

**PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, August 20th, 2025
4:30 P.M.**

**VIRTUAL MEETING:
Live streamed @ <https://www.cityofoberlin.com/city-government/streaming-video/>**

1. Call Meeting to Order and Roll Call.

This meeting was called to order at 4:30 P.M.

Roll Call: Jack Ford, Chair; Amy Maliza, Member; Peter Crowley, Member; Jill Sawyer, Vice-Chair; Carrie Porter, Planning and Development Director and Chris Yates, Code Administrator.

Guests: Joe Comar, Oberlin College; Laura Baudot, Oberlin College and David Hertz, Oberlin College.

Absent: Bryan Burgess, Member.

2. Application for Site Plan Approval for a Change of Use from Retail to Institutional at 37-39 West College Street (Former College Bookstore Space), Submitted by James Shannon Smith on Behalf of Oberlin College.

Porter started this conversation by introducing Joe Comar, representative of Oberlin College. Comar stated that the proposed use of this building will see the basement of this building used for media and cinema classes, as well as an integrated arts program. These studies will focus on producing non-fiction, animation and live-action films. A public performance and gallery space will also be provided to facilitate these studies. This building will also offer studio space, editing labs and classrooms as well as film critique spaces that will be housed on both floors of this building. Comar then shared a zoning map of the property in question. Comar stated that this property exists in the "C-1" Central Business District and is flanked by the "R-2" Dwelling District. Comar added that parking regulations do not apply to the use standards of building being that it exists in the "C-1" District. Comar further added that the College will apply for all signage related to this change of use upon approval of this application. He then prompted members of the Planning Commission for questions regarding this application. Ford then prompted Comar to give a brief description of the activities and floor plan for the first floor of this building. Comar then shared a draft of the proposed floor plan. He stated that media displays will be installed in front of the windows of this building that face West College St., public performance and gallery space will exist in the front of this building while the majority of the east portion of this building will be used for cinema related activities. Ford stated that he is aware that this application meets the requirements of this district's approved uses. He added that there are concerns in the community and by members of this Commission that downtown retail space is dwindling, especially on West College St.

Another concern is that upon approval of this application, this building will no longer function as a public space. He added that the College and the City need each other and

without a downtown, the College loses a lot of its charm. Ford further added that he hopes that this collaboration could be a steppingstone for improving City and College relationships. Sawyer stated she was surprised by this application. She feels that typical storefront spaces in the downtown district are disappearing. She added that the promise by the College to provide retail space at the Hotel at Oberlin never reached fruition, but she remains optimistic. Crowley questioned if the College Conservatory will still use this facility. He then reminded members of the Commission that at the prior meeting regarding this application, College representatives stated that students from the Conservatory would have a portion of this building dedicated to their activities.

Baudot stated that the Apollo Theater complex meets many of the College's needs regarding studies related to movies and cinema, but the studios that Apollo provides are small. The proposed building would now serve as extra space for these studies. She added that this space will also facilitate an area for Conservatory students regarding multimedia work and studies. She then brought attention to the public performance area of the proposed space. She envisions students getting involved in the process of making this space an attractive feature to downtown Oberlin. Baudot further added that this space will be a public space in which part of the curriculum will be determining how to work with the City to make this space appealing to current residents and tourists. Hertz stated that he regrets that this decision had to be made at this special meeting and that the College could not convey their sincere desire to help support downtown businesses' attempts to thrive at the first meeting regarding this application. He added that without flourishing downtown, the College cannot attract the kinds of students that they wish to attract.

Crowley made a motion to approve this application as submitted. Sawyer seconded this motion. Motion carried unanimously.

3. City Council Communications - Joe Waltzer.

Waltzer stated that his dream is that the College will see this use as a temporary solution. He added that nothing will make up for the loss of retail space in the downtown district. Waltzer further added that as the City grows, spaces like the one in question will be needed. He then encouraged the College to entertain the notion of returning this to retail space in the future.

4. Adjournment

This meeting was adjourned at 5:48 P.M.

Chris Yates
11/13/25