

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, March 21, 2018

4:30 PM 2nd Floor Conference Room, City Hall

Members Present:

Hanspeter Weber, Chair
Thomas Powers, Councilor
Nancy Proctor
Erin Benik
Peter Poanessa
Joslin Kimball Frank, Alternate
Andrew Weglinski (Late)

Staff Present:

Tara Kessler, Planner
Mari Brunner, Planning Technician

Members Not Present:

Hans Porschitz

1) Call to Order & Roll Call

Chair Weber called the meeting to order at 4:32 PM and Ms. Kessler conducted roll call.

2) Minutes of Previous Meeting- November 15, 2017 & December 28, 2017

Ms. Proctor made a motion to approve the minutes of November 15, 2017 & December 28, 2017 as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Poanessa and carried unanimously.

Chair Weber advised that agenda item 4.b would be heard first, followed by item 4.a and then returning to the posted agenda.

3) Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

Ms. Proctor nominated Hanspeter Weber to continue as Chair. Councilor Powers seconded the motion. Discussion ensued with regards to Vice-Chair duties and responsibilities after which Mr. Poanessa nominated Andrew Weglinski as Vice Chair. Councilor Powers seconded the motion. The vote on both motions was unanimous. Both nominees agreed to accept the positions.

4) Advice & Comment

- a. **Keene Walldogs Festival “A Magical History Tour”** – Peter Poanessa will present on this multi-day event. Walldogs are a group of highly skilled sign painters and mural artists from across the globe. Once a year, a team of Walldogs gather in one community to paint multiple murals and old-fashioned wall advertisements. Keene has been selected to host the 2019 Festival.

Mr. Poanessa shared his involvement in this project and how it was brought to Keene. He noted his collaboration with Ms. Cassimatis and Friends of Public Art. Mr. Poanessa said the Walldogs are a non-profit group consisting of mainly sign painters who are very passionate about this

business. The painters are volunteers who travel at their own expense and paint for free. They do expect to be fed and housed by the community. There is a paid project leader for each wall/mural who develops the mural design. The designers are the best in the country. The subject matter is historical. The festival begins on Wednesday evening with a host dinner. After dark, the volunteers use projectors to transfer the mural patterns onto the selected walls. The historical research for each mural is completed six months before the festival. The festival runs from Wednesday evening through Sunday and takes place on side streets and alleys, so the impact to activities on Main Street is minimal. Mr. Poanessa continued, saying that the Walldogs have a well-organized process. The artwork is meant to be permanent, lasting from 50 to 75 years. Business owners involved have to commit to the brick being in good condition. The hope is to get one or two walls that can be seen when going down Main Street. Most of the walls identified are backs of buildings and along alleys. Mr. Poanessa said that the festival unfolds slowly, allowing regular commerce to take place, and when the weekend is over there is this incredible resource of unique art work that is a powerful marketing tool for the City. He said that his hope is to spur a real arts culture in the City. Mr. Poanessa noted the reason for being here is because the Walldogs would like to paint murals on buildings in the Historic District.

Councilor Powers asked about the historical component of the festival. Mr. Poanessa said that the murals all have historical subject matter and can be a good way to teach residents and visitors about the history of the area. Mr. Poanessa also reported discussions with the Historical Society and noted they have their blessing. Mr. Poanessa said there will be a research committee to narrow down the historical information along with opportunities for public input. The murals will be business related and/or depict local characters.

Ms. Kimball Frank asked how other towns have approached painting murals on historic buildings and asked about the National Register of Historic Places. Mr. Poanessa indicated he did not know about the buildings listed on the National Register but will find out more and report back. Mr. Poanessa explained other towns have temporarily changed their sign codes to allow this event to take place; codes revert back to their original format on the day the festival ends. An alternative to painting on the bare brick is to paint panels that are then mounted on the building. Continuing, Ms. Kimball Frank asked if there were any communities in New England that have done a Walldogs festival. Mr. Poanessa replied that Westerly, Rhode Island was the site of the Walldogs festival last year. He noted there is only one festival per year and most cities have to get on a waiting list and wait three to four years to hold the festival.

Ms. Proctor asked if the muralists try to replicate old signs. Mr. Poanessa said they are all done in the graphic design style popular in the 1920's – 1940's, however, they are original pieces. He then distributed a book to provide a visual example.

Councilor Powers asked how many murals would be installed. Mr. Poanessa said they would like to install between 12 and 15. Mr. Poanessa noted they are looking at the Airport hangar as a potential mural location for another year. Ms. Cassimatis added there are between 100-150 artists that come to paint; this brings in many tourists who come to watch the painting.

Ms. Proctor asked when the festival would take place and where the artists would get housed. Mr. Poanessa said the festival will take place during the third week of June 2019 and reiterated the community is expected to house the artists. He also noted working with Ms. Bernardi in hopes of getting access to a dorm. He and Ms. Cassimatis noted that many people may come to watch the

painting process, which could result in increased tourism to the area. Mr. Poanessa noted the desire to have places for artists to sell their wares along with food trucks, etcetera. Ms. Cassimatis added they would also like to partner with local businesses.

Chair Weber noted the Historic District Commission (HDC) regulations do not permit painting on unpainted brick. Ms. Kessler explained that painting on unpainted brick, in the Historic District, would require Commission review. Discussion ensued with Mr. Poanessa noting they would be happy to follow the HDC regulations and meet with staff or come before the Commission as needed. Chair Weber also explained that if the brick has been previously painted there are no issues. Ms. Kessler noted there are a few buildings within the Historic District that are also on the National Register of Historic Places. These include Grace Methodist Church, the Old Cheshire County Courthouse, and the Colony House. There may be other properties on the National and/or New Hampshire Register as well.

Councilor Powers commented as far as HDC regulations this is achievable. Ms. Kessler reiterated unpainted brick, in the Historic District, would require Commission review. Councilor Powers asked if the Sign Code would kick in. Mr. Poanessa indicated conversations with Code Enforcement had already begun. Discussion ensued with regards to the content. Ms. Cassimatis commented the murals deal with historical subject matter and do not advertise anything but the history of Keene. Councilor Powers suggested posting information about the Walldogs festival on the City calendar. Ms. Kessler also recommended Mr. Poanessa present the proposal to the Heritage Commission. Ms. Cassimatis asked if City Council approval was needed. Ms. Kessler advised in the affirmative if occupying the City's Right-of-Ways. Mr. Poanessa noted he wanted to present to City Council as traffic control will be needed. Regarding the potential need for a license, Ms. Kessler advised Mr. Poanessa of the protocol meeting process and offered to connect Mr. Poanessa with the City Clerk's office.

Chair Weber asked about staging. Mr. Poanessa explained the walls have to be cleaned, primed, and dry with staging in place 60 days ahead of time. He also noted they will be looking for in-kind donations from local businesses as part of the community involvement. Mr. Poanessa said they are just at the point of being ready to go to the community. Ms. Cassimatis asked about the review process; Ms. Kessler explained the process for those present. Chair Weber recommended painting on walls that are already painted. Mr. Poanessa reiterated that the painting will take place on side streets and in the alleyways; not on building facades facing Main Street. He also noted the website went live today and that information is available at www.walldogsinkeene.com.

Ms. Benik asked how other towns have documented this event. Mr. Poanessa explained the Walldogs require that the organization who applied document the entire event. He recommended looking at the Westerly, Rhode Island event on Facebook and YouTube.

Chair Weber asked why previous Walldog festivals occurred mainly in the Midwest. Mr. Poanessa explained the core group of painters is mostly from the Midwest. He also explained as the rust belt is in the Midwest this is a positive way for communities to revive their towns. Ms. Benik commented it would be exciting to be the first town in northern New England to do this.

- b. May is Mural Month** – Georgia Cassimatis on behalf of Friends of Public Art will present on the third annual Paste Paper Mural project.

Rosemarie Bernardi and Georgia Cassimatis presented to the Commission. Ms. Kessler explained Ms. Cassimatis and Ms. Bernardi have presented twice in the past. She noted the first year was a courtesy visit as the HDC regulations do not speak to what they are doing; they are not painting on unpainted brick. These are temporary mural installations and they are here to keep the Commission informed of what they are doing. Ms. Kessler noted questions raised in the past for new Commission members.

Ms. Bernardi shared her professional background and how and why she connected with Friends of Public Art. She apologized for having no mural designs to share this year, noting they are running a bit behind schedule. Ms. Bernardi said in the first year, four murals were put up. Last year they put up 17 murals, however, she is thinking this year there will be fewer. The murals are printed on paper and pasted on to surfaces such as the sides of buildings. Business owners sign a contract so they know what is going on and that it is all approved. Murals were left up for six months the first year and last year the thought was to leave them up for a year. They found not all of them lasted the year. The ones that were printed on better quality paper (rice paper) held up better than the murals that were printed on cheaper paper. One mural was taken down before Christmas and two should have been taken down but have not been removed yet due to the weather. They are not sure how long the murals will be left up this year. The murals this year will feature two Keene artists, J.A. French and Barry Faulkner, both of whom are celebrated mural artists. Ms. Bernardi noted discussions with the Historical Society and provided background information on the two artists. She also noted and discussed other murals in the City. Ms. Bernardi and Ms. Cassimatis have been discussing staggering the taking down of the murals.

Mr. Poanessa asked how difficult the murals are to remove. Ms. Bernardi said they are difficult to remove. She said they use steamers that soften the murals, get moisture behind them without damaging the brick. They cannot use a power washer but a garden hose would be helpful.

Chair Weber asked about the glue. Ms. Bernardi said it is wheat paste; a version of flour and water. She clarified for Mr. Poanessa more glue is put over the top once the mural is put up. She discussed a mural that has lasted for two years noting it is on a painted wall. Ms. Cassimatis commented the murals are not meant to last. She continued, saying that it is a gallery style show and they want the murals to stay the same as when they were put it up; this is not what wheat paste is intended for. Access to water and electricity and needing more hands are the barriers for removal. Ms. Kessler has offered to get them hooked up with City electricity. Ms. Bernardi commented this is something really unique as she knows of no other printmaking class like she teaches or any other city that does temporary art work like this. Mr. Poanessa noted the value of these temporary works of fine art.

Ms. Kimball Frank commented the art work is fabulous and noted her question had been answered about the murals that are starting to deteriorate. Ms. Kimball Frank also asked if there was a list of all the works of art that have been put up as part of this project. Ms. Cassimatis offered to send Ms. Kimball Frank the information. She added that last year Ms. Kessler did an online story map as a side project. Ms. Bernardi explained the permanent list will be available in June or July.

Ms. Benik asked how many murals would be put up this year. Ms. Bernardi suggested perhaps 12 or less. Ms. Cassimatis noted each year they have one permanent installation; the first year it was on the back of Eagle Court, and second year it was installed under the Elm Street overpass. They are working on the permanent installation for this year. In response to Chair Weber, Ms. Bernardi

noted they are working with the Walldogs group. The Walldogs are interested in large murals that can be seen from a distance and are permanent. Friends of Public Art have both permanent and temporary murals that are smaller in scale and mostly low to the ground. Continuing, Ms. Benik asked if any problems were anticipated putting up the new murals after removing the old. Ms. Bernardi replied in the negative, advising they are still trying to figure out the best removal technique. Mr. Poanessa asked if it was possible to follow in the tradition of pasting over the old ones. Ms. Bernardi suggested that may be too many layers to go through and noted the importance of taking them off and starting fresh.

There being no further questions or comments Chair Weber thanked Ms. Bernardi and Ms. Cassimatis for coming and noted the support for what they are doing.

5) Resource Ranking Update

Ms. Kessler recommended this discussion be postponed until the next meeting due to staff transitions.

6) Staff Updates

1. Mari Brunner will be taking over as staff liaison for the Historic District Commission.
2. Ms. Kessler introduced Erin Benik as a new member and noted Ms. Kimball Frank's appointment as an Alternate member.
3. The Heritage Commission had their 2nd workshop on March 3rd. The focus was on how to restore older houses. There were over 100 attendees. The next workshop is scheduled for June 2nd, and will be a tour of Keene's architectural history. They are looking for people willing to share information on their homes/be a stop on the tour.
4. Chair Webber asked for an update on the Monadnock Food Co-op expansion. Ms. Kessler reported that Historic District Commission was asked to review the Monadnock Food Co-op expansion project in December. The Heritage Commission was asked to review the application because all but one of the Historic District Commission members are Co-op members. The Historic District Commission was temporarily reconstituted using the Heritage Commission, which is allowed by state statute and City code. The Heritage Commission assumed the role and responsibilities of the Historic District Commission and held a public hearing in late December and the process went smoothly. Ms. Kessler is unsure where the project stands at the moment.

7) Next Meeting- April 18, 2018

8) Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Chair Weber adjourned the meeting at 5:47 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Mary Lou Sheats-Hall, Minute Taker
March 22, 2018

Reviewed and edited by Mari Brunner, Planning Technician
April 3, 2018