

Historic and/or Architectural Advisory Board
City of Cortland
April 9, 2012

A regular meeting of the Historic District Commission was held on April 9, 2012 at 8:00 a.m. in the Mayor's Conference Room at City Hall.

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

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

Item No. 1 - Minutes - March 12, 2012 as amended.

Motion: Comm. Wineburg

Seconded: Comm. Delaney

Motion passed.

Item No. 2 - 39 Tompkins St. - (Kappa Sigma Fraternity)(R4) - Chapter Letter Signage

Mr. Nu, a fraternity member, was present. Vice Chair Dineen explained that the proposal was to replace the former sorority Greek letters with those of the current fraternity. The proposed color is dark green painted wood letters attached to the building in the same location as the former sorority lettering went and will be attached to the building with the stainless screws. They are just changing the letters.

Motion: Comm. Wineburg

Seconded: Comm. Smith

A motion was made to approve the project as proposed.

Motion passed.

Item No. 3 - 33 Main St. - (Terwilliger)(CB) - Signage

Tom Terwilliger was present. He noted that the sign dimensions versus the window sign speak for themselves. Comm. Smith asked Zoning Officer Weber if the signage fit the twenty-five percent requirement. Zoning Officer Weber indicated that it did and that the other signs are gone. Mr. Terwilliger stated that the other signs had just been temporary. Comm. Delaney noted that neon signage is an issue, but personally she didn't feel that this commission was ready to attack this issue as we don't have a clear idea on how we are going with neon. Comm. Wineburg felt that more information was needed from

the State as to what they would allow or not allow. Comm. Delaney felt that the Commission needed to have a clearer idea of their vision of Main Street and neon is a big issue. Comm. Wineburg spoke with Chair Kline regarding this and it was felt that they should request that someone from the State come and tell us what they will allow in an historic district and what power this Commission has to regulate it. Comm. Delaney noted that SHIPO has their guidelines, but this Commission has to make its own decisions regarding this community regardless of what SHIPO says. Mr. Terwilliger noted that the whole state is going through a change and noted that to retain historical integrity was important. He also felt, that by the same token it was the year 2012 and we are also a service economy here and it's become a more neon centric area. He noted that he is now matching the décor of downtown. He noted that it has brought him more business and he wished he had done it sooner. Comm. Wineburg didn't want to jeopardize getting the funding from SHIPO because we're not following their guidelines.

Mr. Terwilliger noted that he had been on the SHIPO website and that in comparison to other towns; we are certainly more on the conservative side. He doesn't oppose that exactly, but on the same token he felt he was compliant. Comm. Smith thanked him for taking down the other signs, noting that it now looks cleaner.

A motion was made to approve the signage proposal.

By: Comm. Delaney
Seconded: Comm. Wineburg

Motion passed.

Item No. 3 - 16 Main St. - (Pawn King)(CB) - Signage

Mr. Mercurio was present. He explained that he wishes to put up two (2) neon signs as well as an "open" neon sign. One (1) will say "Big Money for Gold", the other is the little guy logo and then there's the "open" sign and they're all neon. He explained that the building sign up above was a whole other thing. He explained that he was trying to go with what they had used on the other sixteen (16) stores. He had presented three (3) different ideas for the upper part. He noted that they had updated all of their stores to neon signs because everyone is going with neon. He noted that he understood the historic district, but everyone is going with the newer look and explained how the neon signage increased business for him in another location. He stated that he usually does neon window borders and noted that there were some of those already in town at other locations. Comm. Wineburg stated that those were in violation.

Mr. Mercurio stated that he wasn't informed by his landlord about any of this and he may pull out if he has to and will go after the landlord. He's not going to spend hours and weeks going crazy. He noted that he's already into this pretty deep and has already done a lot to the building before he found this out and will go after the landlord if he has to. Comm.

Wineburg noted that the landlord was Mrs. Panzanella. Mr. Mercurio stated that he had spoken with his landlord and asked her if there was anything that he needed to know and she told him "no". He asked about signage and the landlord told him that he should be able to do what they're doing around town. He looked at the others noting it was supposed to be no more than twenty-five (25) percent of windows and he agrees with certain things, but when they put certain things in their windows, they leave it up. He doesn't like clutter in the windows. He asked the Commissioners to go on his website and see that all of his stores look the same and they are not cluttered and the set up is just like what you see on TV. He noted a lot of neons and a lot of clutter in other store fronts along Main Street. He noted it's hard to sort out when everything is a mess.

Comm. Smith noted that right now he was happy with the three (3) neons and not pushing for the blue squares. Mr. Mercurio noted that he was in the Historic District and he understood what this Commission was trying to do. He noted that the blue neons did draw them a lot of night customers, but he understood where the Commission was coming from. He noted that he didn't want to put up a sign in the window that looked like the sign on the upper part of the building. He again stated that the landlord did not tell him there was any sign stipulation in the Historic District and he walked into a wall. He noted that he loved the idea of the neon around the windows, but if it wasn't in right now, he'd let it go. He wanted to know what the future plans were for neons here in Cortland.

Comm. Wineburg noted that that renters should be told ahead of time about Historic District regulations and the others agreed. She noted that the landlords in the Historic District received a letter from the Historic Commission telling them that if they rented places, the renters had to be informed that before they did anything, they had to come before the Historic Board. Mr. Mercurio stated that he's been working on this project for six (6) months and he came through here over the summer and at first thought of going into the TOPS plaza on the other side of town, but he was drawn to the downtown district. He thought it was neat with a lot of history. He explained that he has a year lease. He noted that he draws a lot of people and does a lot of advertising and doesn't want to start off on a bad foot.

Mr. Mercurio noted that it's very confusing on Main Street right now. He explained that he felt that some old neon signs should be able to stay because they're landmark signs, but he's trying to stay with the new wave, which is going with neon. He explained that when he went to the neon sign guy he was told by him that there was an Historic District in Cortland and neon was a problem. He was not told that by anyone here in Cortland. He explained that he had ordered his logo signs and had already spent a lot of money in deposits.

Mr. Mercurio explained some thoughts about the vinyl signage. He also explained that the front of the building is a wreck. He noted that the bottom front of the building was painted plywood and he can get the exact color of the building in a vinyl to replace the rotting wood. He has already spoken to the insurance company next door about working

something out with them to get the whole front of the building painted, so it all matches. He explained that he planned to tear down the front and behind it is really bad plywood. He doesn't have a sample, but he plans to install the vinyl up and down like wainscoting.

Comm. Wineburg noted that the Commission would have to approve one (1) of three (3) choices for the outside signage. Mr. Mercurio noted that #2 was the same sign as #1, but it was not illuminated, but had the lights above it. Commission members seemed to also like that.

Comm. Smith asked him if he was attached to the vinyl or if he would consider a faux brick façade. Mr. Mercurio noted that he wasn't attached to that and could do a faux brick if the Commission prefers. Commissioners seemed to like the idea of the brick. Comm. Delaney reminded the applicant that he must come before the Commission with material samples. Mr. Mercurio noted that the other thing he could do was to paint it the same color as the building and leave it. He explained that he had to do something with the front of the building before he put his sign up. He noted that he wasn't going to spend sixteen thousand (\$16,000) dollars on signs and then have the building facade painted behind it and ruin his sign. He explained that he has the original color of the building, so there will be no change in the color, but he felt that there were only two (2) options for the bottom of the building that are affordable. One was some type of vinyl the color of the building and the other was going with the brick. Comm. Wineburg asked if the brick would be the same color as the rest of the building. Mr. Mercurio stated that the brick could just be brick or any color that is close to the color that it is. Noting that they can match anything, but he would like a decision today. He explained that he had done brick sheeting on his storage units and it does make them look older. He wants to make the building look better because the landlord won't do anything. He noted that he had tried to get a sample of the vinyl, but everything is a special order because of the color and there was no way he could get a sample for this meeting, but the company told him they could match anything. He did note that the brick would match the other buildings downtown. He also explained that there were also some roof issues with this building. He explained that his other stores were well organized and clean. He stated that he needed to paint the old wood before opening.

Vice Chair Dineen asked the Commission to tackle each issue separately. He asked for comments on the three (3) window signs. Zoning Officer Weber explained to the Commission that the renderings presented by the applicant don't look proportional and didn't appear to represent a true idea of size. Vice Chair Dineen agreed. Comm. Smith asked if anyone was interested in sign #3. The Commission indicated they weren't interested in #3. Zoning Officer Weber explained that a variance would be needed for choices #1 and #2 and renderings should be presented to give the Commission a clear idea of proportion.

Comm. Smith asked how big the actual building was. Vice Chair Dineen thought it was twenty (20) feet and they would be allowed twenty (20) square feet of signage. He

further noted that the proposal is forty-five (45) square feet and that's a little more than twice what is allowed.

Vice Chair Dineen thought they should start with the window signs. Comm. Kane noted that the right sign looked wide. Vice Chair Dineen noted that the window is sixty-three (63) inches wide. Zoning Officer Weber noted that the "Open" sign is not considered a sign. Comm. Smith noted that if the neon window signs fit the twenty-five (25) percent, they should be fine and she asked if the calculations had been done to determine that. Mr. Mercurio stated that he would take it to the basic engineer and have them design the signs to fit the window. He'll give them the measurements, so it fits the guidelines and he's done with it. If it can't be done, there wouldn't be anything done and he was okay with that.

Comm. Delaney noted that the twenty-five (25) percent wasn't the question; she felt the question was if the Commission was going to allow the neon at all. Comm. Smith noted that they had just allowed it for the last applicant and felt they should allow it for this one.

Vice Chair Dineen asked the Commission how they liked the three (3) proposed top signs. Comm. Wineburg stated that she like proposal #2 and the others agreed. Mr. Mercurio noted that there was a limit to that size sign being made and his concern was having to really shrink that. He doesn't like proposal #3, but went with it because he was nervous about coming here today. He noted that he doesn't care if he has to go for a variance, but will go with something. He liked the idea of the brick on the front of the building rather than the vinyl and he'll come up with some lights. He noted that if he had been aware of all these issues, he wouldn't have come to downtown and would have gone to the other end of town. Comm. Wineburg told him that was still an option. She explained to him that the Commissioners were appointed to this Board and didn't get paid to do this. She noted that she also has a retail store downtown and noted that her sign wasn't the one that her son had wanted to put up, but he knew that one would not be approved. She noted that there were rules and regulations and they were fighting with some that are in violation and they'll soon be in court. She noted that the Commission didn't want to tell him to do something and then later on have him be in violation. She noted that Chair Kline was not present at this meeting and they needed to fit within the parameters or to obtain a variance.

Zoning Officer Weber explained that a variance was going to be needed for the building mounted sign and that will need to go to the Zoning Board of Appeals. Zoning Officer Weber explained to Mr. Mercurio that he would need to present renderings that were proportional. He further explained that the Historic Board had the ability to approve the concept and the colors and the Zoning Board of Appeals would be able to approve the amount of signage that you're requesting, but this Board will be making recommendations to that Board with regards to the signage. He explained that from his perspective, the renderings submitted do not give a clear idea of what they are potentially approving and the renderings should be proportional.

Massmann stated that samples would have to be available for next Monday and that a notice of a special meeting would be sent out today for a meeting at 8:00 AM on April 16.

After discussion regarding a motion for the neon signs, Zoning Officer Weber asked Mr. Mercurio to have his design person present dimensions for those signs to the Code Office prior to fabrication of those signs. He noted that they needed to have him submit the dimensions of the windows and the proposed signs prior to fabrication and the Code Office will verify the twenty-five (25) percent. He noted that the process was information ahead of time, approval from the Code Office and then fabrication and that would only take about a day. He asked that if his sign person had any questions, that they should call him.

Item No. 4 - 23 Tompkins St. - (Reeners)(R4) - Informal Discussion

Jim Reeners was present. Mr. Reeners explained that he is a residential developer and this property is in an R4. He explained that he is interested in turning this property into a multiple dwelling, perhaps for students or maybe not. He explained that there is a push for better housing, but not necessarily for students. He did note that this was in a typically student area and he is concerned regarding the house next door. He explained that he had hoped to purchase the house next door and use it as a single development. He noted that it has since been sold. He explained that the code for any type of multiple dwelling which would have to be approved, but he noted that there is totally inadequate parking on this site. Comm. Smith clarified that while it was in an R4 District, it was currently a single family home. Mr. Reeners didn't believe that there had been any official change from that, but he believed that it was not being used that way by the current owner. Comm. Smith asked for clarification. Mr. Reeners explained that the owner lived in California and had rented the house to students to some degree. Mr. Reeners noted that one thing he did not plan to do was to change the exterior of the building other than perhaps color. He noted that it was in far worse condition than it looked from across the street. He noted that the Code requirement issue for a multiple dwelling was parking, with two (2) spaces per unit. He noted that some units could have more than two (2) adults living in them. He explained that in everything he has, they have tried to provide one hundred (100) percent parking for whatever the use of the building might be and all of his properties are very close to that. He explained that the YMCA is located across the street and there is hardly ever street parking available in that area. He explained that everything has to be created on site. He noted that the barn is located in an area that does not facilitate increasing parking. He explained that there was no lined parking now and it is somewhat difficult to maneuver there. He is unsure how many parking spaces are there currently. He guessed perhaps three (3) or four (4). He explained that the barn is located in a bad area and doesn't allow for proper parking spaces and a proper drive aisle or turn around. He noted that the survey shows that the rear of the property resembles a gigantic "V" and the two (2) "V" in the back of the property will remain green. He explained that there is a fence on the one (1) side and he would add a fence to the back and down the other side at least up to the neighboring building. Discussion took place regarding rear of the barn and the use of that area. Comm. Delaney and Code Office

Knickerbocker noted that the Alumni House barn is being rebuilt and construction will begin soon and will be in the exact location as the old barn.

Mr. Reeners noted that the barn has to go to allow for parking if he's going to develop the property. He explained that the barn structure is failing and the cupola weight is crushing the building. He explained that the barn structure is currently being used for storage and it is not historic and is basically a twenty-eight (28) by thirty-six (36) foot building. Comm. Kane produced a number of 1984 photos of that barn as well as others that were dotted around the City, most of which no longer exist. She explained that carriage barns were historic.

Mr. Reeners asked them to recall the barn at 50 Tompkins Street. He noted that for him to develop the property he needs to have a bottom line. He noted that his plan was to propose the development of four (4) properties in the City and all were in the Historic District. He explained that this will cost a lot of money, but parking is a huge issue.

Comm. Smith asked him what his plans were for the interior of the building. Mr. Reeners explained that he plans a mix of one (1), two (2) and three (3) bedroom units with as many as twelve (12) students or young professionals and possible an office. He plans to preserve the inside details. He noted that this has to be economically viable for him. He outlined his history as a developer in the City, noting that they would keep this property as an investment. He is trying to determine what this Board wants. Comm. Smith noted that she would like to see this property remain a single family dwelling sold to a young professional couple to bring diversity to the Community and would prefer there be no change in use even if permitted.

Zoning Officer Weber noted that without a formal proposal it would be difficult for this Board to give a feeling. Comm. Delaney noted that he was trying to get their feeling regarding allowing him to tear down the barn. Comm. Smith was against it. Comm. Kane noted that this was a garage and why cars couldn't be parked inside of it. Mr. Reeners stated that the barn would have to be reconditioned and the floor redone to support vehicles. He explained that this would not be a reasonable expense for a reasonable return. He would like to make the house energy efficient rather than spend money on the barn. Comm. Delaney noted that his work was good, but she was simply asking him to leave the barn and not consider developing this house. Vice Chair Dineen noted that with the right proposal he would consider removal of the barn. Comm. Wineburg noted that she would hate to see something taken down. She noted that he wouldn't be making money on the barn and it would be nice if he could find a family to buy an old historic home and keep it up.

Mr. Reeners noted that he likes historical buildings and he is not here to destroy the community and he'll not go any further with this.

Adjournment

Motion: Comm. Delaney
Seconded: Comm. Kane

Motion passed.

Daniel Dineen, Vice Chairperson