

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
ONE JUNKINS AVENUE, PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

EILEEN DONDERO FOLEY COUNCIL CHAMBERS

7:00 p.m.

**March 14, 2012
reconvened from March 7, 2012**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Richard Katz; Members John Wyckoff, Tracy Kozak, City Council Representative Jack D. Thorsen; Planning Department Representative William Gladhill

MEMBERS ABSENT: Vice Chairman Joseph Almeida; Elena Whittaker; Alternates George Melchior, Dan Rawling

ALSO PRESENT: Nicholas Cracknell, Planning Consultant

I. PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. Petition of **Joseph J. and Jennifer Almeida, owners**, for property located at **103 High Street**, wherein permission was requested to allow new construction to an existing structure (remove existing fence, gate and arbor, install new fence, gate, and arbor, construct new steps to shed, add chimney caps) as per plans on file in the Planning Department. Said property is shown on Assessor Plan 118 as Lot 22 and lies within Central Business B, Historic, and Downtown Overlay Districts. (*This item was postponed at the March 7, 2012 meeting to the March 14, 2012 meeting.*)

SPEAKING TO THE PETITION

Mr. Joseph Almeida, owner of the property, was present to speak to the application. He passed out a supplemental sheet that provided more details on the proposed steps for the rear garden shed. He explained that the submitted plans showed the proposed changes highlighted in yellow marker. The proposed changes were for the right side of the building. He pointed out the fence and gate that he wished to replace with a new design that would provide better security and functionality.

Mr. Almeida explained that the proposed arbor structure for the first six feet would be a solid board fence and then it would transition to a picket fence similar to what was there now. He added that the plane of the gate and the fence would match what currently existed. Page one showed the construction details for the steps.

Ms. Kozak asked about the details of the chimney caps. Mr. Almeida said they would be a simple blue stone cap with brick supports on the corners with the height not to exceed 12 inches.

Chairman Katz asked if there were any more questions for the applicant. Hearing none, he asked if anyone from the public wished to speak to, for, or against the application. Seeing no one rise, he declared the public hearing closed and awaited a motion.

DECISION OF THE COMMISSION

Mr. Wyckoff made a motion to grant a Certificate of Approval for the application as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Gladhill. Chairman Katz asked for discussion.

Mr. Wyckoff stated that the design was appropriate for the neighborhood.

Hearing no other discussion, Chairman Katz called for the vote. The motion to grant a Certificate of Approval for the application as presented passed by a unanimous (5-0) vote.

II. WORK SESSIONS

A. Work Session requested by **North Mill Realty Trust, owner**, for property located at **319 Vaughan Street**, wherein permission is requested to allow exterior renovations to an existing structure (add windows, **Request To Postpone** is shown on Assessor Plan 124 as Lot 9 and lies within Central Business A, Historic, and Downtown Overlay Districts. *(This item is continued from the February 1, 2012 meeting.)*

DECISION OF THE COMMISSION

At the applicant's request, Mr. Wyckoff made a motion to postpone the application to the April 4, 2012 meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Gladhill. The motion passed by a unanimous (5-0) vote.

B. Work Session requested by **DiLorenzo Real Estate, LLC, owner**, for property located at **33 Bow Street**, wherein permission was requested to allow exterior renovations to an existing structure (remove existing balcony structure and move to floor above, add new balcony on second level on rear elevation). Said property is shown on Assessor Map 106 as Lot 48 and lies within Central Business A, Historic, and Downtown Overlay Districts. *(This item is continued from the February 1, 2012 meeting.)*

- Mr. Steve McHenry of McHenry Architecture was present to speak to the application. He stated that this was his second work session for the project. At the last work session, it was felt that the proposed balcony was out of scale so he was showing the Commission two options and explained them in detail.
- Mr. Wyckoff stated that he did not have a problem with Option 2.
- Mr. Gladhill commented that that Option 2 looked better than what currently existed.
- Councilor Thorsen agreed. He said that it addressed the top heavy issue that they discussed at the last meeting.
- Ms. Kozak also liked Option 2. She thought it was well balanced.
- Chairman Katz agreed that he liked Option 2 as well.
- Mr. McHenry thanked the Commission for their feedback.

C. Work Session requested by **General Porter Condominium Association, owner**, for property located at **32 Livermore Street**, wherein permission was requested to allow a new free standing structure (construct garage). Said property is shown on Assessor Plan 109 as Lot 20 and lies within General Residence B and Historic Districts. *(This item is continued from the February 1, 2012 meeting.)*

DECISION OF THE COMMISSION

Because no one was present to speak to the application, the Commission voted to postpone the application to a time indefinite, requiring the applicant to reapply for any further consideration on the matter.

D. Work Session requested by **Theodore M. Stiles and Joan Boyd, owners**, for property located at **28 South Street**, wherein permission was requested to allow demolition of an existing structure (demolish garage) and allow a new free standing structure (construct new garage). Said property is shown on Assessor Plan 102 as Lot 43 and lies within General Residence B and Historic Districts.

- Mr. Theodore Stiles, owner of the property, was present to speak to the application. He stated that they have an existing structure that was in poor condition. He explained that they would like to add a foundation, add dormers to both sides, add about ten feet of additional length toward the back of the property making the structure 32' x 14.5' in size. The height would stay the same. He explained that they would like to use the first level as a garage with additional storage for gardening supplies. On the second floor, they would like to use as studio space which would require water and heat. Mr. Stiles said at this point, there were no plans to add windows to the first floor but they would consider it if it looked awkward.
- Mr. Wyckoff commented that dormers on both sides of the structure might be too much.
- Councilor Thorsen asked if dormers typically started from the roof line. Mr. Wyckoff said that it was easiest to build them from the ridge. Ms. Kozak said that they typically like to see them lower than the ridge. She added that it would be important to see street views showing it from public ways.
- Chairman Katz asked the Commission if a site walk would be helpful. Ms. Kozak replied yes.
- Mr. Wyckoff pointed out that since the structure was practically on the property line, the applicant would need a variance. Mr. Cracknell said there were a number of factors that would require it to get Board of Adjustment approval. He added that this work session would provide helpful feedback so that the applicant would know what to ask for with the Board of Adjustment.
- Chairman Katz asked the Commission if there were any major objections to what had been proposed. Mr. Gladhill said with the dormers, he would like to have more visuals.
- Councilor Thorsen said that he had a concern with the view from the neighbor's yard.
- Ms. Kozak stated that she thought it could work but she would like to see more of the context.
- Mr. Wyckoff thought that the extra ten feet was a bit overwhelming. He said he would like to see it cut down by five feet and with smaller dormers.

E. Work Session requested by **South Mill Investments, LLC, owner**, for property located at **25 South Mill Street**, wherein permission was requested to allow demolition of an existing structure (demolish existing house) and allow a new free standing structure (construct new house). Said property is shown on Assessor Plan 102 as Lot 16 and lies within General Residence B and Historic Districts.

- Mr. David Witham, designer for the project, Mr. James Sanders, owner of the property, and Richard Philbrick, builder, were present to speak to the application. Mr. Witham stated that they were proposing to raze the structure and rebuild a replica. He said that they did not take the demolition lightly but that there were a lot of factors that have pushed them in this direction. The building was very dilapidated and needed a lot of work.
- Mr. Witham said that the Portsmouth Advocates report noted that the current window configuration was two over two and that was probably not the original window configuration. The trim and mouldings were not original either and were in varying degrees of rot. The clapboards were in rough shape and had two layers of siding over them.
- The site map for the property indicated that the front steps were located on City property. Mr. Witham said they would like to address this by pushing the new structure back by five feet on the lot.
- Mr. Witham pointed out that large sections of the post and beam construction have been removed and replaced with stick frame. He said that most of the original exterior was gone. Their goal was to replicate the original structure and add a modest addition off of the rear. The addition, he clarified, would be a separate work session.
- Chairman Katz stated that two commissioners who had hard and fast opinions about tearing down structures were not present. Mr. Witham acknowledged that this was a big decision and said he was open to a site walk to view the current conditions. He mentioned the tear down and rebuild project on Mt. Vernon Street and commented that he thought that was a very successful project.
- Mr. Wyckoff commented that the height of the front of the structure would probably have to be maintained because of the grade at the back of the structure. Mr. Witham said he would like to work the grade down a bit in the back.
- Mr. Wyckoff stated that he was the lone dissenting vote on the Mt. Vernon Street tear down and rebuild and now that he has looked at it, he felt he was wrong. He thought it has been a good fit in the neighborhood. He said he could only assume that this proposal would yield the same result and so he was okay with the proposal.
- Mr. Gladhill said that he would like a site walk but his first impressions of the drawings of the replica were favorable.
- Councilor Thorsen stated that since nothing was being changed, he wondered why they would not just improve the property and make it more livable and safer. He did not know where the line was drawn when determining whether to tear down a house or not. He added that the house did look to be in pretty poor shape.
- Ms. Kozak said that she would not only want a site walk but would also want a historic commission's report since this was an almost 200 year old house. She would like to have a structural engineer do an evaluation of the house.
- Mr. Witham commented that you can always renovate a structure but he felt that rebuilding it would result in a safer structure. He said they would also like to correct the front step situation and get them off of City land. Ms. Kozak asked if they had considered moving the house. Mr. Sanders said he did not think it could survive a move.
- Mr. Gladhill asked if the City had a problem with it being on their property. Mr. Witham thought it was a "blind eye" issue but if they had to get a building permit to renovate, they would have to rebuild the stairs which would be an issue.
- Chairman Katz said that the problems they were facing would be more apparent to the Commission when they had the site walk. He explained that it was not without the realm

of possibilities. They have done this before but they have done it reluctantly; however, he had good opinions of Mr. Witham's and Mr. Philbrick's capabilities in this regard.

- Mr. Wyckoff wondered about continuing further with the project before it received Board of Adjustment approval. Mr. Witham said he would like to do a site walk and get the HDC's opinion before going to the Board of Adjustment.
- Chairman Katz suggested that Mr. Witham call the Planning Department to set up the site walk.

F. Work Session requested by **Oak Point Associates, owner, and Mark Troy, applicant**, for property located at **73 Court Street**, wherein permission is requested to allow new construction to an existing **Withdrawn** (construct new fire escape) and allow exterior renovations to an existing structure (remove storm windows, restore existing windows). Said property is shown on Assessor Plan 116 as Lot 19 and lies within Mixed Residential Office and Historic Districts.

At the applicant's request, the application was withdrawn from consideration at this time.

G. Work Session requested by **80 Wright Avenue, LLC, owner**, for property located at **Wright Avenue**, wherein permission was requested to allow demolition of an existing structure (demolish garage) and allow a new free standing structure (construct a 4-5 story mixed use building). Said property is shown on Assessor Plan 105 as Lot 18 and lies within Central Business B and Historic Districts.

- Ms. Jennifer Ramsey of Somma Studios was present to speak to the application. She stated that she was last before the Commission in 2008. She explained that this was a whole new package but she would be applying some of the comments from the 2008 meeting to this project. She said that they were now proposing a more traditional building since this was a gateway to the City.
- Ms. Ramsey explained that the building would face the bridge with its frontage on Wright Avenue. She said that the parking on the lot in front of it would be changing once the Memorial Bridge project was completed so that plan might influence their proposal.
- Ms. Ramsey stated that initially they entered the proposed building with access from State Street but there has been some discussion about entering from Wright Avenue.
- With regard to massing, Ms. Ramsey said that they have tried to be sensitive to what was around it. She pointed out that they would be stepping down the building where it was located next to the existing Federal house addition. They were proposing a glass greenhouse on that end of the building to relate to the pocket garden of the adjacent building.
- The materials proposed were brick for the building along with granite, slate, and copper.
- Ms. Ramsey showed the Commission the State Street and Wright Avenue elevations. The building would have a mix of retail and restaurant use on the first floor.
- Chairman Katz commented that how this building will look in its environment would be very important.
- Mr. Wyckoff stated that the proposed building had a Victorian look and he advised Ms. Ramsey to stick with the proper details for that type of building. He said that he was not completely comfortable with the 51 Islington Street building because of the varying details and materials. He added that he would like to stick with traditional details for this building.
- Mr. Gladhill said that he really liked the State Street façade but he was not as enthused with the Wright Avenue façade.

- Councilor Thorsen said that one of the issues the City Council has dealt with recently was what was going on with the Connie Bean building. He said they were probably looking at a long term lease as opposed to selling the property. He said there was also a lot of discussion about what kind of building would go there and what the nature of the building would be and so with this proposal, the two buildings would affect each other. He said that there was also discussion about increasing the parking in that area. He said he just wanted to mention the risk involved because of the uncertainty of what is happening in the area.
- Chairman Katz asked Councilor Thorsen if he thought the Commission would be involved in the discussion involving the Connie Bean Center. Councilor Thorsen replied yes and said he thought this was one of the topics to be discussed at the upcoming work session. Ms. Ramsey said they would keep in touch with the Planning Department to try to stay on top of any developments regarding the Connie Bean Center.
- Ms. Kozak commented that with regard to the proposed building, she thought it was a gorgeous design; however, she had trouble with the context in this location. She felt it was at least a story too tall based on the buildings around it. She said that streetscapes would be nice but it would be even more helpful to use a bold line to outline the buildings that are actually on the same street because she thought it was a bit deceptive to see huge buildings that were a block or two away. She also thought a streetscape of the other side of the street would be helpful. Ms. Kozak thought this was an important site because it was an introduction to the heart of the eighteenth century of the historic district. She said that the proposed design was strongly alluding to a slightly later era.
- Chairman Katz stated that he also liked the State Street elevation but not the Wright Avenue elevation as much.
- Mr. Wyckoff commented that with the exception of the Warner House, everything was the 19th century in the area. He did not think the proposed building was out of context; however, the massing might be a bit too tall.
- Mr. Gladhill asked Ms. Ramsey if she looked through Portsmouth photographic history books to structures that were long gone for inspiration or did she look at things that exist now. Ms. Ramsey said she did a little bit of both.
- Chairman Katz stated that to make a building financially feasible, you have to go up and wondered how far one can push that. Ms. Ramsey added that to make it a prominent structure it needed to have a proud stance.

V. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:30 p.m., it was moved, seconded, and passed unanimously to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Good
HDC Recording Secretary

These minutes were approved at the Historic District Commission meeting on June 6, 2012.