

HISTORIC AND ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION COMMISSION (HAPC)
MEETING MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, November 12, 2025
6:00 P.M.

I. Call to Order

The November 12, 2025 meeting of the Oxford Historic and Architectural Preservation Commission was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Dana Miller.

Those members present: Dana Miller, Alex French, Kelsey Stryffe, and Brad Spurlock

Those members excused: Sean Wagner, Alia Levar Wegner, Corey Watt

Staff members present: Sam Perry, Community Development Director

Staff members excused: None

II. Approval of Agenda

Ms. French made a motion to approve the agenda. Mr. Spurlock seconded the motion. All were in favor.

III. Public Comments

There were no comments from the public.

IV. Approval of Minutes of September 10, 2025

Mr. Spurlock made a motion to approve the minutes as written. Ms. Stryffe seconded the motion. All were in favor.

V. New Business

36 East High Street, Brick Street Bar, Certificate of Appropriateness for sign modification, Mark Weisman, Applicant, Vince Klusty, Klusty Sign Associates, Agent

Mr. Perry began his presentation by recounting the procedural history. The original application had been submitted in July 2025 and reviewed administratively. However, electronic signage, especially internally illuminated or electronically changeable signage — is prohibited for administrative approval in the Uptown Historic District, causing the request to be automatically referred to the HAPC. The ensuing delay resulted from scheduling difficulties, including quorum issues and applicant availability. Mr. Perry also reminded the Commission that a separate but related matter was pending before the Board of Zoning Appeals concerning the same sign. That BZA matter arose from an administrative denial of the sign permit under zoning rules. The BZA appeal had been filed, but its resolution was not contingent upon the HAPC's decision. For the sign to be installed, both HAPC approval and BZA relief would ultimately be necessary, though the order of those approvals was not prescribed by law.

Mr. Perry next described the marquee as a lawfully nonconforming projecting sign. Current zoning would not permit such an extensive projection over the public sidewalk, but because the structure predates present regulations, it remains legally nonconforming and may continue to exist so long as its nonconformity is not expanded. The existing illumination of the marquee is through direct internal lighting, achieved by fluorescent tubes shining outward through translucent letter panels. This form of illumination, while also nonconforming under present zoning, remains permitted due to its historic existence. The building itself, Mr. Perry noted, is classified as a contributing structure in the historic district, which places upon the Commission a heightened duty to ensure that alterations do not undermine the architectural and historical integrity of the property.

Turning next to the City's Design Guidelines, Mr. Perry explained that the guidelines clearly prefer indirect illumination for signage in the Uptown Historic District, recommending external fixtures such as gooseneck lamps that cast light onto a sign surface. Internal illumination, in which light shines outward through the sign face, is discouraged, and electronic changeable signs are tightly restricted. Movement, flashing, scrolling, or animation are expressly disallowed. The guidelines also emphasize the importance of using materials that resemble traditional signage materials such as wood, stone, metal, and glass, or modern composites that convincingly imitate those historic textures. The LED display proposed by the applicant would, by technical definition, constitute internal illumination, though with characteristics significantly different from the marquee's current fluorescent lighting.

Mr. Perry then discussed the zoning code. The City's zoning regulations explicitly prohibit electronic message centers in the Uptown Historic District, with the sole exception being fuel price displays at gas stations, which are permitted due to a past BZA decision that became institutionalized in the code. Mr. Perry stated that the marquee at Brick Street Bar is not functionally analogous to a fuel station price display, and therefore any approval of the requested signage would be a substantial departure from established norms. Nevertheless, Mr. Perry acknowledged that the HAPC possesses autonomous authority to approve or deny alterations to historic structures under the Certificate of Appropriateness process, based on criteria distinct from those used by the BZA.

Mr. Perry displayed several photographs of the current marquee. Mr. Perry next answered questions from the Commission members. They asked whether conditions placed on a digital sign—such as prohibiting movement or enforcing brightness levels—could realistically be enforced. Mr. Perry answered that while conditions could be imposed, enforcement depended largely on good-faith compliance by the property owner. Violations might occur late at night when staff were not present, and consistent monitoring would be impractical. Commissioners asked whether approving LED signage in this case would create a precedent encouraging future applicants to seek similar technology. Mr. Perry acknowledged that precedent was always a concern.

Mr. Miller invited the applicant's attorney, Mr. Jack Grove, to present the applicant's position. Mr. Grove introduced himself and described his long-standing representation of Weisman

Enterprises, the owner and operator of Brick Street Bar. Mr. Grove explained that Weisman Enterprises had maintained the property as a performing venue for more than twenty years and that the interior stage from the original theater remained intact and utilized for live entertainment. By continuing to host nationally touring acts and student-oriented performances, Brick Street was, in Mr. Grove's view, perpetuating the building's original cultural purpose. Mr. Grove argued that retaining a functional marquee was essential to this legacy.

Mr. Grove then addressed the legal dimension. Mr. Grove asserted that the marquee is a lawfully nonconforming structure and that its nonconforming status authorizes its continued use in its traditional illuminated form. Requiring indirect lighting or forcing a regression to a materially different signage system would conflict with historical authenticity. Mr. Grove also raised constitutional considerations, stating that the City must avoid content-based regulation. If gas stations are permitted to use electronic displays but other businesses are categorically barred, then the City must justify the distinction without relying on the type of business or the content of the signage. Mr. Grove emphasized that the request was not for animated or flashing LED graphics, but for a static display designed to emulate the traditional marquee aesthetic, enhancing safety and reducing maintenance burdens.

Mr. Grove called upon his first witness, Mr. Vince Klusty, the signage expert enlisted by the applicant. Mr. Klusty introduced himself as a veteran sign fabricator who had worked extensively with historic marquees, including the well-known Covedale Theater in Cincinnati. Mr. Klusty displayed photographs of the Covedale marquee before and after its conversion to LED panels. Those images illustrated how a high-quality LED system, programmed with static imagery, could mimic the stylized layout and coloration of traditional changeable-letter theater signs. Mr. Klusty explained that the technology had advanced such that extremely fine pixel pitches—down to six millimeters—permitted detailed, legible imagery at close viewing distances without the pixelation typically associated with LED screens.

Mr. Grove described the challenges of maintaining traditional changeable-letter systems, particularly in outdoor conditions. The existing system at Brick Street Bar required staff to climb ladders on the public sidewalk, often late at night and in adverse weather, to manually insert or remove letters. Ice, wind, and age-induced warping had made the tracks unreliable and unsafe. Mr. Grove affirmed that LED systems, once installed, required significantly less maintenance, reduced safety risks, and permitted consistent visual presentation.

Mr. Klusty also addressed concerns about illumination. Modern LED systems include built-in ambient light sensors that automatically adjust brightness according to the time of day and surrounding lighting conditions. Mr. Klusty emphasized that the applicant understood Oxford's concerns and was fully prepared to operate the system in a manner that ensured subdued nighttime illumination. Mr. Klusty demonstrated static images that resembled the familiar block-letter marquee look, explaining that the technology could easily produce a white background with black lettering or a dual-panel scrolling format that mimicked letter trays—except without movement, which the applicant agreed would be disabled.

Mr. Grove distributed Professor Kiely's research work on Art Moderne style. Professor Joss Kiely then delivered expert testimony on the architectural significance of the building. Mr. Kiely explained his academic background in twentieth-century architectural history and contextualized the style of the former Miami Western Theater as operating at the intersection of Art Deco and Art Moderne. These styles embraced bold geometric forms, streamlined contours, and the integration of modern materials and lighting technologies. Professor Kiely explained that during the mid-twentieth century, theater marquees frequently underwent modernization to incorporate updated lighting and materials. This process of technological evolution was historically consistent and did not undermine architectural authenticity. Mr. Kiely suggested that a static LED display that visually reproduced traditional marquee messaging could be compatible with the building's stylistic lineage and uphold its historic character.

Mr. Grove shared some photos of signage in the community with the Commission.

Mr. Grove also shared the Ohio Historic Inventory document.

Following the testimony, the Commissioners excused themselves to deliberate privately.

Ms. French articulated the Commission's decision. Ms. French stated the Commission believes that the evidence shows the applicant is attempting to honor the historical and architectural significance of the sign and to use technology consistent with the historical use of the sign and agreement that they will use it as a static sign with no scrolling imagery with illumination adjustments to reduce light distraction. Ms. French made a motion to approve the Certificate of Appropriateness for the sign modification at 36 E High Street with the following conditions:

1. Static signage
2. No scrolling marquee and no moving images
3. Illumination adjustment as recommended by the sign installer to reduce distraction
4. Attempted adherence to the traditional character of the signage on the marquee

Mr. Spurlock seconded the motion. All were in favor.

VI. Old Business

Update on District Design Guidelines and Preservation Plan Progress

After the vote, the Commission members engaged in a brief administrative discussion regarding upcoming revisions to the Design Guidelines. Mr. Perry explained that staff had begun reviewing the latest draft from the consultants.

VII. Adjournment

Ms. Stryffe made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Spurlock seconded the motion. All were in favor. The meeting adjourned at 8:11 pm.ⁱ

ⁱ This meeting summary was generated with the assistance of AI technology to enhance accuracy and efficiency. While AI was used to capture key points and structure the summary, it has been reviewed for accuracy and completeness by a staff member.