

IN THE MATTER OF	*	BEFORE THE
THE APPLICATION OF	*	HOWARD COUNTY
CHRISTA KERRIGAN		
FOR A CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL	*	HISTORIC PRESERVATION
TO MAKE EXTERIOR ALTERATIONS	*	COMMISSION
AT 8360 COURT AVENUE	*	Case No. 25-39
ELLCOTT CITY, MARYLAND		

* * * * *

DECISION AND ORDER

Pursuant to Title 16, Subtitle 6, of the Howard County Code, notice having been properly published, the Historic Preservation Commission (“Commission”) convened a public hearing on October 23, 2025, to hear and consider the application of Christa Kerrigan on behalf of Michael Graves Architecture (“Applicant”), for a Certificate of Approval to make exterior alterations at 8360 Court Avenue, Ellicott City, Maryland (the “Subject Property”).

The Commission members present were Julianne Danna, Erica Zoren and Ben Barlow.

The following documents, incorporated into the record by reference, are applicable to this case: (1) the appropriate provisions of the Howard County Charter and the Howard County Code, including the Howard County Zoning Regulations; (2) the General Plan for Howard County; (3) the application for a Certificate of Approval and associated records on file with the Commission (the “Application”); (4) the Agenda for the October 23, 2025 Commission meeting (the “Agenda”); (5) the Ellicott City Historic District Design Guidelines, May, 1998 (the “Design Guidelines” or “Guidelines”); and

(6) the general design guidelines listed in Rule 107 of the Commission's Rules of Procedure.

SUMMARY OF THE PROCEEDINGS

Ms. Samantha Holmes, Staff to the Commission, presented the Application, identifying the work proposed by the Applicant for which approval is requested, and the Staff's recommendation and the basis for the recommendation. Copies of Staff's recommendation and the Application were provided to each Commission member and reviewed with the Commission by Ms. Holmes. The Applicant represented herself at the hearing.

I. TESTIMONY

Ms. Danna swore in Brandon Love, Christa Kerrigan and Bill Brown. Ms. Kerrigan said it was publicly announced that the new name of the center will be the "Capitoline Center," and verbally amended the application to replace the placeholder "Community Center" verbiage with the official name.

Ms. Zoren asked if the lighting was dimmable on the front entrance sign. Ms. Kerrigan said the sign will be front lit and the lighting will sit on the shelf and shine up on it. She said right now there is one setting and did not believe the light had a dimmable setting. Ms. Zoren said the Guidelines are clear to not have neon or internally lit signs. She explained that she knew that was not the look they were going for, but wanted to make sure that the lit could be dimmed in the event the light was installed and was too bright. Ms. Zoren wanted to make sure they did not make the sign look like internally lit letters. Ms. Kerrigan explained that they knew internally lit letters could not be used, so this was their

solution for how to comply with the Guidelines. Mr. Brown said the light is not dimmable, but they should be able to set the illumination level when installing the lighting.

Ms. Danna then swore in Zach Hollenbeck.

Ms. Danna questioned how far the monument address sign would be in relation to the sidewalk. Ms. Kerrigan said the monument address sign would be about 4 feet from the building and another 4 feet from the sidewalk. The Commission and Applicant discussed the design and siting of the monument address sign. Ms. Kerrigan explained the monument address sign would sit in the landscape bed with low landscaping around it. Ms. Kerrigan explained there was nowhere else on the front of the building where the address was posted. Ms. Kerrigan also explained that because the new entry portico is vertical and aligned, they decided a freestanding column-style sign would be the most appropriate next to the tall metal silver panel columns.

With testimony completed, the Commission moved to deliberations.

II. COMMISSION DELIBERATIONS

During deliberations, Ms. Danna said she was fine with the design of the monument address sign, agreeing that the streets near the courthouse are all confusing and it would be helpful to have the street name in addition to the address number.

Mr. Barlow liked the vertical signage on the monument address sign and did not see a way to design it differently. Mr. Barlow said his main concern would be managing the brightness of the light and the ability to adjust the light. Regarding the monument address sign, Mr. Barlow said that when reviewing the Guidelines for square footage of signs, there are no comparable buildings regarding the enormous size of the building. Mr. Barlow also

said the sizing seems consistent with the Guideline recommendations for allowing more sign area for larger buildings.

Ms. Zoren liked the building sign and wall sign. She advised using a light where the brightness could be controlled. She was concerned about the height of the monument address sign since it would be above the ramp to the left and the sidewalk to the right and viewed at about 7 feet. However, she said the sign looked good and was in-scale with the building, so in this instance it may be okay. Ms. Zoren said the square footage was fine, and the height may be fine because there was an enormous building located behind the sign.

Ms. Danna was concerned with the size of the monument address sign. She thought the entry portico and wall signs were good and said the installation in the mortar would have minimal impact on the wall. She thought the size of the monument address sign was large, but said that given the size of the building, the sign should be large to ensure visibility for emergency situations. Mr. Barlow said the Guidelines contemplate signs being in proportion to the size of the building and there are no comparable structures in size in Ellicott City. He said that if the sign was smaller, the building would overwhelm it and to have a sign that is going to be useful, it has to be in scale with the building.

Ms. Danna asked Ms. Kerrigan for clarification on whether the monument address sign was double-sided. Ms. Kerrigan said that it was double-sided so it could be seen by people coming up the hill.

III. THE APPLICANT'S AMENDMENT TO THE APPLICATION

The Applicant said it was publicly announced that the new name of the center is "Capitoline Center" and verbally amended the application to reflect the new name.

IV. MOTION

Mr. Barlow moved to approve the application as amended. Ms. Zoren seconded. The motion was unanimously approved by a vote of three (3) to zero (0).

FINDINGS OF FACT

Based upon the evidence in the record, the Commission makes the following findings of fact:

I. THE SUBJECT PROPERTY

This property is located in the Ellicott City Historic District. The original Courthouse building is listed on the Historic Sites Inventory as HO-51 and dates to 1841-1843, with later additions dating to 1938 and 1986. The 1986 addition became the main entryway to the Courthouse. Oak Lawn (HO-284, circa 1840) is a historic house that was retained and incorporated into the 1986 addition.

The former Howard County Circuit Courthouse has been vacant since the construction of the new Courthouse at Bendix Road and Judicial Way and will be repurposed to become a center for arts, culture, and history.

In June 2024, in case number HPC-24-23, the Applicant received pre-application advice on the proposed exterior alterations associated with the adaptive reuse of the Courthouse. The Commission advised using black metal instead of gold for the light fixtures and commended the Applicant for the juxtaposition of materials and pops of color highlighting the entrance.

In December 2024, in case number HPC-24-64, the Applicant received a Certificate of Approval to make various exterior alterations, such as the construction of a new building entrance and updating the existing building entrance colonnade and open-air arcade area.

II. THE PROPOSED SCOPE OF WORK

The Applicant proposes to install three signs on the building/site:

A. Primary Building Signage

The new primary building signage will read, “Capitoline Center.” It will be black powder coated aluminum individual letters pin mounted to the vertical face of the new canopy (approved in HPC-24-64). The application explains that the letters will not be lit from behind or internally lit but will instead be lit from within a “shelf” that will rest below the primary lettering.

The sign dimensions are approximately 2’-4” tall by 11’-0” wide by 3” deep. The center shelf holding the lighting will be 12” deep. The larger lettering will be 3” deep and 15” tall, with an overall square footage of approximately 13 square feet. The smaller lettering will be 1” deep and 8” tall, with an overall square footage of approximately 2.5 square feet. The total square footage will be approximately 15.5 square feet.

B. Monument Address Sign

The proposed monument address sign will be a concrete vertical reinforced slab wrapped with a metal panel, mounted on stand-offs about 1” deep on both sides of the sign, and will read “8360 Court Ave.” The concrete will not be tinted a color. The metal panel will be black aluminum with cut out lettering. The sign will contain the building address and read vertically “8360 Court Ave”. The overall dimensions of the concrete slab and aluminum sign are approximately 5’-0” tall by 2’-0” wide x 2’-0” deep. Each building number will be 8” tall and each letter in the street name will be 4” tall, oriented vertically. The sign will be approximately 10 square feet. The sign will be lit from the ground on both sides. The lighting fixture will be the Graze Compact Powercore gen2.

C. SW Corner/Retaining Wall Sign

The SW corner sign will be mounted into the mortar of the granite retaining wall at the intersection of Court Avenue and Court Place, below the original section of the Courthouse, and will read “Capitoline Center.” The sign will be a powder coated black aluminum sign, pin mounted to the mortar. The sign will be 1’-6” tall by 12’-0” wide and 2” deep. The larger letter will be 10” tall and the smaller lettering will be 6” tall. The overall square footage will be approximately 12 square feet.

The sign will be illuminated from a light mounted above the sign, hung from the top of the retaining wall to avoid damage to the stone wall cap. The lighting fixture will be the Graze Compact Powercore gen2.

III. THE STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Prior to the October 23, 2025 Commission meeting, Staff reviewed the Application, all materials submitted in support thereof, and all relevant Guidelines. Having done so, Staff included in the Agenda a detailed report summarizing the Application, restating the relevant Guidelines, and providing the Commission with recommendations based on the application of the Guidelines to the Applicant’s proposed scope of work (the “Staff Report”)¹. At the hearing, the Staff Report was made a part of the record without objection or amendment by any party and is hereby incorporated by reference into these Findings of Fact as though fully set forth herein.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

Based upon the foregoing Findings of Fact, the Commission concludes as follows:

¹ See the Agenda at pp. 21-27.

I. STANDARDS OF REVIEW

The standards of review for an application for a Certificate of Approval are set forth in Section 16.607 of the Howard County Code and require consideration of:

- (1) The historic, architectural, or archaeological value or significance of the structure and its relationship to historic value of the surrounding area.
- (2) The relationship of the exterior architectural features of such structure to the remainder of the structure and to the surrounding area.
- (3) The general compatibility of exterior design, scale, proportion, arrangement, texture and materials proposed to be used.
- (4) Whether the requested action is necessary to protect against threats to public safety.
- (5) Any other factors, including aesthetic factors, which the Commission deems to be pertinent.

Section 16.607(c) of the Howard County Code further provides:

It is the intent of this subtitle that the Commission be strict in its judgment of plans for contributing structures. It is also the intent of this subtitle that the Commission shall be lenient in its judgment of plans for structures of little historic value or plans for new construction, except where such plans would seriously impair the historic or architectural value of surrounding structures or the surrounding area. It is not the intent of this subtitle to limit new construction, alteration, or repairs to the architectural style of any one period.

Section 16.607(d) of the Howard County Code authorizes the Commission to adopt guidelines for its review of applications based on the standards set forth in the Code. Pursuant to this authority, the Commission has adopted the Ellicott City Historic District Design Guidelines. Given the Applicant’s proposed scope of work, the Application will be evaluated in accordance with the recommendations found in Chapter 6 of the Guidelines.

II. APPLICATION OF STANDARDS

Applying these standards and guidelines to the Subject Property, the Commission finds that it contributes to Ellicott City’s historic significance. Consequently, in reviewing the Application, the Commission will be strict in its judgment. The Commission finds that the Applicant’s proposal would not impair the historic or architectural value of the

surrounding area. The Commission finds that the proposal is consistent with the Guidelines. The evidence supports this conclusion.

As is more fully detailed in the Application and restated in the Findings of Fact at Section II (The Proposed Scope of Work), the Applicant seeks approval to install three signs, two of which will contain the building name using a simple sans serif font, and a third that will contain the building's street address.

Except for their size, the design and materials of all three proposed signs are fully compliant with the recommendations contained in Chapter 11.A of the Guidelines.

The signs all use simple, legible words and graphics, either identifying the building by its new name or by its address, as is recommended by the Guidelines. The signs will be constructed of powder coated black aluminum, giving the appearance of iron, and will use minimal colors in accordance with the Guidelines. Specifically, the primary building sign and retaining wall sign will consist solely of black letters, and the monument address sign will be a concrete slab clad with black aluminum, with the address cut out of the aluminum resulting in lettering that appears to be unstained grey concrete, all of which is compatible with the granite color of the buildings and retaining wall. Additionally, the retaining wall sign and its affiliated light fixture will be attached to the mortar joints of the granite retaining wall as is recommended by the Guidelines.

The proposed lighting fixtures for the signs also comply with the Guidelines. The lighting for the primary building signage and the monument address sign will be indirect, concealed lighting that will minimize glare by focusing the light on the signs, in accordance with the recommendations in Chapter 11.A of the Guidelines. And while the overhead light for the retaining wall sign will not be concealed the way the other lighting fixtures are, its

style is compatible with the clean lines of the retaining wall, and it will also minimize glare by focusing the light on the sign and directional arrow, which also complies with the Guidelines.

As for the size of the signs it is important to note that while the Guidelines' recommendations focus on the placement of signs on smaller commercial buildings on Main Street with typical storefronts and address the importance of pedestrian visibility for business signs, they also recognize that signs need to be in scale with their buildings. *See* Guidelines at Chapter 11.B.1 ("Signs need to be in scale with the particular building and therefore are not uniform in size throughout the historic district. For example, the small shops of Tongue Row require smaller signs than a more massive structure such as the former Talbott Lumber Company building."). The Courthouse is the largest building in Ellicott City, and the Guidelines recognize that "more sign area is appropriate for some of Ellicott City's larger buildings" so that signs can be in scale with their building, thus limiting a sign to 8 square feet would result in an ineffective sign. *See* Guidelines at Chapter 11.B.2.

The proposed primary building signage will be located just below the roofline of the new entry portico addition, which was part of the original building plans. The sign will be approximately 15 square feet. The sign will be 11 feet wide, which fits the width of the new entry portico addition, and will be located on a building façade that is approximately 113 feet wide. Similarly, while the retaining wall sign will be approximately 12 feet in length, it will be located on a section of wall that is approximately 85 feet wide. As for the monument address sign, it will be approximately 10 square feet in area and located in a

landscape bed along Court Place, next to the front entry portico. It will be located at ground level and sized such that it will easily be visible to vehicles and pedestrians.

Accordingly, while the signage for the new Capitoline Center may be larger than is typically recommended by the Guidelines, the Commission finds that the scale of the proposed signs is proportionate to the immense size of the building and therefore concludes that the larger-than-recommended signs are appropriate under these specific circumstances.

For these reasons, including the reasons identified in the Staff Report and the reasons stated by the Commission at the hearing, the Commission concludes that the Applicant's proposed work will not impair the historic and architectural value of the surrounding area, and that the Application complies with the Guidelines and standards applicable to the Ellicott City Historic District.

ORDER AND CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, by a vote of 3 to 0, it is this 12 day of December, 2025, **ORDERED**, that the Applicant's request for a Certificate of Approval to make exterior alterations at the Subject Property, is **APPROVED AS AMENDED**.

DS
BB

HOWARD COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Signed by:
Julianne Danna
2AEDC0229A59492...

Julianne Danna, Chair

ABSENT

Ellen Flynn Giles, Vice-Chair

ABSENT

Cathy Allen

Signed by:
[Signature]
FFF10F2A288F427

Ben Barlow

DocuSigned by:
Erica Zoren
025B1E868AA8439

Erica Zoren

APPROVED for Form and Legal Sufficiency:

HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF LAW

Signed by:
Mark D. Beaumont
0D37C4EBA51C4C3...

Mark D. Beaumont
Senior Assistant County Solicitor

ANY PERSON AGGRIEVED BY THIS DECISION AND ORDER/CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL MAY APPEAL THE DECISION TO THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR HOWARD COUNTY WITHIN THIRTY DAYS OF THE DATE OF THIS DECISION.