

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, May, 15, 2019

4:30 PM

**2nd Floor Committee Room,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Hanspeter Weber, Chair
Nancy Proctor
Hans Porchitz
Erin Benik
Sam Temple

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Acting Planner

Members Not Present:

Councilor Thomas Powers
Andrew Weglinski, Vice Chair
Joslin Kimball Frank, Alternate
Dave Bergeron, Alternate

Site Visit: Before the meeting, Commission members conducted a site visit of the property located at 27 Mechanic Street.

1) Call to Order & Roll Call

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 4:31 PM and Ms. Brunner conducted roll call.

2) Minutes of the Previous Meeting – March 20, 2019

Ms. Proctor moved to adopt the minutes of March 20, 2019, which Ms. Benik seconded and the Historic District Commission carried unanimously.

3) Public Hearing

- a. COA-2010-15 Modification #1 – 27 Mechanic Street – Window Replacement – Applicant and owner Chris Fox proposes to replace all windows on the building historically known as the GAR building. A waiver is requested from Section XV.B.5.b.2 of the HDC Regulations regarding window appearance. This property is a Contributing Resource and is located at 27 Mechanic Street (TMP# 554-081-000) in the Central Business District.**

The Chairman requested a staff recommendation on completeness. Ms. Brunner recommended accepting application COA-2010-15 Modification #1 as complete. Ms.

Benik moved to accept the application as complete, which Ms. Proctor seconded and the Historic District Commission carried unanimously.

Chair Weber welcomed Chris Fox (of 27 Mechanic Street, Keene), who explained that the original building windows are incredibly energy inefficient. An alleyway abuts the building; windows on that façade are minimally visible to drivers on Mechanic Street. He has noticed that all buildings abutting his in the Historic District have modern windows. He asked the HDC to approve replacing all windows, including two windows facing Mechanic Street, six windows facing Pleasant Street, and six windows facing an alley between the building and an adjacent structure. He also proposed unblocking an historic vent on the back of the building so it can contribute to summer ventilation.

Chair Weber recognized Scott Depot of LaValley Building Supply, who has worked with Mr. Fox to find a solution to increase the energy efficiency of the building. He said the current windows are metal framed and mortared into the brick face, therefore the proposed solution is to cut them out of the brick and replace them with energy efficient windows. He noted three proposals for window options described in the meeting packet:

1. Matthews Brothers Vinyl Windows (proposed option)
 - a. These windows would be all vinyl with a subsill at the bottom that is historic to New England, with a 3.5" wide casing that would sit on top of the masonry shelf in the window opening. The Commission looked at a window sample the applicant brought to the meeting.
2. Andersen Vinyl Exterior & Wood Interior (400 series)
 - a. This window is very similar in appearance to the Mathews Brothers product, with a 3.5" thick sill. The materials are different with a wood interior and vinyl exterior.
3. Andersen Fibrex Composite (100 series)
 - a. This option does not come with an integral trim, and therefore comes with an additional cost of \$2,700 to bring these windows to the same caliber as the 400 series and Matthews Brothers casings.

Mr. Depot concluded saying all windows are proposed to be double hung with simulated divided lights between the glass to give the 8/8 grid pattern like the original windows. On the alley façade, where the windows are barely visible, the applicant proposes no grids in the glass to reduce cost.

Mr. Porchitz asked about the windows' flanges. Mr. Depot replied that the factory would cut off the flanges so that a bead of caulk will bring the window right to the edge of the masonry opening. There will be no visible flanges past the 3.5" trim. Mr. Porchitz noted that 3.5" is significantly wider and asked if there are other, narrower profiles. Mr. Depot said there is a 2.5" brick mold with a 0.25" profile on the edge, just proud of the flat part. Mr. Porchitz asked why the 3.5" is proposed and if there is a cost difference. Mr. Depot felt the 3.5" looked more historic to New England, but not necessarily this building. Mr. Fox recalled that the existing windows are mortared into the brick and will require nontraditional methods to remove them. Mr. Porchitz expressed the Commission's

understanding of the challenges with updating this kind of building. The Commission is more concerned with significant changes to the building's appearance. He said that because these windows are built into the brick, there is almost zero trim; he prefers the narrower brick mold because it best matches the character of the building. Mr. Depot noted the cost might be slightly less for the brick mold. Mr. Porchitz thinks the brick mold profile will enhance the overall efficiency of the windows.

Mr. Porchitz said he understood the logic of applying for different window treatment in the alley where they are less apparent. He understands the windows facing Mechanic Street are the most pronounced, but he prefers to extend the same appearance to the side facing Pleasant Street; he would like the same treatment with the center-divided lights. Mr. Depot said there are six windows on the Pleasant Street façade and the same treatment would add \$1,200 in project costs (just less than \$200 per unit).

Mr. Temple recalled that the original windows are mortared into the brick, but he said they are also recessed. Mr. Depot referred to page 8/28 in the meeting packet and said there is a full brick course in front of the metal frame, so a portion would meet the metal frame with 1-1/8" covering the brick, and 2-7/8" recessed with brick showing on the edge of the masonry opening (as opposed to the 4" typical). It will be fastened with screws through the side into a wood strip fastened inside masonry opening.

Chair Weber said he always has some concern about the durability of plastic and its appearance in 10-20 years; he noted that some start sagging with time. Mr. Depot said the sash has 2" reinforced aluminum, which is larger than most resulting in a thicker and robust sash. This significantly reduces the chances of the window sagging in 20 years.

Chair Weber said that following the site visit, he agrees with Mr. Porchitz that it would be nice to see the grid treatment carried around the corner to Pleasant Street. Mr. Fox noted the alley is his property and he can park there.

The Chairman requested staff comments and Ms. Brunner said the applicant provided a comprehensive overview of the request. She directed the Commission to a quote comparison table in the meeting packet. Based on the addendum for the Andersen Fibrex Composite quote submitted the day of the meeting, the total cost of the project with the additional cost of the trim is \$8,969.61, which is approximately \$600 more than the Matthews Brothers option. Ms. Brunner also recalled the HDC criteria for granting a waiver:

Sec. X. Waivers.

In a case where:

- A. Strict application of these regulations would result in a particular and exceptional difficulty or undue hardship upon the owner of the affected property; and*
- B. An alternative design or materials meets the design objectives stated in these regulations and in the Historic District Ordinance equally well or better than would strict compliance with these regulations; and*

C. The waiver may be granted without substantial detriment to the intent of these regulations and the Historic District Ordinance, and the public good. The HDC may waive strict compliance with these regulations where the HDC has determined that the above criteria have been met. To request a waiver an applicant must submit a request in writing and cite the specific regulation or standard and the reason(s) it cannot be met.

Ms. Brunner concluded saying the applicant submitted quotes to show hardship of replacing all 14 windows with the more expensive options.

Mr. Porchitz asked the applicant if he had a preference of the three window options proposed. Mr. Fox said he was waiting for the Commission's recommendation before deciding; his priorities are cost and efficiency. From the list of proposed options, he is comfortable with them all based on the Commission's preference. Mr. Temple noted all options are double-hung vinyl windows so they all seem equally efficient; he asked the merits of Andersen. Mr. Depot said the Andersen window has a vinyl-clad exterior and the interior wood sash is invisible from outside. Based on those details, Mr. Temple said all options seem equal for the Commission's purposes of appearance.

Chair Weber asked for pricing clarification. Mr. Depot noted the addendum submitted to Ms. Brunner for \$2,715.55 in additional material and labor cost for the Andersen Fibrex 100 series is the cost involved in upgrading the appearance of this product to match that of the Matthews Brothers or Andersen 400 series.

Mr. Porchitz asked if Andersen Fibrex is fiberglass. Mr. Depot said Fibrex is an Andersen trademark composite made of their recycled materials and it is very durable. Mr. Depot said the downfall of Fibrex is that it is single-hung with the top sash fixed and in this way is less energy efficient, because the top of the windows cannot be opened at night to ventilate the building. Chair Weber asked for confirmation that a metal reinforcement would be applied to the Matthews Brothers but not the Andersen Fibrex; Mr. Depot replied in the affirmative but said the exterior of all options are very similar in terms of how they look.

Chair Weber recalled that part of the waiver request is for undue hardship reflected in the \$6,000 cost difference as well as for the alternative design and material in the alley. Mr. Fox said the window replacement would enhance the neighborhood. Chair Weber acknowledged that \$6,000 is a significant difference.

Mr. Temple asked what action the Commission needed to take on the vent reinstallation. Ms. Brunner said the applicant does not need a waiver for the vent because it is historical to the house and reopening it would match the vents on the front of the building. The Commission can approve the vent installation as part of the approval for the window replacements.

Ms. Benik asked if cutting the original windows from the brick would destroy them. Mr. Fox hoped to recycle the metal at a minimum. Ms. Benik suggested someone might buy

the windows if kept intact. Mr. Depot said it is possible to remove the windows without destroying them. Mr. Temple noted the unique features of these windows, which Mr. Depot said is because the building used to be a social hall and was not designed as a residence. It is called the GAR building, which stands for “Grand Army of the Republic.”

With no comments, Chair Weber closed the public hearing.

Commission members discussed and agreed that the six windows on Pleasant Street should be treated the same as those on Mechanic Street and the alleyway windows can have the lower cost treatment. Mr. Porchitz expressed concern about single pane glass without grills in the alleyway, but ultimately the Commission agreed the alley windows are not highly visible. The original metal windows do not have to be replaced with wood and thus a waiver is not necessary for materials; if the original windows were wood, the regulations would favor replacement in kind.

Mr. Porchitz made the following motion, which Ms. Benik seconded:

On a vote of 5-0, the Historic District Commission approved a waiver from Section XV.B.5.b.2 of the HDC Regulations for six windows on the east façade of the building and COA-2010-15 Modification #1 for the replacement of 14 windows on the property located at 27 Mechanic Street (TMP# 554-081-000) as presented in the application and supporting materials submitted to the Community Development Department on April 29, 2019 with the following condition:

1. Staff approval of a window product with a 2” brick mold prior to window installation.

4) Resource Ranking Subcommittee

Ms. Brunner recalled the need to assess all buildings in the Historic District that do not yet have a resource ranking; all properties are categorized as primary, contributing, non-contributing, or incompatible and have associated standards for review. Some properties are currently unranked, either because they were built after the initial ranking *or* they are located in the Historic District extension that occurred in 2011. At the March meeting, the Commission directed staff to reach out to other groups that could help lead this effort; however, the Community Development Director noted this responsibility falls in the Commission’s purview. Two members of the Heritage Commission are interested in helping, and Ms. Brunner asked if anyone on the HDC would be willing to participate. Mr. Temple and Chair Weber volunteered.

Ms. Brunner recalled that this is not an effort to rank *new* buildings, only those 50 years or older because the HDC charge will likely change to only deal with buildings older than 50. Ms. Brunner confirmed there were less than 20 buildings to rank including: Bank of NH, Friendly’s, Peoples United Bank, US Army Recruiting Office, Brady Sullivan, Arcadia Hall, TD Bank, Keene Student Rental, Keene Industrial Paper Company, The Center at Keene, Cityside, Keene Fire Station, Monadnock Food Co-Op, The Courtyard Marriot, and Railroad Street Senior Housing, possibly among a few others.

Ms. Brunner said there are folders on the fourth floor of City Hall that include basic research on each property in the Historic District such as year built, historical significance, modern additions, and architectural significance. There is a form with a checklist to work from that the subcommittee can use in their ranking effort. Ms. Brunner said that she refers to the resource ranking form and other supporting documents for background information on properties that she shares with the Commission in staff reports, and she is trying to digitize them along the way. As the Chairman recalled, the Heritage Commission gathered research for the HDC to use as ranking criteria originally. Ms. Brunner believes the HDC can use the Heritage Commission as a resource in their ranking process. Ms. Brunner will coordinate the Resource Ranking Subcommittee.

5) Staff Updates

a. Building Better Together

Ms. Brunner said that the steering committee for the Building Better Together project has changed. Previously, staff worked with the Joint Planning Board and Planning, Licenses, & Development Committee to review drafts as they were brought forward. The feedback was that the project is too comprehensive to meet just once monthly. Moving forward, drafts will be reviewed by an ad-hoc steering committee with members appointed by the Mayor. The group will meet twice monthly on Fridays from 4:00 PM – 6:00 PM. All meetings have been on Cheshire TV but they will not be moving forward. Still, the meetings are open to the public and may be of interest to the Commission when the HDC regulations are under review. Meeting minutes will be posted on the project website.

b. Outreach & Education Opportunities

Ms. Brunner said that as a part of the Building Better Together project, staff is working to streamline the development process for applicants. One way to improve the process is by providing outreach and educational materials that explain what the City does, the processes to get permits, and the Historic District, among much more. She recalled Commission members' interest in developing educational materials about the Historic District available readily to interested developers. Ms. Brunner clarified she was not looking for someone to take on creating a new document but wanted a sense of interest from the Commission in producing an outreach material (e.g., pamphlet). She noted that the HDC has a small budget but other committees have substantial budgets and can contribute; there may be grant opportunities. The Commission agreed outreach is important because many people do not know what it means to live in the Historic District or where it is. Adding the district to local materials like the discovery maps would be valuable.

The Commission discussed the best way to educate and stay in contact with the public. Ms. Benik provided an example of a Heritage Commission outreach effort. Like the HDC, the Heritage Commission can apply for grants and they have been proactive doing so for things like walking tours and forums. This year, they are leading a historic foods walking tour along Washington Street and side streets (pending) heading west.

The Chairman asked Ms. Brunner what happens when a property owner comes into the office and Ms. Brunner replied that she discusses the request with the property owner and directs them to the appropriate sections of the HDC regulations. Chair Weber agreed that could be overwhelming and a simpler brochure that summarizes it all might be a better option. Ms. Brunner said she tries to distill the information most relevant to applicants she meets with. Still, she might not always be the first point of contact when someone comes to the office and while the Community Development Department has consolidated, there is opportunity for improvement.

Members also agreed that the following outreach possibilities would enhance the Historic District:

- Mailings
 - One of the most effective options could be a letter sent to district residents, possibly in the same envelope as their tax bill. This would remind property owners that they are in the district, remind them of the regulations, and invite them to contact the City and Commission. It would be an opportunity to increase awareness and understanding about the HDC and their values and functions. Regular mailings could reduce the instances of retroactive applications as well.
 - There are 180 properties in the Historic District and Ms. Brunner confirmed that regular mailings would not be a significant expense if they can be paired with a mailing that is already going out.
- Plaques or informational markers delimiting the district so people know when they are entering/exiting.
 - Signs along the bike path and other opportunities to connect with pedestrians in the district.
- Educational opportunities with the Walldogs Festival
- Pamphlets/Brochures
 - To ensure the overwhelming list of regulations is not the first experience a person has with the HDC and the district.
 - It can provide a summary of why the HDC exists, its goals, and relevant regulations.

Ms. Brunner did recall the HDC regulations will most likely change through the Building Better Together project; in particular, the HDC will only hear matters pertaining to buildings 50 years and older, not new construction, which will only go through the Planning Board standards of visual appearance. A shift to form-based zoning means new developments must meet some standards to fit the basic fabric of downtown. Buildings classified as noncontributing or incompatible will have less stringent standards with a less intense review process. Mr. Temple's property is an example of a non-contributing or incompatible resource that had changes, which were approved administratively. Regarding resource ranking, Commission members discussed the unclear ranking of the Hanna Grimes building and agreed to revisit it.

Ms. Proctor asked for an update on 34 West Street. Ms. Brunner reported that the external muntins are in place and look good. Mr. Porchitz agreed the muntins made a difference. The Commission members agreed important shifts are happening to limit communication breakdowns that were apparent with that property, including a more unified Community Development Department.

6) Next Meeting – June 19, 2019

7) Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Chair Weber adjourned the meeting at 5:37 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katriona Kibler, Minute Taker
May 21, 2019

Reviewed and edited by Mari Brunner, Planner