

**Montevallo Architectural Review Board**  
**Minutes**  
**Tuesday, May 2, 2023**  
**6:00 p.m.**  
**Parnell Memorial Library**

**Members Present:**

Veronica Bailey, Tara Brantley, Rev. Kenny Dukes, Bill Glosson, Susan Godwin, Melinda Nix, James Salter, Janice Seaman and Sherry Vallides

Guest: Mayor Rusty Nix, Steve Gilbert, Patricia Honeycutt, Councilwoman Martha Ann Eisenburg, Rene Gilbert and Amy Sturdivant & Reid Knight of 58 INC.

**Call to Order:**

A quorum was established and the meeting was called to order at 6:03 p.m.

Minutes from the April 4, 2023 meeting were read by J. Seaman. A motion was made by B. Glosson to approve the minutes with a correction; motion seconded by S. Godwin; motion passed.

**New Business:**

J. Seaman distributed copies of the Certificate of Appropriateness application. Tara Brantley stated that, according to Municipal Code 2-294 Section 2 (Content of applications), a few details are missing from the submission including:

- a. The date the owner acquired the property, purchase price and condition on date of acquisition;
- b. The number and types of adaptive uses of the property considered by the owner;
- c. Whether the property has been listed for sale, prices asked and offers received, if any;
- d. Description of the options currently held for the purchase of such property, including the price received for such option, the conditions placed upon such option and the date of expiration of such option;
- e. Replacement construction plans for the property in question and amounts expended upon such plans, and the dates of such expenditures;
- f. Financial proof of the ability to complete the replacement project, which may include but not be limited to a performance bond, a letter of credit, a trust for completion of improvements, or a letter of commitment from a financial institution; and
- g. Such information as may reasonably be required by the commission.

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Also, under section MC 2-294 Section 3(j), An application for certificate of appropriateness shall be accompanied by such drawings, photographs, plans or other documentation as may be required by the commission. J. Seaman also requested any feasibility study that was done for the hotel included in the aforementioned information.

Amy Sturdivant asked if the requested information is standard procedure for projects within the city and is it common practice to require a disclosure agreement from the owner that includes their proprietary information that is confidential in nature. J. Seaman responded that it is required for, what will be, the second request for the approval of the hotel on the site. A. Sturdivant also asked if there is any feedback, she can send back to the hotelier so that they know what the commission expects in regard to the construction set-up plans. J. Seaman said that we had other concerns and that there was another acceptable site available for construction of a hotel. T. Brantley stated that the Victory building is part of the historic district and that you just don't go and demolish a building on the National Register unless you have no other option. So, that was our concern. It's not anything against the hotel in Montevallo at all and we understand there is a need but it's the location and we just want to make sure that all other options have been exhausted before we consider demolishing a nationally registered building. That's the big concern. A. Sturdivant stated that the hotelier had considered other locations within the city and the Victory building site is the one that they chose. This can be shown when the aforementioned requested information is disclosed to the commission.

S. Godwin requested a feasibility study and an ADEM or EPA report for the property approving demolition and construction on that site. Steve Gilbert responded that the process for such reports has already been submitted and underway. J. Seaman said that she had spoken to Kristine Goddard with Shelby County Services about any restrictions that might be put on the property for construction and Ms. Goddard stated that she wouldn't know the status until she sees the new study results. Mayor Nix said that the restriction on the property was for permanent residences only and S. Gilbert confirmed this statement. S. Gilbert also stated that no dirt can be removed from the site...you can move it around and restructure it but it cannot be removed from the actual site.

J. Seaman asked A. Sturdivant if she could explain why the hotelier did not like the lot on Middle Street. A. Sturdivant explained that the investors wanted to be part of the Main Street Community. They know that Montevallo has a number of businesses that are thriving and that the town has the potential for more business and economic growth with the construction of a hotel. They really want to be a presence on Main Street so that their guests can walk right out of their door and be directly on our gorgeous Main Street. They want the parents of students and patrons in town for viewing sports or other activities, festivals and attractions to be within walking distance of their destination. Ms. Sturdivant also stated that the other properties that they were shown weren't quite large enough to accommodate the structure that they have planned. She also stated that UM showed them several sites that they had as well as other sites within the city. The Victory site matched what they were looking for according to their feasibility study.

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Councilman and Rev. K. Dukes expressed his concern and disappointment that problems with this site was never expressed when other businesses or buyers were previously interested in the building. He asked if it was a problem because the business wanting to locate there is a hotel or is there a problem selling the property to anyone? He also stated that the property on Middle Street is in a flood plain and that was a great concern to the investors. J. Seaman said that the MHPC was not included in any discussions prior to this evening. K. Dukes asked when our next meeting would be to discuss the COA after the requested information has been submitted. J. Seaman stated that we will meet in June. M. Nix also stated that a special meeting could be called before that time as well.

Mayor Nix stated that this project is an outstanding one for the economic growth of our city and that he thinks it is a good location. The hotel will bring in a lot of new tax revenue from lodging and sales tax and it sure beats what we are looking at right now with the building and that he hopes that when paperwork is finalized that this commission will move forward with the project.

Meeting guest, Patricia Honeycutt, stated that, as a member of the Montevallo Main Street Board, a member of the community for her entire life and had a grandfather that was mayor for eighteen years, she has participated in conversations with visitors and members of Alabama Main Street that it is frustrating that there is no place in town for persons to stay for lodging before/after meetings or events. People have to leave Montevallo for lodging and that their tax dollars for food and other expenses go to other surrounding municipalities. She stated that she knows that there is a bed and breakfast and other Airbnb properties listed within the city but there isn't enough space in those establishments to house a large number of people. She stated that she would like to see money that is going to Alabaster and Calera stay in Montevallo.

S. Godwin asked P. Honeycutt, as a member of Main Street, was the lot on Middle Street considered distasteful to her or would Main Street be ok with another site in town. P. Honeycutt stated that Main Street would most certainly prefer the location at the Victory site and most certainly not on the Highway 25 corridor. Main Street wants visitors to stay, shop and dine on Main Street. She also stated that the hotelier is willing to work with the MHPC to ensure that the building meets the requirements for the historic district and that we should give them a chance to do that. She also said that with all of the current and additional sports that are going on at UM, Stephens Park and Orr Park, the Victory site is more convenient for all of those locations.

J. Seaman stated that she felt the Middle Street lot had a better view and would be a better location. S. Gilbert replied that that area is still in a FEMA flood plain and that the city has not been presented with any other paperwork stating otherwise. The fact that it is still in a flood plain is one of the main reasons that the investors were not interested in that site. S. Gilbert stated that he has spoken with the owners of that property and asked them to supply him any updated documents that state that that property is no longer in a FEMA flood plain.

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K. Dukes stated that he is a member of the National NAACP and that they will be bringing 10,000 people to UM for a National Conference this summer on June 24-25<sup>th</sup> and that there is no place in Montevallo for those attendees to stay. Everyone is having to book in Hoover and Downtown Birmingham. Alabaster, Calera and Pelham couldn't even provide enough housing for the large number of visitors coming for the event. He said it would have been nice to have a place for some of them to stay here in town. This event will be a reoccurring event and it would be nice to be able offer some lodging in the future.

Mayor Nix responded that the Victory building, itself, is not a historic building. It is a contributing building within the historic district. He reminded everyone that, with the building being added on to and the exterior façade being changed a few times, it has lost its historic integrity. He stated that if Montevallo First Baptist Church couldn't be considered a building in the downtown historic district because the front exterior staircase had been changed, the Victory building also should not be considered a historic building. P. Honeycutt stated that, if the Victory building still looked like the original brick building, she doesn't think anyone in town would want it destroyed but that building has been long gone. Right now, she considers it an eye sore.

Meeting guest, Rene Gilbert asked how many commission members have actually walked through the Victory building as it stands? She stated that she comes from a construction and masonry family and she walked through the building not long ago. Having grown up on building sites and gaining knowledge from her family, it's entirely possible that any type of work on the interior or exterior of the building could cause it to start crumbling. The plaster that was placed on the original bricks on the building modified it. She stated that she thought that building has served its purpose to the community. She stated that Mr. Reynold's built a store there and that store eventually closed and a car dealership/garage opened in that spot and it was modified to meet the needs of the new business. R. Gilbert has been in Montevallo for forty years and she said that the Victory building has always been a car dealership or auto repair center since she has been a resident. She says the building is an eye sore on Main Street and she would like to see something built there that would benefit the community.

J. Seaman said that the drawings submitted by Cobblestone did not resemble something appropriate for a historic district. M. Nix stated that the promotional booklet was an example of what they had produced in the past. K. Dukes spoke to the fact that, in meetings with the mayor and city council, Cobblestone said that they were open to working with the MHPC to make sure the new structure blended in to the historic district and that they were impressed with what the Dollar General on 119 looks like and that they understand what will be expected from them.

J. Seaman stated that she has had potential buyers for the Victory building. One of them wanted to put a Harley Davidson co-op and club in the building along with a restaurant.

T. Brantley stated that she understands about visitors coming to visit Montevallo and that there is no available lodging but, without viewing a feasibility study, she asked what the number of visitors to our city every week and projected occupancy of the hotel would be. A. Sturdivant responded

that, of the two possible hoteliers interested in bringing a hotel to Montevallo, Cobblestone was the group that responded the best to the willingness to work with the MHPC and that had a hotel footprint that aligned with the needs of our community. R. Knight of 58 INC. stated that there was a feasibility study that was done at the beginning of 2023 that looked at four comparable hotels. Two of those hotels were in Calera and the other two in Alabaster. Those four were selected because they were mid-scale hotels and were the most similar to those under operation of Cobblestone. The numbers that were adjusted to “break even” amounts were found to be at 54% occupancy rate. What he found interesting about UM involvement in booking hotel rooms was that UM projected that they would need at least 10,000 room nights per year. If you equate that to a 55-room hotel, that’s almost 50%- or six-months occupancy and that’s just to break even. He went on to say that it is even more compelling that those data points in comparison to other hotels, on average, for the past three years including the year of 2020 hotels still had an occupancy rate of 60%. Knowing that this would be a new hotel on a Main Street, he feels that this particular hotel would be in a better position to have a higher occupancy rate, especially since UM will have at least 50% of the rooms booked as soon as it receives its certificate of occupancy. A. Sturdivant reported that Cobblestone Hotels has had many meetings with Dr. Stewart at UM and they have had conversations and prepared estimates of real time occupancy rates.

S. Godwin asked A. Sturdivant if there have been any discussions with Dr. Stewart and UM about purchasing land to build a hotel that would be beneficial to them. A. Sturdivant restated that UM has shown the hotelier sites on UM property but they were all rejected. Godwin asked if Sturdivant knew what it was about those sites that were unappealing other than the fact the sites were not on Main Street. She said that the main purpose of the hotel was to be on Main Street within walking distance of Montevallo businesses.

Mayor Nix said that everyone needs to keep in mind that Cobblestone is investing nine million of their own dollars into this project. They have done their homework and are a successful hotel chain. He said that he doesn’t think that Cobblestone would just throw away that much money on a business expecting that it would fail.

R. Knight stated that he wanted to remind everyone that Cobblestone Hotels is coming in to this project knowing that they will have to work with the MHPC and are willing to do so. Mr. Knight asked what kind of features the MHPC was looking for the new building to incorporate to blend in with the downtown historic district. What would the MHPC need to see to be happy with new construction? J. Seaman responded plans and specs and the planned façade is what we are most interested in. A. Sturdivant asked what in particular could she send as feedback as it relates to the façade. M. Nix responded that she felt like the building would need to seamlessly fit into our downtown with brick features, resemble the current buildings in the district, maybe work in some cobblestone features that our city and UM are known for, historical lighting and signage, utilize materials from the original building on the inside to exhibit the historical nature of the site of the building and for the building to stay in scale of our current downtown district.

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The Commission reviewed Cobblestone's printed presentation that Steve Gilbert provided. It was noted that Cobblestone Hotels has a location in Cullman, Alabama and two other hotels in the infant stages in the state

Meeting adjourned at 7:08 p.m.

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