

**City of Keene
New Hampshire**

HERITAGE COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, December 9, 2015

4:00 PM

2nd Floor Conference Room

Members Present:

Louise Zerba, Chair
Katherine Snow, Vice-Chair
Terry Clark, Councilor
Ardis Osborn, Alternate
Susan D'Egidio

Staff Present:

Tara Kessler, Planner

Others Present:

Members Not Present:

John Bemis
Rose Carey

1) Call to Order/Roll Call

Chair Zerba called the meeting to order at 4:02 PM. Roll call was conducted. Chair Zerba noted that Ms. Osborne would sit in for Ms. Carey.

2) Approval of Minutes – November 10, 2015

Ms. Snow made a motion to adopt the minutes of November 10, 2015 as submitted. Councilor Clark seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

3) Demolition Ordinance Review Discussion -

Ms. Kessler referred to the last meeting and Councilor Clark's letter to City Council requesting this Commission review and consider amending the Demolition Review Ordinance. Ms. Kessler noted the discussion at the last meeting reiterating the concern that the 50 year time period might be too short considering the amount of construction that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s in Keene. Ms. Kessler shared information from the City's Assessing Department on the numbers of properties that would be 50 years or older in the next few years. This information is included below.

Information on buildings in Keene that are 50+ years

Number of Residential Buildings:

1965 or older = 3,765

1970 or older = 4,247

(In the next five years 482 additional properties will be 50 years or older)

Number of Commercial Buildings:

1965 or older= 636

1975 or older= 694

(58 additional properties will be 50 years or older in 5 years)

Ms. Kessler asked the Commission to consider what they would consider as an appropriate amendment to the 50-year mark. For example, should the period of time change from 50 to another number such as 75, or are there other types of criteria that might make a property historically significant. Ms. Kessler distributed copies of written comments shared by Ms. Carey's on this issue in an email. Chair Zerba noted that she had been in touch with the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance on this topic, and Ms. Kessler noted that she has been doing some research as well. Ms. Kessler indicated that the focus of this

agenda item is to discuss the Commission's thoughts on what would be the most appropriate amendment to the Demolition Review Ordinance to make it more manageable for the City and property owners.

The discussion began with Ms. Osborne asking if the data provided by the Assessing Department on properties 50 years or older included churches and schools. She noted that these structures often have architectural or historical significance. Ms. Kessler noted she would have to check, suggesting they might be included in the number for commercial buildings. Councilor Clark noted that he does not believe state and other governmental properties have to go through this process. He suggested that churches and other non-profits might be included in the above numbers.

Chair Zerba reported that Peter Michaud, of the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources recommended leaving it at the 50 year mark. Chair Zerba read Mr. Michaud's responding email dated December 9, 2015 to the Commission members. The text of this email is included in quotations below.

"Dear Louise,

Thank you for your time on the phone today. The 50 year mark is a standard tool in the identification of historically significant properties. The National Park Service recommends that "fifty years is a general estimate of the time needed to develop historical perspective and to evaluate significance. This consideration guards against the listing of properties of passing contemporary interest and ensures that the National Register is a list of truly historic places.

(http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15_7.htm#crit con g)

Every community in New Hampshire is facing the arrival of buildings and developments that many residents remember seeing constructed, coming of age for National Register eligibility. There are tools being developed to help bring context and understanding to our most recent history. In New Hampshire, we have a context for mid-century modern commercial architecture that can be found at http://www.nh.gov/nhdhr/publications/documents/mid_20th_century_architecture_nh.pdf.

Pennsylvania has an excellent document on evaluating Post World War II suburbs that can be found at http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/document/913635/pws_researchers_guide_pdf There are other guidelines out there that can help the commission develop understanding and the tools to evaluate more modern buildings as an alternative to omitting these resources from the commission's valuable work. Time at a meeting could be set aside for research and discussion on these topics so the commission is set to make the same educated decisions for these resources as it does for the city's older stock of buildings.

As a Certified Local Government, there are grants available for the survey of these resources and neighborhoods that would be vital to your future work. You can contact Nadine Peterson (603 271 6628) directly about this opportunity (she is copied here.) The next grant round is coming soon and a call in the next two months would be useful for moving forward with such a project. I hope the Heritage Commission of Keene will look forward to and embrace this challenge and help lead the way for future residents interested in the history and preservation of the city."

In response to Ms. Snow, Chair Zerba clarified that any structure that is 50 years old or falls within the Historic District Commission has to come before this Commission.

Ms. Osborne asked how many Demolition Permits were issued in the last year. Councilor Clark reported that three had been issued in the last two months. Ms. Snow noted that she did not feel that the Commission would want to see all of the structures in Maple Acres, a development contains many properties approaching 50 years, demolished. She feels that the period of 50 years is not the issue. Councilor Clark clarified for Ms. D'Egidio that the criteria for Demolition Review is if the structure is 50

years or older and over 500 square feet. Councilor Clark also noted that providence is another thing to keep in mind. He noted that the preservation of Jonathan Daniels home in Keene would be similar to preserving Abraham Lincoln's log cabin. He discussed different periods of architectural growth in Keene's history. Ms. Snow pointed out that the Maple Acres development is a land use model that speaks to an era, suggesting there is value in that.

Ms. Kessler reported that the City of Newtown, MA has completed a policy analysis on their Demolition Review Ordinance because they were encountering a similar challenge. She noted that in this analysis it was observed that most places have the 50 year threshold, and that some places don't have a year threshold. Other places rely on criteria, such as placement on the National Historic Register or in a Historic District. She also outlined the City's current demolition review process and noted that some other places have an intermediary step completed by staff that is similar to the Administrative Review utilized by the Historic District Commission and Planning Board. Councilor Clark suggested that the problem for the Demolition Review Subcommittee is that by the time a Demolition Permit application reaches the committee, the decision has already been made by the owner to demolish the structure. The Commission tried to address this issue that by developing an informational packet to be distributed with Demolition Permit applications. Councilor Clark suggested that the Commission does not need to slow the permit process for demolition; instead, it needs to identify the properties that are important to preserve ahead of time and notify the owners before they take any action. He continued, stating that the Commission needs to be able to communicate with property owners about the importance of preservation of historic structures in the community. Councilor Clark also pointed out that property owner buy-in is an essential component.

Chair Zerba asked Councilor Clark how this communication would happen. He noted that tax bills present an opportunity for the City to identify and inform individual property owners that their piece of property fits into this category. Discussion returned to the delay period with Ms. Kessler noting Newton changed its delay period from 12-months to 18-months. Ms. Kessler agreed to send this report to the Commission members. Ms. Snow asked if the Commission could send out something congratulating the owner on their home reaching a certain age (50 or 100 years) pointing out its historical importance, and providing them with preservation resources. Councilor Clark stated that he is in favor of Ms. Snow's idea. Ms. D'Egidio noted she is not in favor of changing the 50-year criteria.

Discussion turned to Ms. Snow's idea and how to implement it. Commission members were in agreement to keep the 50 year criteria and send out the letters to homeowners. Chair Zerba suggested it would be better for the letter to come from the Commission versus in the tax bills. In response to Ms. D'Egidio, Ms. Kessler noted the Commission does have an annual budget and some staff support could be provided. Ms. Kessler would research what level of staff support would be required to support this type of activity and whether it would be feasible. Ms. Kessler questioned when the letters would be sent out and how often. Chair Zerba recommended sending out an initial letter when a property turns 100 years old and then sending it again when there is a change in ownership.

Chair Zerba asked if the Commission felt there was anything to change in the Demolition Review Ordinance. Ms. Osborne indicated she would like to see something similar to the Administrative Review process utilized for Minor Projects of the Historic District Commission. Ms. D'Egidio is in favor of keeping the requirement that allows the Demolition Review Committee five (5) days to address the request.

Ms. Kessler provided criteria she read from other similar ordinances to the Commission.

"Any building within the city which is in whole or in part fifty years or more old and which has been determined by the commission or its designee to be significant based on any of the following criteria:

- The building is listed on, or is within an area listed on, the National Register of Historic Places; or
- The building has been found eligible for the National Register of Historic Places; or
- The building is importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the city or the Commonwealth; or
- The building is historically or architecturally important (in terms of period, style, method of building construction or association with a recognized architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings.”

Commission members were in agreement they would like to see similar language in the Ordinance. Over the next month, Ms. Kessler will identify the homes that are turning 100 years old and bring the list back to the Commission for review. Commission members were also in favor of potentially establishing an Administrative Review process; however, it would be imperative to establish clear guidelines for this process.

4) Report of the Demolition Commission – None at this time.

5) Report of the Community Outreach Commission – None at this time.

6) Report of the Research Commission –

a. Historic District Commission (HDC) / Heritage Commission Sub-Committee Update –

Ms. Kessler noted that the Sub-Committee will be meeting on December 10, 2015 to continue work on developing a draft Ordinance for the proposed Main Street Historic District.

7) Staff Updates-

a. Commission Membership

Ms. Kessler will remind Kevin Dremel to submit his letter to the Mayor’s office. Chair Zerba and Ms. D’Egidio indicated they have not heard back from the people they contacted.

8) New or Other Business –

1. Ms. Snow motioned to adopt the proposed 2016 Meeting Schedule as submitted. Councilor Clark seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

2. Chair Zerba and Commission members commended Ms. Carey for her outstanding work on the City Hall display. Ms. Kessler noted Ms. Carey will be doing two more displays in the future on different topics.

3. Ms. Kessler addressed Ms. Carey’s idea of sharing the inventory of homes on the Commission’s website noting they are working on conceptualizing the project. She noted the IT Department is willing to work with the Commission to include a slideshow of photos on the Commission webpage (10 photo limit). Ms. Kessler noted the Commission was also offered the opportunity for a Flickr page, which could be imbedded in the website.

9) Adjournment – Chair Zerba adjourned the meeting at 5:05 PM.

The next meeting will be Wednesday, January 13, 2016

Heritage Commission Meeting Minutes
December 9, 2015

DRAFT

Respectfully submitted by,
Mary Lou Sheats-Hall, Minute-taker
December 11, 2015

Respectfully edited by,
Tara Germond, Planner
January 7, 2016