

**CITY OF LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN  
CITY PLAN COMMISSION  
REPORT  
April 3, 2017**

➤ **AGENDA ITEM - 17-0321 (Tim Acklin)**

AN ORDINANCE to amend Section 115-320(e)(2)(b) of the Code of Ordinances of the City of La Crosse regulating window openings on commercial facades in the Downtown Commercial Historic District.

➤ **ROUTING:** J&A Committee, Public Hearing 4/4/17 7:30 p.m.

➤ **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

The proposed ordinance amendment is in response to multiple Orders to Correct issued by the Fire Inspection and Building Safety Department to building owners in the Downtown Local Historic District for non-permitted siding materials in window openings. The buildings located in this district are subject to historic design standards when doing any renovations or modifications to the exterior. In this instance the building owners were not permitted to fill the window opening with anything other than a window. A few owners appeared before the Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) to explain their reasons for wanting to install other materials but the Heritage Preservation Commission did not feel that the current ordinance allowed them the discretion or flexibility to permit that and denied their requests. There was an immediate effort to amend the current Ordinance to allow for greater flexibility with this standard whether it is other materials that are permitted or allowing the HPC the ability to approve other materials on case by case basis.

The original ordinance that was introduced to the Council was a collaborative effort by staff, Downtown Mainstreet Inc, and Council Member James Cherf. This amendment still required that windows had to be installed on street facing facades, but allowed for brick, cement siding, or shutters to be permitted materials on street viewable and rear facades. Any other proposed materials would be allowed only at the approval of the HPC. This ordinance is attached as part of the legislation.

At their March 16, 2017 meeting the HPC reviewed the Ordinance and revised the amendment to remove any other permitted materials on the street viewable and rear facades and make any proposed materials other than a window approved solely at their discretion. A copy of their amended ordinance is attached as part of the legislation.

➤ **GENERAL LOCATION:**

Downtown Local Historic District. See attached **MAP PC17-0321**

➤ **RECOMMENDATION OF OTHER BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS:**

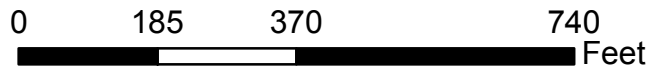
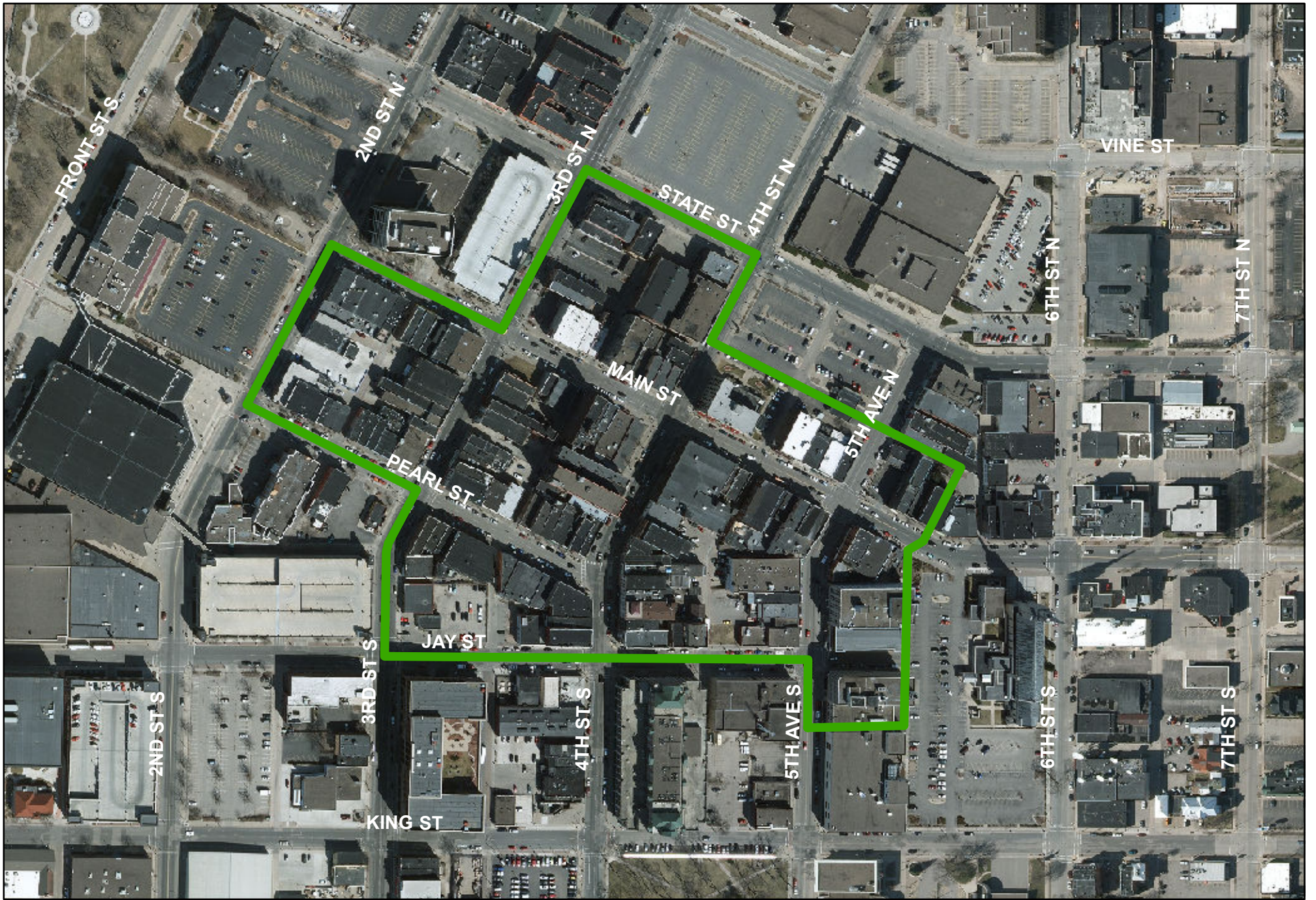
The Heritage Preservation Commission recommended approval of the proposed amended ordinance at their March 16, 2017 Meeting.

➤ **CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN:**

N/A

➤ **PLANNING RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff is in support of an Ordinance that allows building owners at least an option to request something other than a window in their window openings on non-street facing facades. Certain circumstances may exist that would preclude the need or ability to install a window such as interior renovations that block off a previous opening. Both proposed ordinances allow for this flexibility. The HPC argued against having other materials listed as permitted materials as they may not be compatible with the architectural character and style of the building, which is direct contrast with the intent of having design standards to begin with. The debate with this issue comes down to whether the facades that are hardly seen are as important as the facades that face the street. Staff believes that they are as more and more of the alleys are being used for upper floor uses. The Court Above Main is a prime example of this. Parking for this use is located in the Market Street Parking Ramp and customers then walk through the alley to get to the entrance. The Downtown, particularly the historic core, is a major asset to the economic vitality of La Crosse and the effort to maintain its character should somewhat extend to all the facades of its buildings. In an effort to support this stance the Planning Department has been working with DMI to create a Facade Improvement Grant Program for the Downtown that building owners will be able to apply for to help with the cost of any such improvements that may be required as a result. Staff believes that it is important to support the standards that are in place as they were created to maintain the historic look and feel of the Downtown, but understands the need for some flexibility due to other circumstances. The Ordinance proposed by the HPC achieves both. **The Ordinance as amended by the Heritage Preservation Commission is recommended for approval.**



**PC 17-0321**