

**Minutes of the Community Design Commission  
Held on October 23, 2013  
At Village Hall in Room 101**

Meeting called to order at 7:15 p.m.

**Attendees:** Chairperson Douglas Chien; Commissioners Teresa Heit-Murray, Christina Lorz, John Schiess, Aaron Stigger, Michele Wheeler, Bernie Woytek

**Absent:** Commissioners Lloyd Natof, Greg Sorg

**Also present:** Craig Failor, Village Planner; Michael Bruce, Zoning Administrator

**Public Attendees:** Dennis McCauley, Fenwick High School

**Non-Agenda Public Comment:**  
None.

**Minutes:**

Commissioner Wheeler motioned to approve the minutes from September 25, 2013.  
Commissioner Woytek seconded. The minutes were approved as submitted.

**Public Hearing(s); Sitting as the Design Review Commission:**

Cal. No. 06-13-DRC: 505 Washington Boulevard, Fenwick High School

The applicant is requesting that variations be granted from the following sections of the Sign Code of the Village of Oak Park to permit the installation of an approximately 253 square foot wall sign on the south elevation of the building at the premises commonly known as 505 Washington Boulevard.

1. Section 7-7-15 (D) (1), which section requires that wall signs located within residential districts shall not exceed a maximum size of forty (40) square feet; whereas the proposal features an approximately 253 square foot wall sign; and
2. Section 7-7-15 (D) (1) (b), which section requires that wall signs shall only be located along the front lot line (Washington Boulevard) and/or the corner lot line (East Avenue) of corner lots; whereas the proposal features a wall sign located along the south elevation of the building facing Fenwick's' parking lot where there is no street frontage.

Mr. Dennis McCauley from Fenwick High School presented the application. He said they have no sign recognition on Madison and they had changed the main entrance to face the south parking lot. He said the sign would be mounted 40 feet in the air and that side of the building was approximately 200 feet long. The sign would not be illuminated.

Commissioner Stigger asked about the school's prior purchase of a former dry cleaning building on Madison as a way to increase awareness- what was the progress on that end? Mr. McCauley

said the usage was cost-prohibitive as of right now and there wasn't an awareness that it was not a commercial building. Commissioner Stigger said he had been asked before where the school was located and saw a need for better signage on the Madison side, but he was concerned it would not be as effective as something right along Madison Street.

Chair Chien asked if there was a master plan and how did the signage fit into it. Mr. McCauley said when the school built the expansion, the goal was to possibly level the corner and incorporate it into Fenwick property but that the plan was being re-evaluated. Chair Chien said he could see the need for a sign, but if the expansion happened would there be another sign added to Madison with the large sign in the background on this building. Mr. Bruce said that wasn't relevant to the application.

Commissioner Stigger said he had concerns that heading east you wouldn't be able to see the sign. Mr. McCauley said when they had events they gave out directions that had drivers coming from Madison westbound to East Avenue.

Mr. Bruce clarified that under the current sign code the sign should be on East Avenue or Washington Boulevard and those locations would not be appropriate. Commissioner Woytek said the variance location was the most appropriate for visibility versus the historic façade and fit with the scale of the building. He said the visibility would be effective although he would prefer it to be the height of the windows.

Commissioner Chien asked about the material. Mr. McCauley said it would be acrylic and the colors would be predominately black. Commissioner Stigger said he thought it was too big and would be better if it were the height of the windows as well. Commissioner Heit-Murray asked if there were plans to include lettering on the gateway arch for identification. Mr. McCauley said it would be difficult to see if traveling by car and also the details on the arch made it difficult to add identification on both sides. A small discussion ensued about Oak Park River Forest High School's signage. Commissioner Schiess said tweaking the size of the sign would not really change the perception or impact of the sign as it was so high in the air and the sign should have its own graphic identity apart from the windows. Commissioner Wheeler said she agreed with Commissioner Schiess and appreciated the size because it was so high.

Commissioner Loran said if it were a commercial building they would not allow this to go forward as the building had no street frontage on Madison. Commissioner Schiess pointed out that that was the purpose of the variation process to look at unique uses and Fenwick was an institution and not trying to sell a product.

Commissioner Stigger said the application was not as effective as it could be and not the best way to direct people to the school, he would prefer smaller signs on the street. Commissioner Chien asked if they had explored the possibility of signs in other locations. Mr. McCauley said he was unsure.

Ms. Kim Rasmussen, owner of It's a Sign, said her company works with the International Sign Association and they do studies that have found that signs help people in terms of navigation and safety.

Ms. Julie Carpenter, candidate for the CDC, said she felt there were three dots that needed to be aligned: safety; whether the sign aligned with the cache of the building; and the possibility of adding a more appealing obelisk on the corner property to identify the school.

Commissioner Wheeler reminded commissioners that they were not charged with telling the applicant where signs should go or different signs to use, they needed to stick with the application. Commissioner Schiess agreed, and referred commissioners to the project review team's report that supported the application.

Commissioner Schiess motioned to approve the application. Commissioner Wheeler seconded. A roll call vote was taken:

Schiess - yes  
Wheeler - yes  
Woytek - yes  
Loranz – no  
Stigger – no  
Heit-Murray – no  
Chien – yes

The motion failed as a passing measure would need an affirmative vote of the majority of the commission members.

Chair Chien asked commissioners to give the applicant more feedback on why the variation failed. Commissioner Loranz said a wayfinding street sign would be a better alternative. Commissioner Stigger said the large size concerned him and he didn't feel it was effective. Chair Chien asked staff if there were Village resources the applicant could tap into regarding wayfinding signs. Mr. Failor said the applicant could contact the Public Works department, but ultimately it would need Village Board approval.

Commissioner Schiess said the commission was wasting political capital on this by sending the message that the Village was trying to tell the high school how to place their signs and direct their traffic. He said staff did a good job at vetting that- it was up to the commission to look at the application and determine if it was a reasonable request. He said the institution wasn't looking to benefit by selling burgers, for example. It was about trying to serve the institution. Chair Chien said he agreed with the exception of using reasonableness as the basis for determination, as the commission was bound by four criteria when looking at applications. Commissioner Woytek said after consideration, he felt the scale in real life would read the same as a street sign.

Commissioner Heit-Murray suggested the logo be painted on the brick to be more in keeping with the style of the neighborhood. Commissioner Stigger said he would be in support of it without the shield logo.

Commissioner Stigger motioned to approve the variation without the shield logo. As there was no second the motion failed.

Mr. McCauley suggested using a more subtle color as a background. Commissioner Heit-Murray asked about the finish on the letters. A short discussion ensued about the paint on the letters and if they could use that as a condition for approval.

Commissioner Heit-Murray motioned to approve the application with the condition that the letters be painted acrylic with a matte finish. Commissioner Woytek seconded. A roll call vote was taken:

Heit-Murray – yes

Woytek – yes

Loranz – yes

Schiess – yes

Stigger - yes

Wheeler – yes

Chien – yes

The motion passed 7-0.

**Staff Reports:**

Mr. Failor updated the commission on the sign ordinance amortization discussion with the Village Board. He said all signs were grandfathered in with the exception of any sign that could be made into compliance by spending \$500 or less to do so. For example, by removing an additional window or wall sign or neon outlines of windows and doors. He said if a business category changed it was required to come into compliance. He said staff would notify business owners that the ordinance passed and also follow up on any safety concerns.

**Sub-Committee Reports:**

None.

**Other Business:**

Chair Chien said traditionally there was not a November meeting as it was close to the Thanksgiving holiday and there was also the Cavalcade of Pride award ceremony. The December meeting should also be moved due to the Christmas holiday. The November meeting was cancelled and the December meeting was moved to Dec. 18, 2013.

**Cavalcade of Pride**

Commissioner Heit-Murray updated commissioners on the upcoming ceremony. Commissioner Stigger suggested having a “best” Halloween or holiday decorations category. Commissioner Heit-Murray showed commissioners the power point presentation on the award winners.

**Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Angela Schell,

Recording Secretary