

Columbia Borough

Heather Zink, Council President

308 Locust Street

Columbia, Pa 17512

September 4, 2020

After serving many years on the Historical Architectural Review Board, I don't see how Columbia's Historic District moves forward after the recent Borough Council decision. The recent Council decision to approve materials that do not meet the Secretary of the interiors standard creates a precedent that does not allow the HARB to function properly from this point forward. I requested some communication with legal counsel as HARB chairman concerning several questions about this decision, but I never heard anything back from them on the topic. However, the discussion by Council and the mayor was even more disturbing than the decision. I heard talk about modernizing the ordinance, which is pretty much in direct conflict with the intention of the ordinance. You either have a historic district or you don't. I also can't believe a Councilman declared that a landlord should get a free pass, because they have more invested. I have based every one of my HARB decisions on the notion of equal and fair treatment to anyone who came before our board. The notion that someone who owns more should get to do whatever they want is offensive to me. It's my opinion that the residents of Columbia Borough should be outraged that their elected official believes that the "have's" should get more rights and liberties than the "have not's". Residents should be calling for the resignation of that Councilman and anyone else who believes in "special" treatment or voted for their friend, rather than uphold the written the ordinance or precedents already set. Out of respect for every previous HARB applicant that didn't get the friend or "have's" benefit, I am furnishing my resignation effective immediately.

Thank you,

Glen Schaeffer

Columbia Borough

Heather Zink, Council President

308 Locust Street

Columbia, PA 17512

September 4, 2020

Heather,

I've been a member of HARB for 17 years, the longest seated voting member since the inception in 2002. In that time, members have come and gone, including the professional seats. Council members too have come and gone during this time. A few have been vocally opposed to historic preservation. One so much that he drove a campaign against HARB, receiving enough support to water down the ordinance to be all but meaningless. In 2018, a decade later, we finally had a majority of council, whose support was enough help change the ordinance, giving it back some of the strength it had lost many years ago.

It's been well over a decade since the board's had the pleasure of having a registered architect. In early 2017 HARB was surprised to know that a registered architect, Ted Vedock, would be joining our board. Over the next three years, application after application and with Ted's input, our board was elevated to a standard higher than we had experienced before. Having an architect, one of Ted's caliber, who also has an affinity for historic preservation, not only benefitted the HARB but also rewarded many applicants with a better project. After all, what is a Historical Architectural Review Board, without the expertise of an architect?

Well I'm left answering that question for myself, in light of Ted's resignation early this morning, dated 9-3-2020. In reading his letter, I completely share his sentiments, frustration and agree with his view of Columbia's leadership. Furthermore, I have no interest in entertaining discussions of changes that would further weaken the Historic District Ordinance. Moving forward I do not see, after last Tuesdays council meeting and vote, how Columbia can hold any applicant to a higher standard than the very low one set by 3 members of council and the mayor.

After seeing what our board had become over the past three years, I'm unwilling to remain a member of a lesser board, with the resignation of Ted. Nor am I willing to deny any applicant the ability to use materials that council and the mayor have already set a precedent for use. This leaves me with no other option than to ask that you accept my resignation immediately.

Regards,

Elaine M. Beckley

Ms. Heather Zink
Columbia Borough Council President
308 Locust Street
Columbia, PA 17512

September 3, 2020

Ms. Zink,

In February 2017, I was recruited by several preservation-minded former Council members to fill the vacant registered architect seat on the HARB. I was happy to volunteer my time and offer any expertise I may have gained in my 23 years of working in the architectural field, specializing in working with historic buildings.

This was not my first time serving on a historic architectural review board. I knew quite well that these are challenging positions in the best of times, even when they enjoy full support of their efforts.

The recent discussions at Council meetings regarding the property at 24-26 South Second Street, and the Council decision to overturn HARB's decision with regard to this property clearly illustrates the lack of support that Columbia Borough's leadership has for the HARB, their local historic districts and the preservation of Columbia's remaining historic fabric in general.

The precedent set by Council's encouragement of the removal of character defining historic material in favor of a cheap, plastic imitation will be the beginning of an endless battle between HARB and Council as we work diligently to implement the ordinance and Secretary of the Interior's standards, only to have our efforts undermined by Council decisions to overturn them.

It is clear that my preservation opinions, values and ethics are not in alignment with current Borough leadership. I am not interested in rubber stamping the removal of historic features in favor of vinyl, or participating in a further dilution of the Borough's already weak historic preservation ordinance. This disconnect makes my role with HARB challenging and unrewarding.

Therefore, I am submitting my resignation as the architect and vice-chairman of Columbia's Historic Architectural Review Board, effective immediately.

I will continue my professional and volunteer efforts to promote historic preservation, and for the immediate future, I plan to redirect my time to completing my current project restoring the original, virtually irreplaceable, chestnut windows in my 1920's home. I recognize the value of the historic fabric I have in my own home, and never once considered replacing these windows with vinyl. Instead, I am giving them new life for their 100th birthday.

I encourage the Borough to look closer at their own rich and unique architectural heritage and sincerely reconsider current efforts to accelerate its removal.

Sincerely,



Theodore L. Vedock, AIA