



Community Development Department

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STAFF MEMO

To: Planning Commission
From: Andrew Levins, Land Use Planning Consultant
Date: October 7, 2024
Subject: Application for variance from historic design review requirements

BACKGROUND:

On September 26, 2024, Joelle Gibson submitted an application for a variance from certain requirements of Snoqualmie Municipal Code (“SMC”) Chapter 17.35 establishing the palette of approved colors within Historic Downtown Snoqualmie (“Historic District”) for a building located at 8050 Railroad Avenue in Downtown Snoqualmie. According to the King County Landmarks and Heritage Commission, 8050 Railroad Avenue is designated as a non-contributing structure. Pursuant to SMC 17.35.120.B.2, any exterior alteration to a non-contributing structure that is not identified as a Type I project is a Type II project. The Planning Commission, acting as the Snoqualmie Landmark and Heritage Commission, reviews applications for Type II projects and variances from requirements applicable to Type II projects (SMC 17.35.150.C). Per SMC 17.35.150.C, a variance from the requirements may be considered when “if the applicant demonstrates the need for such a variance; and provided, that the request is in keeping with the intent and purposes of [SMC 17.35].”

An application for a variance from Historic District requirements is a Category IV permit (SMC 14.30), requiring a notice of application and comment period, a public hearing, and decision by the Planning Commission. The SMC directs the Planning Commission to take the following factors into consideration with respect to decisions on variances from Historic District requirements:

1. The extent to which the project would adversely affect the character of the building or the overall historic district;
2. The reasonableness of the proposed project in light of other alternatives available to achieve the objectives of the owner and the applicant; and
3. The extent to which the proposed variance may be necessary to meet the requirements of a law or regulation, such as the building code, including the Washington State Barrier Free regulations, the Model Toxic Control Act or the Flood Hazard regulations.

The City maintains a list of approved colors, as defined by SMC 17.35.040.C, to be used for both contributing and non-contributing structures within the Historic District (see Attachment 1). The current

application seeks a variance from the approved colors and proposes to paint the exterior of the non-contributing structure according to the palette identified in Attachment 2.

ANALYSIS:

The applicant indicated the variance request would not adversely affect the character of the building or the overall Historic District because it would renovate the exterior of the building by refreshing the paint color. According to the application, the proposed colors are complementary to the businesses located within the building, which contains Wild Hare Antiques and will contain Carousel Candy. The applicant has also indicated that the variance request is reasonable because the proposed colors are neutral and would, according to the applicant, complement the Historic District approved color scheme and the uses within the structure.

Staff analyzed the Historic District variance request against the three criteria specified by SMC 17.15.150.C. This analysis is found below:

SMC 17.15.150.C	Staff Response
The extent to which the project would adversely affect the character of the building or the overall historic district;	The applicant has proposed a color scheme consisting of three colors not found on the Historic District approved color palette. The colors proposed by the applicant consist of Lancaster Whitewash, Odessa Pink, and Van Buren Brown (“Proposed Colors”). The Proposed Colors are muted and are not fluorescent or unnecessarily bright, and are compatible with the colors of adjacent buildings and with the approved color palette. Staff has determined that the Proposed Colors, in limited applications, are not likely to adversely affect the character of the building or the Historic District as a whole.
The reasonableness of the proposed project in light of other alternatives available to achieve the objectives of the owner and the applicant; and	The application proposes to paint the exterior of a building with the Proposed Colors, which are not found in the Historic District approved color palette. The Proposed Colors may complement the uses contained by the building better than Historic District approved color palette, and would also result in a refreshed exterior appearance. Staff has determined the application is reasonable, given other alternatives and the objective of the applicant.

The extent to which the proposed variance may be necessary to meet the requirements of a law or regulation, such as the building code, including the Washington State Barrier Free regulations, the Model Toxic Control Act or the Flood Hazard regulations	The proposed variance is not necessary to meet the requirements of a law or regulation. The proposed variance does not conflict with any law or regulation known to Staff.
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The applicant’s request appears consistent with the criteria specified by SMC 17.35.150, given that the building is a non-contributing structure and the proposed color palette was selected to complement the building’s intended use as a candy store, while maintaining compatibility with the color tones and shades of other buildings within the Historic District and the approved color palette. Per WAC 197-11-800(6)(e), the application is SEPA exempt.

RECOMMENDATION AND PROPOSED FINDINGS:

Staff recommends the Planning Commission **APPROVE** the application for a variance from the approved color palette requirements for the non-contributing building located at 8050 Railroad Avenue in historic downtown Snoqualmie. Staff recommends the Planning Commission adopt the following findings as part of its approval:

1. The Planning Commission, acting as the Snoqualmie Landmark and Heritage Commission, may consider variances from the strict application of the standards of SMC 17.35 if the applicant demonstrates a need for the variance and the request is in keeping with the purposes of SMC 17.35.
2. The Planning Commission has reviewed the application against the criteria for Historic District variances described in SMC 17.35.150.C and found the application is consistent with the review criteria.
3. Lancaster Whitewash (HC-174), Odessa Pink (HC-59), and Van Buren Brown (HC-70) align with the tone, brightness, and saturation qualities found in the Historic District’s approved color palette. The Proposed Colors may be used in limited applications, such as on a single non-contributing building, while maintaining consistency with other buildings in the Historic District and without adversely affecting the character of the building or overall Historic District.
4. The variance request is reasonable, given the applicant’s objective to utilize a color palette that is complementary to the intended use of the site.

NEXT STEPS:

1. Provide feedback on the application. The public hearing required for the application is tentatively scheduled for October 21, 2024 with the Snoqualmie Planning Commission.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Approved Color Palette for Historic Downtown Snoqualmie
2. Applicant’s Proposed Color Palette
3. Application Package