

Notes from Design Review Board workshop, Thursday, August 27, via Zoom

Design Review Board members present: Chairman Barbara Sassaman, Vice-chair Andrew Geel, Secretary Pete Bono and Member Pancho Cole

Town staff present: Planning Director Michele Gagnon and Assistant Planner Steve Fuller

Others present: Ian Hayse from Fogtown Brewing

Pre-application review with Fogtown Brewing — signage for space at The Criterion

Mr. Hayse explained Fogtown's approach is to try to echo and match The Criterion's aesthetic as much as possible. He had shared a document (attached in the PDF version of this file) showing three proposed sign designs, and when asked what his favorite of the three was he said the neon option. He said a simple, neon sign that was not too large would echo The Criterion's marquee but also be a nice sign in its own right.

Chairman Sassaman said the code will not allow a neon sign like the one proposed (it does allow for certain generic neon signs, such as "Open," etc.). There was discussion about an old photo, circa 1940, which appears to show a neon sign for a business in the same location where Fogtown will be setting up (the photo is also attached in the PDF version of this file).

Mr. Hayse also referenced language in the approved multi-tenant signage plan for The Criterion, which states in part that "tenants shall use colors and materials consistent with the historic nature of the Criterion Theatre building." He said he thought the historical photo showed a new neon sign would be consistent.

Mr. Bono said he believed the prohibition of neon found in the code would trump the multi-tenant signage plan. He also expressed concern about the size of the proposed sign, and Mr. Hayse said it could be made smaller if needed.

There was a discussion about how the sign would be powered, which Mr. Hayse answered, and then a discussion about other types of internally-illuminated signs and signs with halo-type lighting. Mr. Cole said he believed neon was not appropriate for Bar Harbor except on this building (the Criterion). Mr. Geel said the ordinance was pretty clear about neon, and that the marquee was grandfathered.

In response to questions, Mr. Hayse explained what Fogtown Brewing is and that it will be taking up two spaces (out of five) at The Criterion. This allows them to have up to 40 square feet of signage. Mr. Hayse said he and his business partner are trying to adopt an art deco aesthetic throughout the space to complement The Criterion. Chairman Sassaman said the board likes that, but that it can't allow neon due to the code.

Chairman Sassaman said internally illuminated letters could be used, if they were all on one sign (and not done individually) and if it met the correct ratio outlined in the ordinance.

Mr. Bono cautioned that looking too much like The Criterion might confuse potential customers. Mr. Hayse said they would consider having window decals outlining what is offered, i.e., BEER, CIDER, WINE, FOOD. He said the goal is to keep it simple. There was a discussion of matching The Criterion's font, if possible.

Mr. Hayse asked about exposed light bulbs, and Chairman Sassaman explained about the town's Dark Sky regulations. She said the key thing is that light cannot be allowed to go upward. Mr. Hayse offered one example that sort of matched the marquee sign, which the board had concerns about.

Lighting

Discussion shifted to lighting styles, including halo lighting, and how to regulate it in the ordinance. Chairman Sassaman wondered if there was a way to do halo lighting that is dark-sky compliant. There was a comment about reigning-in halo lighting so that Bar Harbor does not look like a shopping mall. Mr. Cole said he thought Fogtown would be a perfect fit for a subtle halo sign. He said he had found low-key, elegant examples of such lighting elsewhere.

Planning Director Gagnon said she did not believe the ordinance had a definition of halo lighting at present. She said perhaps a definition could be found and then a particular proposed sign itself could be linked with its compatibility with the architectural style and location. Mr. Cole said he thought each application would have to come before the board for suitability, saying, "We'll know it when we see it." Planning Director Gagnon expressed concern with such an approach. Mr. Geel said two easier criteria could be a sign's size/proportion, and how many lumens it uses.

Chairman Sassaman said she agreed with the clause that the board needed to look at any halo-style lighting/sign. She said she saw four specific things the board would need to identify or address: where would halo lighting be allowed? Where would it be prohibited? What would the allowable lumen level be? How would the sign size be determined?

Mr. Geel said that most businesses downtown have relatively little signage. He said that is part of the charm of the downtown. Mr. Bono said the character of the downtown area might not allow for some of the internally-illuminated signage the board was discussing. He asked if the board could look at best applications for signs directed toward pedestrians vs. those directed at vehicular traffic.

Chairman Sassaman referenced Hannaford, and said the board had the ability to allow it to go with a large sign because of the size of the building. She said this was also the case with the former Rain Wise building, behind the Post Office. She said in the latter case, the applicant broke its signs up into two signs.

There was a comment about signage at the Ferry Terminal, and Planning Director Gagnon said she would remind Bay Ferries that it needs to have DRB review/approval for signage.

Chairman Sassaman said she would send some lighting language to Planning Director Gagnon. Planning Director Gagnon said she would also review American Planning Association material.

Planning Director Gagnon said this would also be a good chance to put the board's current Kelvin recommendation (3,000 K or less) into the ordinance as a requirement.

Follow-up question from Fogtown

Mr. Hayse, who had remained in attendance during the discussion on lighting, said he and his business partner were considering the possibility of using the front of their space to put in a garage door. Chairman Sassaman said she thought it was likely that such a change would take the building off the National Register of Historic Places.

Mr. Hayse said he would look for ways to have such a door match the existing wall that is there, and wondered if that approach might help with the National Register issue. Mr. Cole said he felt the board would have to see a specific proposal before weighing in on it.

Returning to the subject of lighting/signage, the question was raised about a subtly backlit sign with wooden letters. Chairman Sassaman said the board would have to see a specific proposal. She said she thinks the board wants to encourage more creativity in town, while not allowing the turn in to something that looks like a shopping mall.