

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, September 15, 2021

4:30 PM

2nd Floor Committee Room,
City Hall

Members Present:

Andrew Weglinski, Chair
Russ Fleming, Vice Chair
Councilor Catherine Workman
Hans Porschitz

Staff Present:

Tara Kessler, Senior Planner

Members Not Present:

Hope Benik
Sam Temple
David Bergeron, Alternate
Tia Hockett, Alternate
Peter Poanessa, Alternate

1) Call to Order & Roll Call

Chair Weglinski called the meeting to order at 4:31 PM.

2) Minutes of July 20, 2021

Mr. Fleming made a motion to accept the minutes of July 20, 2021 as presented. Councilor Workman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

3) Public Hearing: COA-2014-07 Mod. 4 – 37 Mechanic St – The Community Kitchen Solar Array Supplementary Equipment – Applicant Charles Michal of Weller & Michal Architects Inc., on behalf of owner, The Community Kitchen Inc., proposes to install supply lines/supplementary equipment on the primary façade of the building at 37 Mechanic St (TMP#554-087-000). A waiver is requested from Sec. 21.5.5.G of the HDC Regulation in the Keene Land Development Code related to supply/supplementary equipment for renewable energy systems. The property is ranked as a Primary Resource and is located in the Downtown Limited District.

Ms. Kessler stated staff recommended that the board accept the application as complete. Chair Weglinski made a motion to accept the application as complete. Councilor Workman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Chair Weglinski opened the public hearing and invited the applicant to speak.

Charles Michal of Weller and Michal Architects stated he was present on behalf of Community Kitchen, a well-known institute in the City. He went on to state that the current project is a continuation of a series of projects, with assistance from community development grants, to improve the facility they operate out of and put it into a safe and capable condition to carry out their mission. He noted an increased effort to reduce high operating costs and reported that prior projects improved refrigeration capacities in the building; however, they are still seeing very high electrical costs, sometimes running as high as \$3,500 per month.

Mr. Michal continued to state that they'd like to install a PV solar array on the roof to directly offset that operating cost, and as a renewable energy project it would also be a contribution to the City's own goals. The project had previously been approved by HDC with supplemental equipment for installation on the west facing façade. They were underway when it was realized that the original designated location for the mounted safety disconnect switches, necessary for emergency personnel to be able to disable the array, could not be used. He explained that the abutting property owner denied permission to place equipment in the previously designated location because it would cross the property line, and the abutter does not desire any new additions on the property. Additionally, codes prevent installation on the rear of the building, as well as running interior conduit through the building.

Mr. Michal stated they discussed the situation with staff and looked at other potential scenarios, concluding that the primary façade is the best location for the equipment. He then showed an image with the wall-mounted equipment, and a conduit running to the roof enclosed with a conduit cover, on the south facing elevation of the building, near the southwest corner. He stated the equipment and conduit cover would be painted a color that closely matches the brick surface to which it will be mounted.

Chair Weglinski opened the floor for questions.

Chair Weglinski asked how much the solar array would offset the usage/operating costs. Mr. Michal stated he didn't have the exact number handy but could get that information at a later time.

Mr. Fleming asked if staff would approve the color of paint. Mr. Michal stated they would be more than happy to paint a small section and let staff give their opinion. He added that he could use a color matching app to help the process be more accessible.

Mr. Porschitz asked if there was an option to have the conduit blending in versus the entire box of equipment. Mr. Michal answered that if they come off the public service poll the conduit could enter the building but that is a violation of building code.

Ms. Kessler stated they had been working with the applicant to approve a location for equipment and the only other suitable location would be west facing, which does not work due to lack of permission from the property owner. She went on to state that the standard the applicant is seeking a waiver from is Section 21.5.5.G which says that “All supplementary equipment and supply lines associated with renewable energy systems shall be placed in inconspicuous locations and/or concealed from view with architectural elements (e.g. downspouts) or other screening.” She went on to state that the location on the primary façade of the building is not inconspicuous so the applicant is seeking a waiver from the standard and proposing to paint the equipment to match it as closely as possible the brick. Ms. Kessler noted that the board can place a stipulation that staff approve the color prior to completing painting.

Chair Weglinski asked for public comments. There being none, he closed public hearing and began board deliberations.

Mr. Fleming made a motion to grant a waiver from Section 21.5.5.G of the Historic District Commission Regulations and to approve COA-2014-07, Modification #4 for the installation of supply lines/supplementary equipment associated with the roof-mounted solar PV array on the south-facing façade of the building at 37 Mechanic Street (TMP#554-087-000) as presented in the application and supporting materials submitted to the Community Development Department on August 25, 2021, but with the stipulation that staff approve the color proposed based on a sample test on the building. Councilor Workman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

4) Staff Updates

Ms. Kessler stated, as part of its public hearing surrounding the Land Development Code, the Commission had asked that staff bring forth to the Planning Board a request that any major site plans for new developments/construction, or additions to buildings younger than 50 years old, within the downtown Historic District be brought to the Historic District Commission (HDC) for an advisory review and recommendation to the Planning Board, before the Planning Board concludes a public hearing on the application.

She reported that staff followed through with that request and a public hearing was held in August; however, the Planning Board denied the proposed amendment. She explained that Mayor Hansel had concerns about adding another step to the process and felt it would contradict the intent of the project, which was to create a more streamlined review process.

Ms. Kessler informed the commission that they can add this item to the October meeting agenda if they'd like to discuss further.

Ms. Kessler announced the virtual workshop being held by the Heritage Commission on September 21, 2021. She explained that architectural historians from Preservation Company

would be guiding a virtual exploration of the history and evolution of urban barns and carriage houses in Keene's north central neighborhood.

5) **New Business**

6) **Next Meeting**

Chair Weglinski stated the next meeting is October 20, 2021.

7) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Weglinski adjourned the meeting at 5:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Nicole Cullinane, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner