

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, June 17, 2020

4:30 PM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

Andrew Weglinski, Chair
Councilor Catherine Workman
Nancy Proctor
Hans Porchitz
Tia Hockett, Alternate

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Planner

Members Not Present:

Sam Temple
Joslin Kimball Frank, Alternate
Dave Bergeron, Alternate
Hanspeter Weber, Alternate
Peter Poanessa, Alternate

1) Call to Order & Roll Call

Chair Weglinski called the meeting to order at 4:38 PM and read the executive order authorizing a remote meeting: Emergency Order #12, issued by the Governor of the State of New Hampshire pursuant to Executive Order #2020-04.

Pursuant to this order, Ms. Brunner called roll and members present, all of whom called alone, stated their locations:

Andrew Weglinski – 28 Valley Street, Keene
Catherine Workman – Home address
Hans Porchitz – 46 Probate Street, Keene
Tia Hockett – 56 Page Street, Keene
Nancy Proctor – 10 Algonquin Drive, Keene

2) Minutes of Previous Meeting – May 20, 2020

Ms. Proctor moved to approve the minutes of May 20, 2020, which Councilor Workman seconded, and the motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

3) Public Hearings

- a. COA-2020-04 – 70 Court Street – Keene Senior Center – Applicant Dan Bartlett, on behalf of owner Keene Senior Citizens, Inc., proposes alterations to the existing porch and entrance and the installation of a concrete ramp on the south façade of the Keene Senior Center building located at 70 Court St. (TMP# 568-041-000). The building is ranked as a Primary Resource and is located in the Office District.**

Staff recommended accepting this application as complete. Ms. Proctor moved to accept application COA-2020-04 as complete, which Councilor Workman seconded, and the motion passed by unanimous roll call vote. [Note: Mr. Porchitz was absent for this vote.]

Chair Weglinski opened the public hearing and welcomed the applicant, Dan Bartlett, who was calling alone from 449 Park Avenue, Keene. Mr. Bartlett used aerial photos to demonstrate the location of this property on Court Street, opposite of Mechanic Street. Mr. Bartlett used photo views from Court Street to demonstrate where the proposed ADA compliant ramp would begin, between the sidewalk next to the building and the vegetation, both of which would remain. He said that the ramp would continue toward Court Street and then return toward the current porch and the Cheshire Village Home sign, where it would extend under the porch and continue toward the front door. With the ramp construction, Mr. Bartlett explained that there would be landscaping changes, such as replacing the daylilies with evergreen shrubbery to provide greenery all year. The goal is to recreate the current vegetation on the Court Street side of the ramp. The current raised planters would be removed, flowerpots on the porch would remain, and the flagpole would not be disturbed. Mr. Bartlett used a photo to show the historic building and the newer addition, with the existing non-compliant ramp. That non-compliance prompted this application and created an opportunity for an important ramp feature that could deliver people to both the entry and rear of the building. Mr. Bartlett showed a photo of stairs that would be replaced to meet the finished floor of the existing building; the accompanying hand railing would be replaced as well in kind. The new ramp would begin at the bottom of those stairs. Mr. Bartlett explained how the current black iron railing would be unaltered beyond adding to the new ramp railing, which would also be the same black iron throughout for consistency.

Mr. Bartlett continued displaying the site plan and architectural elevations to demonstrate the proposed ramp. He explained how the thin, low line of plantings between the sidewalk and ramp would continue to the Court Street side to screen the ramp there and somewhat to the north. Mr. Bartlett used the architectural elevations to explain the decision to continue the 1.5” diameter iron railing throughout the new ramp because it is transparent and any other vertical element would be more visually intrusive. The elevation from Court Street showed handhold detailing that would be needed at the top of the railing to be ADA compliant. Mr. Bartlett showed the existing front door and the proposed replacement to be also ADA compliant. Fortunately, he said there is sufficient framing around the existing door to maintain essentially the same panel above it. Mr. Bartlett demonstrated that the current door threshold is 8” above the deck, but it would be flush with the new deck.

Ms. Proctor asked if the new door would be painted to carry through the off-white color or stay wood as in the prototype photo. Mr. Bartlett said the intent is to match the existing door as much as possible but he was open to discussion. He said there are windows throughout the building with that same off-white color.

Councilor Workman thought the proposed plan for the building was a great one. She was glad that the greenery and garden in the middle would be staying and built up around the ramp. The Councilor asked about the proposed concrete ramp material and asked whether other materials were considered to ensure it would not be slippery in New England winters. Mr. Bartlett said they also considered wood but he did not recommend it because it is shorter lasting. The concrete ramp should endure for more than 100 years whereas wood requires maintenance within 10-20 years due to rot. The proposed concrete is treated with a non-skid finish that provides an excellent gripping surface and a buildup of ice would indicate that the concrete needs maintenance. He thought the Keene Senior Center was worthy of a more durable material and Councilor Workman agreed.

Chair Weglinski requested staff comments. Ms. Brunner reported that this property, known as the “Lewis J. Colony House,” was built in 1828 by John Prentiss, the founder of the New Hampshire Sentinel, for use as a parsonage for the Unitarian Church. The Rev. Thomas R. Sullivan occupied this site until 1835. During this time, Prentiss and his family lived in the house north of 70 Court Street. After 1835, the house served as the residence of John W. Prentiss, who succeeded his father as publisher of the New Hampshire Sentinel. Lewis J. Colony bought the house in 1867, and it remained in the Colony family for almost 70 years, until 1936. Lewis J. Colony owned the Munson Cotton Mill at Munsonville, which he converted to the L.J. Colony Chair Company in 1871. This company is known for being one of the first manufacturers to introduce large office chairs and rockers. The Colony family sold the property to Ray Tenney in 1936, who sold the house a few years later to Dr. Fred Almquist in 1939 and for about 23 years, the house served as Dr. Almquist’s residence and office. It was sold to Emile Legere in January 1962 and six months later, Legere sold the property to the Keene Senior Citizens Inc. The property has remained under the same ownership since 1962, operating as the Keene Senior Center.

Ms. Brunner stated that according to the property inventory form prepared for this site in 2003 by the Keene Heritage Commission, this house was known for many years as, “the house with the front door on the back side.” Major alterations include the construction of a 4,400-sf addition to the rear and south side of the building in the late 1970s, the addition of an elevator shaft to the northeast corner of the building in the early 1990s, and the conversion of the side lawn to parking sometime in the 1990s. Significant architectural and character-defining features include the following:

- 2.5-story brick house with wood-frame extension at west end (delineated by two-story paneled square column) and offset wood-frame ell in rear,
- Blind arcade of arches and wooden pilasters across east elevation,
- Front and side (south) porch with modified triglyphs in frieze,

- Flush boarding in gable,
- Tall brick chimneys on lower slope of front wall,
- Slate roof, and
- Size and spacing of window openings.

The property inventory form notes that, “This house displays one of the few blind façade arcades in Keene, a highly sophisticated architectural treatment employed in the first third of the 19th century. Coupled with the detailing on the porch, flush boarding in the front gable, and height and placement of the chimneys, the features on this residence make it among the City’s most architecturally significant for its era.” Due to the high architectural and historical significance of this property, it was determined to be individually eligible for the National Register of Historic Places in 1997.

Ms. Brunner explained that the applicant proposed to demolish the existing concrete stairs on the south façade of the building, remove portions of the wood porch deck and framing, remove a portion of the iron railing on the porch, install new concrete stairs and a concrete ramp on the south façade of the building, and install a new entrance door. Per Sections III.D.3 – Renovation, rehabilitation, or restoration of a building or structure, III.D.13 – Installation of New Paving, and III.D.15. – Changes to grading, this request was classified as a “Major Project” for review by the Historic District Commission.

As such, Ms. Brunner read the HDC standards relevant to this application:

- *Sec. XV. A. 1. – Trees, Landscaping, and Site Work:*
 - b) Design Standards*
 - 2) Grading or changes to the site’s existing topography shall not be allowed if existing mature trees might be negatively impacted by altered drainage and soil conditions.*
 - d) Projects that do not require a COA*
 - 2) Planting new trees, shrubs, ground cover and other plants*
 - 3) Planting hedges or flower, vegetable, and rock gardens*
 - 5) Landscaping or site work that does not alter the grade or require changes to the Topography.*

Ms. Brunner said that the applicant proposed to remove existing landscaping on the south façade of the building, which currently consists of perennials and flowers, and replace with new plantings that are similar in type and size to the plantings that exist on the site today. Small evergreen shrubs will be included to provide year-round screening of the ramp. Ms. Brunner recommended including a condition of approval to ensure that landscaping would be installed and maintained to provide year-round screening of the concrete ramp from the Court Street view. No existing mature trees would be impacted by proposed changes to grading in this site area.

Ms. Brunner read the next relevant HDC standard:

- *Sec. XV. A. 2. – Fences, Walls, Posts and Site Features:*
 - b) Design Standards*

- 1) Historic fences, walls, posts and granite site features, including but not limited to mounting blocks, shall not be removed from the site on which they are located, and every effort shall be made to leave them undisturbed.*
- 2) New fences or walls shall be simple in design and shall complement the materials and design of the building(s) on the site and the character of the site itself. Fences and walls along the street frontage shall be no higher than four feet, unless it can be documented that a higher fence existed historically.*

Ms. Brunner explained that the applicant proposed to remove a portion of the existing porch railing and install a new welded steel pipe railing along the concrete ramp, as shown in the east and south elevations submitted with the project application. The new railing would be painted black to match the existing, and would have an intermediate horizontal rail.

Ms. Brunner read the final relevant HDC standard:

- *Section XV.B.6. – Entrances, doors and porches:*

b) Design Standards

- 1) Historic doors, entrances and porches, including their associated features, shall be retained or replaced in-kind. If repair is necessary, only the deteriorated element shall be repaired, through patching, splicing, consolidating, or otherwise reinforcing the deteriorated section. If replacement is necessary, the new feature shall match the original in size, design, texture, color and where possible, materials. The new feature shall maintain the same visual appearance as the historic feature.*
- 2) Introducing new door openings onto the primary elevations, or enlarging or reducing door openings to fit new stock doors, is generally prohibited.*

Ms. Brunner said that the applicant proposed to alter the existing, historic porch on the south façade of the building by installing a new ramp that would cut through the porch. In addition, the applicant proposes to raise the porch deck by 7-3/4” to be flush with the porch entrance. The existing door would be replaced with a new door in order to meet accessibility requirements. The new door would be wider than the existing door; however, the brick opening will not be enlarged or otherwise impacted by the proposed change. The new door is proposed to be a wood door with similar features as the existing, including a 9-lite, 3/3 grid pattern on the top half and a double panel on the bottom half of the door.

[Note: Mr. Porschitz returned to the meeting at 5:09 PM.]

With no public comments, Chair Weglinski closed the public hearing. There was no Commission deliberation, all agreeing that the application seemed straightforward.

Ms. Hockett made the following motion, which Ms. Proctor seconded, and was followed by a unanimous roll call vote.

With a vote of 5-0, the Historic District Commission approved COA-2020-04 for alterations to the existing porch and entrance and the installation of a concrete ramp on the south façade of the Keene Senior Center building located at 70 Court St. (TMP# 568-041-000), as presented on the plan identified as “New Ramp and Interior Alterations, Keene Senior Center, 70 Court Street, Keene, NH” prepared by DB Architects LLC at a scale of ¼” = 1’ and dated April 24, 2020 with the following conditions:

1. Architect’s stamp appears on plan.
2. Landscaping shall be installed and maintained to provide year-round screening of the east and south concrete faces of the ramp.

4) Committee Membership

Ms. Brunner recalled that there are two openings on the Commission for one regular member and one alternate. She stated that after the last meeting Hope Benik applied, but had not yet been confirmed through the nomination process. Chair Weglinski recalled that the Commission also needs a Vice Chair. If any members have ideas for recruitment, Ms. Brunner would be happy to reach out to those individuals.

5) Staff Updates

Staff will provide an update on the Land Use Code Update/Building Better Together project at the July meeting.

Staff was contacted by the NH Division of Historic Resources, which visits communities regularly to talk about their programming and they hope to come to Keene soon. They would meet ideally with both the Historic District and Heritage Commissions, and so staff proposed a joint session during the HDC’s regular August 19 meeting for this presentation.

6) New Business

7) Next Meeting – July 15, 2020

8) Adjourn

There being no further business, Chair Weglinski adjourned the meeting at 5:19 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker
June 23, 2020

Reviewed by Mari Brunner, Planner