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MINUTES
MEETING OF THE BOARD OF BUILDING & FIRE CODE APPEALS
Friday, April 9, 2010
Committee Room #2

PRESENT: S. Jung, C. Millman, R Ornst, J. Price, R. Lex, D. Wheaton – 6

EXCUSED: D. Bachman, P. Nook

ALSO PRESENT: Mike Carberry, Fire Marshal/Asst. Chief

Mr. Ornst as Chair called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

8701 Watertown Plank Road

Variance

Ms. Andrea Nemecek, of the Medical College of Wisconsin, has requested a variance to locate a red lens over the fire alarm strobes in areas that are used to conduct light sensitive studies, whereas lights used for fire alarm signaling shall be clear or nominal white. Reference NFPA 72, section 7.5.2.4

Present in favor: Ms. Andrea Nemecek, Architect
Mr. Robb Gorgen, Forth Technologies, 3720 N. 124th St.

No one present in opposition.

Ms. Nemecek said that she is on staff at the Medical College of Wisconsin and is asking for a variance regarding NFPA 72 section 7.5.2.4 which would allow the use of red covers over fire detection strobe devices.

Ms. Nemecek said the main building was completed in 2007. However the east wing on the ground floor was never completed. Construction is in process for the interior laboratory spaces at the Biomedical Research Center, which is part of the Medical College. There is now a need to fill those areas with office suites, lab areas, and testing rooms. The testing rooms house rodents and they are negatively affected by audible devices and white lights. Ms. Nemecek is requesting that they be allowed to place a red lens over the strobes in the testing procedure spaces that the rodents would not be able to see. This red light would not affect the animals in any way. Ms. Nemecek said that there are three suite corridors which take you to these testing rooms. They would like to cover these suite lights with a red lens also.

Ms. Nemecek explained that the testing procedure areas are hidden within the buildings. The plans show that these rooms are very small spaces. These rooms are not used for occupancy. There is only a two foot table available to record data and they are not encouraged to spend a considerable amount of time in the space. A researcher likely will only be in the room for approximately one hour.

Mr. Ornst inquired about the current light used. Ms. Nemecek said currently the lights are ceiling mounted and are not directly shining on the animals in the space. There is no light flashing situation.

Mr. Gorgen advised that they want to add these UL listed specialized strobes and will be on their own circuit for functionality reasons. The lighting would mimic day and night light. Mr. Gorgen reported that it is the very bright flashing light that affects the animals.

The Fire Marshal reported that he toured each of these mini labs during the construction phase. He noted that these rooms are about the size of a closet with no window. There is only one door to the lab area. Mr. Carberry has researched the code and advised that a properly placed visible strobe would be needed at the correct candela rating. This would give adequate notification to the one or two individuals in the area that the fire alarm has been pulled.

Ms. Nemecek responded to a question that the alarm system is tested monthly. There is one light in every lab space. Mr. Carberry noted that he would be on site for the acceptance test and he will check every strobe.

Ms. Nemecek advised they would like to use the same type of light on the corridor lights. Ms. Nemecek assured the committee that other than employees, all guests into these areas would be escorted. The committee discussed whether in the event of an emergency, would the lights be enough warning for people to exit the area. Mr. Carberry advised the red strobe system should suffice in notifying anyone in the building, with one strobe in each lab per code and along the corridor leading to the lab. He advised that there are areas in the hospital that utilize this system.

Mr. Lex said he researched clear strobes and audible horns. He said color blind people have trouble seeing the red light so the clear light is easier to be picked up. The audible would be helpful for the sight impaired. Ms. Nemecek said only trained personnel would be allowed in the restricted area. Mr. Carberry advised that any person should be able to see the device on and off whether they are color blind or not. The reflective motion light should indicate that an emergency is involved regardless of the color and they should evacuate. Mr. Gorgen noted that there is also a horn device in the corridors.

Moved by Mr. Millman, seconded by Mr. Price

The board finds that: 1) a manifest injustice exists and that granting the Variance will be in keeping with the spirit of the code; 2) the Variance will not create special detriment to the overall character of the neighborhood nor adversely effect property values in that there is a similar type of system in the neighboring hospital and 3) the hardship or practical difficulty was not created by the property owner; it exists due to the difficulty when the rodents are housed in these lab areas and testing is going on, a clear flashing strobe would skew the research and the animals get aggressive with each other and the research would have to be eliminated. The difficulty is the animal and the exception is the medical research. Based upon these findings I move that the variance be granted with the understanding that signs be provided to read that untrained personnel must be escorted by trained personnel.

Roll call vote taken. Ayes: 6

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 a.m.

David M. Wheaton, Secretary

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