

City of Keene
New Hampshire

JOINT HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION & HERITAGE COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, August 19, 2020

5:00 PM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Historic District Commission Members

Present:

Andrew Weglinski, Chair
Councilor Catherine Workman
Hope Benik
Tia Hockett, Alternate (Voting)

Historic District Commission Members

Not Present:

Nancy Proctor
Sam Temple
Hans Porchitz
Hanspeter Weber, Alternate
Joslin Kimball Frank, Alternate
Dave Bergeron, Alternate
Peter Poanessa, Alternate

Heritage Commission Members Present:

Rose Carey, Chair
Councilor Gladys Johnsen
Susan DeGidio
Cauley Powell
Louise Zerba, Alternate (Voting)

Heritage Commission Members Not

Present:

Charlotte Schuerman
Erin Benik
Kelly Ballard

Staff Present:

Tara Kessler, Senior Planner
Mari Brunner, Planner

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Weglinski called the meeting to order at 5:03 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 the members present, all of whom called alone, stated their locations. Chair Weglinski, Councilor Workman, Ms. Hockett, Chair Carey, Ms. Powell, Councilor Johnsen, and Ms. Zerba called from their home addresses. Ms. Benik called from 34 Court Street.

- 2) NH Certified Local Government Program Discussion – Staff from the NH Division of Historical Resources (NHDHR) will facilitate a discussion regarding the City’s involvement in the Certified Local Government Program, which is a partnership between municipal governments and the state historic preservation program to encourage and expand local involvement in preservation-related activities.**

Ms. Kessler introduced Staff from the NH Division of Historical Resources (NHDHR), Amy Dixon (calling alone from Warner, NH) and Nadine Miller (calling alone from Nashua, NH), who tour Certified Local Government Program communities every few years to check-in.

Ms. Miller explained that the Certified Local Government (CLG) program is a partnership between the National Park Service, the NHDHR, and the 25 current local NH communities participating, which must have a Historic District regulated locally. Keene has been a CLG community for approximately 12 years and has done great work, particularly due to the joint roles of the Historic District and Heritage Commissions fostering the CLG's responsibility to the whole town, not just the Historic District. Ms. Miller said that the greatest benefit of the CLG program is two-year grants awarded annually for various programming such as surveying historic properties anywhere in town, master plan development, ordinance review, and education. Ms. Miller said that the NHDHR promotes Keene to other CLG communities as an example of popular community engagement to determine whether/how to expand their Historic District. Every four years, NHDHR staff check-in with CLG communities and at this meeting, Ms. Miller went through a series of questions for Staff and Commission members' reply.

1. How does the community enforce State and local legislation for the designation and protection of historic properties?

Ms. Kessler confirmed that Keene follows the US Secretary of Interior standards for Historic Preservation. Ms. Miller asked if there had been any controversial projects of note in the City for discussion moving forward. Chair Weglinski noted the common Historic District Commission theme of retroactive approvals – applicants doing work and asking forgiveness later – that the Commission is trying to limit but must address case-by-case during public hearings. Ms. Brunner added that in some instances, people were unaware they were in the Downtown Historic District and therefore needed approval; however, there have also been instances where people who should have known that they needed permission did not seek approval until the City asked them to after-the-fact. Ms. Miller suggested a possible future CLG grant could be used for education and promotion to Historic District residents.

2. Are Commission memberships adequate and qualified?

Ms. Kessler confirmed that the City requests resumes or background information and initial interest letters for all Commission members, which are kept on file as a requirement for nominating and appointing new members.

3. Do the Commissions meet at minimum four times annually?

Ms. Kessler confirmed that the Heritage Commission meets bi-monthly and the Historic District Commission meets at minimum four times annually, and often more than four times (pending applications). Commission meetings are currently proceeding virtually during the Covid-19 State of Emergency.

4. Is there a system for survey and inventory of historic properties?

Ms. Kessler said the City is currently under contract with a historic preservation firm to conduct a historic resource inventory of carriage houses, barns, and agricultural buildings near to the City's downtown to understand what resources exist between Court and Washington Streets, to identify properties most at risk of potential demolition, and to work with those property owners by helping them to seek resources to preserve historic features. Chair Weglinski noted that a carriage house on Main Street came to the Historic District Commission several times for rehabilitation. He added that due to the Historic District expansion in 2011, a section of the District remains unranked, and a subcommittee of these two Commissions formed but could not continue work during the Covid-19 State of Emergency. Ms. Miller suggested such a ranking effort could be a CLG grant opportunity, similar to CLG initiatives in Lebanon, Sanbornton, and Amherst, the latter of which integrated GIS into their ranking for their website.

5. Does the community participate in the NHDHR's program to recommend buildings to the National Register?

Ms. Kessler said that a local property owner chose to be on the State Register in 2019 and the Heritage Commission was helpful in that process. Ms. Miller said that a CLG grant could fund listing a property on the Register.

6. Are there public hearings and minutes for all Commission decisions and actions?

Ms. Kessler said that per the Right to Know Law (RSA 91-A), meeting agendas and minutes are posted to the City website and elsewhere within the Law's terms. Ms. Miller asked about posting historic resource inventories/surveys, etc. on the website. Ms. Kessler said that the City applied unsuccessfully for a CLG grant in the last round to better consolidate that historical resource survey information for the public, but there is insufficient Staff time for the effort despite seeing the great advantage. Ms. Miller referenced an inventory database that can help in this effort without having to visit the NHDHR office; Ms. Kessler and Chair Carey have access to the database.

Having concluded the formal questionnaire, Ms. Miller noted that she reviews Federal and State projects under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and she asks applicants in the Keene Historic District to check-in with the Historic District Commission; she knew the Commission was very responsive on cell tower projects. Ms. Miller asked how the Section 106 review process is working for the City. Ms. Kessler said that review is effective generally and if an applicant does not come to the City directly, the NHDHR notifies the City of the application and encourages the applicant to visit the Heritage Commission, which can provide feedback to assist in State review. Chair Carey thought the Section 106 review process works well to allow the City to work with applicants trying to modify historic areas; there have been several instances in the last two years. Ms. Miller appreciated the comments and added that when an application is in the Historic District, the NHDHR tries to condition their comments on following local guidelines as well.

The conversation continued on cell towers and Ms. Miller said that the NHDHR sometimes reviews those applications within the programmatic agreements that telecommunications companies sign, which can sometimes limit the NHDHR review. Ms. Miller cited a project on

Water Street that NHDHR was not allowed to review. Ms. Kessler said the City was informed by that applicant that they were exempt from Section 106 and the City informed Ms. Miller, who said that if there were significant local concerns, the NHDHR could investigate further. Ms. Brunner explained that Staff were concerned because under the City's Telecommunications Ordinance, the proposal to expand that array would require a Conditional Use Permit but State law preempted local authority. Staff was concerned because that array was placed on a historic building outside the Historic District and prior to its establishment and creation of the local Telecommunications Ordinance. The applicant subsequently reduced the array size but now wants to increase it again and the proposal does not follow local regulations. Ms. Kessler said that Staff ultimately felt it was impossible to require a review process due to State law and opted to not seek NHDHR support to go directly to the FCC because the array was preempted at State level. Ms. Miller cited another small cell collocation downtown and Ms. Kessler said that applicant contacted the City and in consultation with Chair Carey, Staff determined that because it was located on a State right-of-way farther from downtown and with no historic buildings in a reasonable radius, the decision was to not bring it to the Heritage Commission. Ms. Miller said to never hesitate contacting NHDHR for projects of concern.

Commissioners cited the following ideas with which NHDHR could potentially help the City:

- Emerald Street resource inventory – part of the 2011 Historic District expansion. Ms. Brunner will consult with Ms. Miller.
- Stone Arch Bridge – final work pends a grant application that the City needs assistance writing. Ms. Dixon would determine whether grant writing is an eligible expense. Because the bridge is a part of the Transportation Heritage Trail, there could be other types of funding available, such as for additional research on the bridge or rail line because it was never formally evaluated historically, or for sign concepts and design development (not installation). Ms. Miller said that NHDHR encourages NH Department of Transportation to work with the City and to have confidence in the Heritage Commissions ability to excel with that bridge. The Heritage Commission would discuss.
- Heritage Commission grant application deferred to this fall – this is a major project for the Commission to best digitize their resources for the public. Ms. Dixon would revisit the original submission but thought funds ran out last time, agreed it was a worthwhile effort, and said the City should contact NHDHR in the fall or closer to beginning of 2021 with an updated cost quote from the vendor.
- Historic District Commission support – Ms. Miller and Ms. Dixon can help the Keene Commission collaborate with other Historic District Commissions through the State. Additionally, the NHDHR can provide resources to best support new Commission members learning their roles; to begin, Commissioners can refer to the [National Alliance of Preservation Commissions](#) website, including their CAMP program that the State has been trying to replicate.

3) Other Business

Chair Carey welcomed Councilor Johnsen to the Heritage Commission and Ms. Kessler would work with the Councilor via email on the Commission's history. There should be a

Commissioner on both the Heritage and Historic District Commissions, but is lacking at this time.

The Commissions would like to hold joint meetings more often to check-in and collaborate, perhaps annually. Ms. Kessler added that CLG grants are available annually, with the application due in November, and so it might be good to have that annual joint meeting toward the end of summer or early fall to determine if the Commissions want to apply for a collaborative grant. The City can submit multiple applications at the same time, currently has one active grant for the carriage barn project, and one application moving forward this fall for web developer support to create a public database of historic property inventories. The downside of the grants is that only research projects are funded 100% and other programs like education require a 40% community match, which can include Staff and volunteer time.

Both Commissions would discuss at their next meetings ways to better collaborate and consider a replacement liaison member for both Commissions. Carey would send status updates to Ms. Brunner to determine when both sides want the next joint meeting.

4) Adjourn

There being no further business, Chair Weglinski adjourned the meeting at 5:59 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katryna Kibler, Minute Taker
August 26, 2020

Reviewed and edited by Mari Brunner, Planner