

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

EILEEN DONDERO FOLEY COUNCIL CHAMBERS

7:00 p.m.

May 30, 2012

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Richard Katz; Vice Chairman Joseph Almeida; Members John Wyckoff, Tracy Kozak, City Planning Department Representative William Gladhill; Alternate George Melchior, Dan Rawling

MEMBERS EXCUSED: Council Representative Jack D. Thorsen

ALSO PRESENT: Nicholas Cracknell, Planning Consultant

I. Discussion on Article 6 of the Zoning Ordinance – establishing design standards

Chairman Katz opened the meeting by stating that the purpose of the work session was to review the mission of the board and its procedures.

Mr. Cracknell stated that the current zoning ordinance provided a lot of latitude. In an earlier era, he felt the language of the purpose and intent of the Historic District review was meant to be flexible. As a result, he thought some of the challenges that the Commission was experiencing now were that some of the activities that were thought to be exempt actually were not, thus needing to come before the Commission. This has increased the work load for the Commission so he suggested expanding the list of exemptions for projects that were minor in nature by providing very clear performance standards. He pointed out that at the last work session, they were able to get through about half of the list of exemptions and he hoped that tonight, they could get through the rest of them.

Mr. Cracknell also discussed the importance of conducting post mortems by going out into the community and seeing what has worked and what has not worked. He said that an action plan needed to be in place.

It was pointed out that the Commission did not have a mission statement and it was felt by some that it was important to have. Mr. Almeida talked about the guidebook from the 1970's and wondered if it could be amended and if so, how might it be done. Mr. Cracknell thought the guidebook was a good starting point and there was considerable discussion on its content and how a new one might be funded. The idea of formulating a proposal to go before the City Council was voiced as a possible first step.

Mr. Melchior stated that the Commission should first craft a mission statement which would define the purpose of the guidebook. He felt they had a lot of work to do before going to the

City Council. He added that the mission statement was an important first step that has been put off for far too long.

At this point, the conversation shifted to the receipt of applications and the possibility of separating them into commercial, residential, major, and minor groupings to be placed on the agenda in that order to be more efficient.

Ms. Kozak pointed out that the Master Plan should be taken into consideration also. Mr. Wyckoff talked about “old town/new town” and whether there should be more of a concentration on the core of the historic district. Mr. Melchior reminded the Commission that the City was a timeline and the timeline should show progression. Ms. Kozak commented that they needed to find which direction best matched the sense of place in Portsmouth. It was a combination of the history, time, and stories mixed with the energy of the people. She felt it was a real trick to define what was sacred. She added that she would like to see a new survey undertaken.

Mr. Almeida said that he wanted to do more about improving the process. He told the Commissioners that he took a walk earlier in the day and took 300 pictures. He was surprised to see that he found more things that were right rather than wrong. He said he would like to push for more strict enforcement of what is more historic. He felt the Commission was under constant pressure to erode the historic district so he wanted hard and fast rules because he felt they were not tough enough.

There was discussion about a survey that could have various levels where each house was given a grade which would give the homeowner some idea of what could be done with their home. It was thought that a survey would need to be commissioned by the City Council. Mr. Rawling pointed out that there were some buildings that should not have additions on them. Mr. Melchior said that a survey could identify those buildings.

Mr. Gladhill talked about spot zoning to protect certain properties. Mr. Melchior said that could also be part of the survey.

At this point in the meeting, the Commission discussed issues that were frustrating them. The list included: incomplete applications, changes to an application during the public hearing, and submitting new drawings as a result of a stipulation(s).

The Commission decided to take the following actions prior to the next work session:

- 1) Have Chairman Katz participate in the review process for applications when they are submitted to make sure they are complete.
- 2) Come back to the next work session with ideas for a mission statement.
- 3) Reread the regulations, the guidebooks, and in particular the Norfolk guidebook.
- 4) Review the list of exemptions suggested by Mr. Cracknell prior to the next meeting for discussion and approval.

Mr. Melchior agreed to bring his surveys for the Commission to review. It was decided to meet prior to the June 13, 2012 meeting to discuss the possible exemptions.

II. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:55 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 August 1, 2012.