

ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW REPORT

Referral by City Planner to Historic District Commission  
Meeting of July 20, 2023

Permit: Sign Permit #23-987

Location: 43 The Green, Dover  
Located on property addressed as 45 The Green, inside fence next to John Bell House.

Tax Parcel: ED-05-077.09-05-29.00-000

File Number: HI-23-03

Present Zoning: RG-O (General Residence & Office Zone)  
H (Historic District Zone)

Referral of Permit:

The following application **Sign Permit #23-987** for 43 The Green is referred by the City Planner to the Historic District Commission for consultation regarding the issuance of the Architectural Review Certificate for a Sign Permit. Applications for certain types of construction activity within the Historic District Zone (H) are reviewed by the City Planner (or Staff as designated) for Architectural Review Certification as part of the Building Permit application review process. Staff is referring the Permit for review under the provisions of *Zoning Ordinance*, Article 10 Section 3.22(A) and (B). See below.

Section 3.22 Architectural review certification by the city planner.

- (A) An architectural review certificate for specific classes of building permits, including Signs, signs, siding, window and door replacement, roofing, the addition or replacement of decorative features, minor demolition, residential additions, and other construction of a minor nature, may be issued by the city planner, after a review and determination that the proposed construction is in general accordance with the standards set forth in subsection 3.25.
- (B) The city planner may refer any permit application for demolition or construction in the historic district for consultation with commission.

Permit Proposal:

Sign Permit #23-987 was filed on June 15, 2023 for a sign project at 43 The Green, Dover, Delaware. The Project outlined in the Permit submission involves placement of Kiosk sign inside the fence at 45 The Green with a locking faux wood plastic cabinet to post informational posters and flyers relating to activities with the First State Heritage Park. This location is a fenced yard area located between the John Bell House building and the adjacent state owned brick building to the east. The yard is actually part of the adjacent parcel at 45 The Green.

The project site is located within the local Historic District Zone (H) and subject to the provisions of the *Zoning Ordinance*, Article 3 §21 and referenced sections. This building is also located within the boundaries of a National Register Historic District, specifically the Dover Green Historic District.

Staff Review of Permit for Architectural Review Certification:

Project activities are reviewed for compliance with the *Zoning Ordinance* and the *Design Standards and Guidelines for the City of Dover Historic District Zone* as stated in *Zoning Ordinance*, Article 10 Section 3.25(A).

**3.25 Architectural review standards.**

(A) An architectural review certificate may be issued if it is found that the architectural style, general design, height, bulk and setbacks, arrangement, location and materials and structures affecting the exterior appearance are generally in harmony with neighboring structures and complementary to the traditional architectural standards of the historic district as set forth in the historic district design guidelines and standards adopted by the planning commission and as set forth in the United States Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

The current proposed location of this sign is in the “public view”, and it is deemed visible from the public ways of the adjacent street (The Green). Public view is defined in the *Zoning Ordinance* as “that which can be seen readily from a public street, public building or public property, excluding views from alley rights-of-way.”

In reviewing the proposed project for Architectural Review Certification, Staff referenced the last section of Chapter 5: Storefronts and Signage of the *Design Standards and Guidelines for the City of Dover Historic District Zone* which presents the Recommended, Not Recommended, and Inappropriate approaches to Signage in the Historic District. While plastic signs are not recommended, the signposts will have a faux wood color and texture. This is an informational kiosk rather than an advertisement to attract more business.

Listed under inappropriate are:

Signs that are clearly unsympathetic to the character of the building. This sign is a simple design often found at State and National parks.

Also listed as inappropriate are signs that obscure significant historic features. This sign will not be attached to a building. Directly behind the proposed location of the sign is a building addressed and facing Federal Street. The proposed sign is 9 square feet and would only obscure a small portion of the back of the building at 410 Federal Street (Kent County Court House).

Hanging, projecting and freestanding signs were typical of Colonial and Federal periods of architecture. The John Bell house is an example of Georgian Colonial architecture, built between 1743-1772. This freestanding sign would then be appropriate.

This sign is not of an earlier time period than the John Bell House or the nearby Old State House. It would not be mistaken for a sign of the same time period as the buildings surrounding it. It will not be back lit or visually assertive.

This request should be reviewed for conformity with the design criteria and development guidelines found in the *Design Standards and Guidelines for the City of Dover Historic District Zone*. Specifically, Chapter 5 Storefronts and Signage of the *Design Standards and Guidelines for the City of Dover Historic District Zone*.

#### Historic District Commission Action

The Historic District Commission should consider the proposal for the Sign Permit project and take action in regard to the Architectural Review Certification for the Sign Permit #23-987. The Historic District Commission may add conditions for the Sign to comply with the character of the property within the Historic District.

#### Staff Findings from Review of Sign Permit:

Staff findings and recommendations are summarized as follows for the proposed sign project as presented in Permit #23-987 and accompanying documents.

1. Sign Location: The proposed sign is to be located between the John Bell House and the Sykes Building, inside the fence line. The parcel it would be on is addressed as 45 The Green. Nearby the Old State House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Dover Green Historic District is a national historic district added to the National Register of Historic Places. The Green is also part of the First State National Historical Park run by the National Park Service.
2. Sign Visibility: The Sign would be visible from the sidewalk on The Green. This Sign is subject to Architectural Review Certification.
3. Sign Height – 6.31 ft. tall from ground level: The *Design Standards and Guidelines* do not give guidelines for stand-alone sign required heights. The *Zoning Ordinance* Article 5 § 4.7 states that an Urban Collector road classification sign for a non-residential use adjacent to a residential can have a maximum height of 7 feet. The maximum square footage for this classification is 32 square feet. This sign is proposed as 9 square feet. The setback from the property line for the sign should be 5 feet. However, Staff recommends allowing the sign (informational kiosk) to be placed closer to the fence (reducing the setback) to allow ease of reading the information posted in the bulletin board.
4. Sign Material: The proposed signposts and cabinet are to be made of recycled plastic made to look like wood. This provides weather resistance and long wear. The cabinet front will be clear high-density polyethylene. There are weep holes inside the cabinet to prevent buildup of condensation and to allow for water drainage. The back of the inside of the cabinet is natural cork. While construction material is a composite plastic material, careful selection of color/surface texture can give the appearance of wood.

#### Advisory Comments and Recommendations:

1. The applicant shall be aware that issuance of a Sign Permit is required prior to the commencement of construction. The Sign Permit Application will be subject to the conditions of approval established and may be required to be updated if necessary, to

comply with these conditions established through the Architectural Review Certification process.

Attachments:

- Letter of Referral Notice to Applicant dated July 12, 2023
- Building Permit #23-987 Application Form and Permit submission documents
- *Design Standards and Guidelines for the City of Dover Historic District Zone*, Chapter 5 page 5-5 through 5-8.