

CHATHAM BOROUGH HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION



Chatham Borough Historic Preservation Commission Report

Applicant: 185 Main Street Application, Block 122, Lot 2

September 21, 2023

Background

At a regularly scheduled public meeting, held on September 19, 2023, the Historic Preservation Commission (“HPC”) met at a public meeting at Borough Hall with representatives of Danny Realty, concerning 185 Main Street. Steven R. Tombalakian, Esq. was present as attorney for Danny Realty, and James E. Henry, PE, PP was there representing the owner’s design team.

Early in the meeting, it was also explained to the applicants and the public in the audience that the HPC is an advisory committee whose charge is to make recommendations to the Zoning Board, most importantly when demolition is being proposed to a building or a portion of a building in the Historic District. The Commission must put together a report which includes recommendations to the Zoning Board. The Zoning Board is charged with making the final decision whether or not this project can proceed.

Description of Existing Building

The building on the property in question is a “Non-Contributing Structure” in the Historic District, originally constructed in the 1930’s and remodeled in 1982 .

The building is essentially a flat-roofed masonry box with some applied metal panels. It has served as a car service station for many years. The dominant red and white striped canopy over the fuel pumps closer to main street and the fuel island station themselves obscure some of the structure from the Main Street side, but it is clear that the building has fallen into a state of disrepair.

There is a red, white, and blue monument sign on the northeast corner of the site.

Applicant Proposal and Presentation

Mr. Henry presented the proposed improvements to the HPC and those present. Improvements to the building would include a medium-sloped (approximately 4:12) metal standing-seam roof, two glass and aluminum storefronts with awnings, vinyl siding, and wall-mounted signage and lighting. The roof structure would conceal rooftop HVAC equipment located on the south side of the roof.

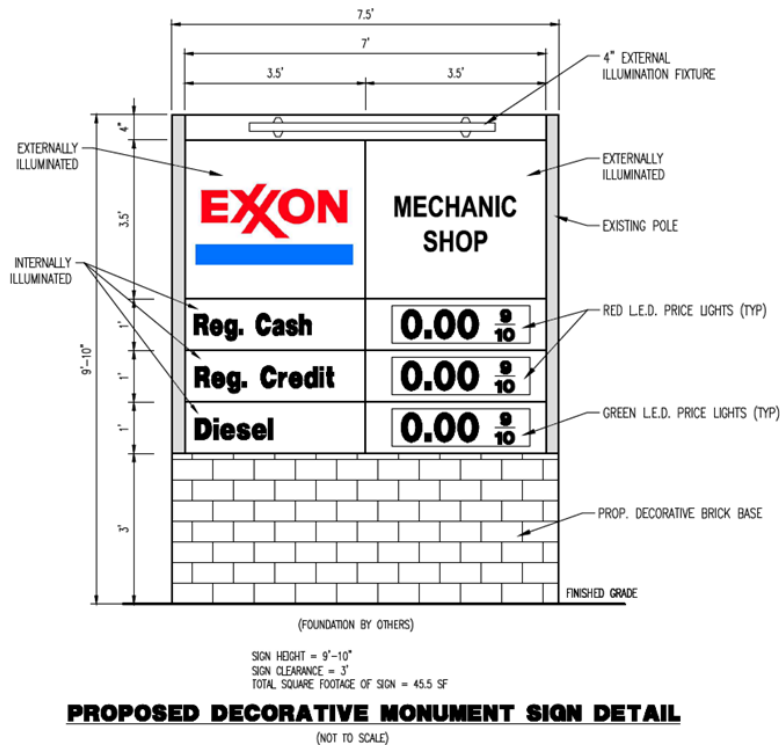
Other improvements to the property would include a new monument sign to replace the existing sign on the NE corner of the site. The new sign would be constructed of brick masonry and would be 9’-4” high and 10 feet wide. It would have a non-illuminated corporate sign insert that would be 6 feet high and 7 feet wide. Inside the non-illuminated panels would be three digital (LED) “price point panels”. Each price point panel is approximately 9 inches tall.

Other planned site improvements include new landscaping at the perimeter of the lot. There are existing trees on the extreme NE and NW corners of the lot, but the drawings submitted are not clear on what happens, if anything, to those trees. The are existing Borough trees near the NE corner of the lot.

The applicants stated that there were no plans to upgrade or modify the existing canopy over the fuel pumps.

Discussions

The proposed monument sign was the first item discussed. Danny Realty had previously attended an HPC meeting in December 2022 to present a proposed new monument sign. At the time, HPC commissioners recommended a smaller scale, a reduction in the area of the signage itself, color changes, and the elimination of the digital price point components of the sign. The sign design presented in December 2023 was illustrated as follows:



At the most recent meeting (9/19/23), HPC commissioners questioned why the design for the monument sign had not incorporated any of the recommendations made during the December meeting. The explanation was that based on previous experiences with hundreds of other gas stations, signage had to be of a certain size. Mr. Henry also explained that color changes to the Exxon logo may be

problematic from a corporate standpoint and that the digital price point signage was necessary for safety.

As previously noted, the proposed sign is 9'-4" high and 10'-0" wide with 42 square feet of sign graphics (which include digital price point signs). It is HPC's opinion that the scale and graphics presented are not appropriate for the Historic District. Internally illuminated signs are not permitted in Chatham Borough ordinances. In addition, published HPC Design Guidelines for the Historic District state that "Internally illuminated signs are not appropriate in the Historic District."

The HPC commissioners present had many questions about the proposed design for the renovation of the building. The shape, pitch, and configuration of the roof design seemed arbitrary, and not in keeping with sloped roofs in the District. Detailing and descriptions of materials were minimal and lacked enough information to evaluate.

The storefronts appeared to be conventional commercial aluminum and glass. The proposal included awnings over the storefronts, but the shape and location of the awnings were not viewed positively by the HPC commissioners. The applicant should consider storefront solutions that are more in keeping with the objectives included in the HPC Design Guidelines.

The proposal included the use of vinyl siding for almost all vertical surfaces. HPC Design Guidelines do not recommend the use of vinyl siding but do support the use of many other composite maintenance free materials available on the market today. The commissioners noted that the proposed elevations were devoid of detail, color, and changes (breaks) in the elevations to add architectural character. The elevations were in the same plane appeared two dimensional. HPC commissions suggested the possible introduction of an architectural brick or stone water table at the bottom of the exterior walls to break up the elevations.

There were references to lighting in the proposal, but Mr. Henry had no information on what the light fixtures were, how they appeared, and how and what they illuminated.

Members of the public also presented legitimate concerns regarding existing landscaping (Specifically the welfare of existing trees located in the NW and NE corners of the property), lighting concerns and potential glare issues to neighbors, and proximity to the historic Dosenberry House located directly across the street (listed in National Register of Historic Places).

The proposal did not address the existing canopy over the fuel pumps, a problematic component of the Historic District streetscape for many years. HPC commissioners voiced their disappointment that the proposal did not include any changes in appearance for this element on the property.

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Recommendations

The HPC does not recommend approval of this submission from Danny Realty. The submission does not adequately respond to objectives included in the “Design Guidelines for Rehabilitation and New Construction” for the Main Street Historic District as published on the Chatham Borough Website. If there are subsequent submissions, said submissions must respond to these objectives and provide significantly more information and detail.

It is important to note that it is the HPC’s opinion that there are many favorable actions the property owner can take at 185 Main to improve the property’s appearance and make it more compatible with the historic fabric of Chatham Borough’s Main Street. The HPC would welcome the opportunity to work with the owner’s representatives to achieve that goal.