downtown business owners were not especially concerned with the visual appearance of downtown, but in running their

businesses. Zoning Officer Weber noted that an effort was made to inform everyone regarding the regulations for locating in the Historic District and that Mr. Karam had received a copy of that letter. He noted that the letter was in an effort to educate everyone. He noted that everyone's intent was good, but when someone does something that doesn't follow the rules, there is a penalty and it's difficult. He noted that this Board spent a lot of time on this, noting that if there was no penalty, then there would be no inducement to obey. He sympathized with everyone in this situation, but felt this Board was left with no choice. Chair Kline reported that this was not the first time this had happened. She indicated that she wanted this Board to be consistent. Concern was expressed that allowing more time would encourage others to stray from the guidelines. It was noted that various efforts to communicate Historic District guidelines and information had been made time and time again. Other suggestions were made to enhance the communication of guidelines and a welcome packet was suggested for new businesses.

Discussion ensued regarding the evolution of the Historic Board from its inception to what it is now and all of the efforts they had made to inform business owners, property owners and realtors of the Historic District guidelines, but they all felt that consistency was key.

Comm. Delaney asked if there were any suggestions to resolve this dilemma with Mr. Karam. Zoning Officer Weber reminded them that cost should never come in to play with the Historic Board's decisions. Mayor Tobin felt there was a big distinction between health and safety and presentation. Zoning Officer Weber noted that it was Mr. Karam's decision to as to what path he wanted to take. He noted that this Board's decision should be based on the presentation that is made and not to figure out which option is more beneficial from a dollars and sense point of view.

Comm. Smith expressed concern about Mr. Karam's acting on the advice from a past City representative that influenced his decision regarding the awning color and what the City's liability was in this. Mayor Tobin felt that a compromise between maintaining the Historic District and working with the business owner to find an acceptable solution was good. Various solutions were suggested and discussed.

Chair Kline asked the Commissioners if they would be comfortable with the awning color remaining red if the new façade paint colors complimented the red awning. Discussion regarding the use of colors that are not considered historic colors ensued. It was noted that SHIPO had researched façade styles more than colors, but they did provide a color pallet to choose from. Mayor Tobin asked for an explanation about the color choices. Chair Kline gave him background on the paint colors. There was discussion regarding the use of the color.

Chair Kline noted that if the Planning Commission denied Mr. Karam's appeal, this would come back before the Historic Board. Mayor Tobin noted that SUNY Cortland is now making more of an attempt to correlate their school colors into their buildings. The Commissioners expressed a concern that public sympathy would be with Mr. Karam when it

was learned that the previous Mayor was the one who picked out the color for the awning and that Mr. Karam was under the impression that was all the approval that he needed. Mayor Tobin felt that they could compromise with Mr. Karam, but eventually that compromise would bring him into compliance with Code and the Historic District.

Chair Kline didn't want to appear as giving in, because public opinion would be that the Historic Board had caved in. Zoning Officer Weber felt that if a compromise is made, it should be made by the Planning Commission because that's their role. Noting that it's part of the appeal process.

Comm. Delaney felt that Mr. Karam liked the red awning and she felt that the only solution was suggesting color changes to the façade to compliment the awning. She felt that was all that he would agree to. There was a discussion regarding color and design of signage. Comm. Delaney noted that Mayor Tobin's suggestion of working through this situation with compromise and then going into the future with education was a much more positive way to handle this rather than confrontation.

There was further discussion about whether this would be a permanent solution or a temporary solution for Mr. Karam. The discussion included establishing a vision for downtown. Ideas were expressed about having community input on that vision. It was thought that perhaps a committee should be organized to establish that vision for the historic district. It was felt that they could work with the applicant to help him pick the façade colors.

Mayor Tobin noted that the Commission was saying they couldn't suggest the colors or design, but they could suggest color or changes in design. He suggested that the Historic Board meet with Mr. Karam and hammer through the sign and color issue before the Planning Commission public hearing, so he could focus on his business and this could be resolved.

Comm. Delaney noted that what was being suggested was that they were to go to Mr. Karam and suggest that the façade paint job be made to coordinate with the awning and be attractive and would he let the Historic Board pick out a few things and take care of it. There was further discussion regarding this. Comm. Delaney asked Chair Kline if she would be willing to work with her on this.

Chair Kline doesn't want to look like this Commission is knuckling under pressure. Mayor Tobin felt that they were coming into a compromise and were taking into account that Mr. Karam had received feedback from a City official and he was influenced by that advice on his choice of awning color and he believed it was approval. Mayor Tobin was hoping to resolve this before the public hearing. He was concerned regarding the public having the perception that this Commission was not willing to work with business owners, which is not so. He didn't want to be perceived as directing this Commission, but he wanted them to

