

**MINUTES
THE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
PORTSMOUTH, NH**

Remote Meeting Via Zoom Conference Call

Per NH RSA 91-A:2, III (b) the Chair has declared COVID-19 outbreak an emergency and has waived the requirement that a quorum be physically present at the meeting pursuant to the Governor's Executive Order 2020-04, Section 8, as extended by Executive Order 2020-24, and Emergency Order #12, Section 3. Members will be participating remotely and will identify their location and any person present with them at that location. All votes will be by roll call.

6:30 p.m.

March 10, 2021

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Vincent Lombardi; Vice-Chairman Jon Wyckoff; Members Reagan Ruedig, Margot Doering, Martin Ryan, and David Adams; City Council Representative Paige Trace; Alternates Heinz Sauk-Schubert and Karen Bouffard

MEMBERS EXCUSED: None

ALSO PRESENT: Nick Cracknell, Principal Planner, Planning Department

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Chairman Lombardi read the four Requests to Postpone work sessions into the record.

*It was moved, seconded, and passed by unanimous vote (7-0) to **postpone** the work sessions for 500 Market Street, 180 New Castle Avenue, 449 Court Street, and 279 Marcy Street to the April 7, 2021 meeting.*

I. ADMINISTRATIVE APPROVALS

1. 124 State Street

The request was for a rear entry canopy on the back of the building. Mr. Cracknell said the front basement windows would be replaced, and that the previously-approved top egress windows and door on the back elevation would also be replaced. He said the applicant also wanted to place a mahogany pergola on the rear roof balcony and a metal downspout that would match the canopy.

The project architect Joshua Butkis. In response to the Commission's questions, he said a window would be replaced with a door because they had to create separate entries for the two units and that egress and fire codes required the window replacements. He explained that the new bricks on the second floor would be filled in to match the existing bricks and that there would be no perceptible seam. He explained how the new door on the lower level would be hidden behind the new flight of stairs and said there would be guard and hand rails per code on the lower level. He said the casement windows would have inside screens and that the other windows had half screens. Mr. Cracknell suggested stipulating that the brick infill sections be infilled with

restoration brick to match the existing bricks. Ms. Doering asked about the canopy's thickness. Mr. Butkis said it had a simple finish that would match the guard rails and would look like a rectangular metal box supported by one-inch brackets. In response to further questions, he said the awning gutter would likely have an aluminum finish to match the wrought iron supports. City Council Representative Trace said she wanted to see more specifications for the awning because it was a 21st century architectural element that would be seen from Court Street. It was decided to stipulate that the canopy component would return for a separate administrative approval.

Stipulations:

- 1) The brick infill sections as shown shall be infilled with restoration brick to match the existing bricks; and
- 2) The rear canopy shall be resubmitted for administrative approval, with additional details and cross-sections.

2. 65 Bow Street

The request was to remove 13 skylights and replace 10 of them. Mr. Cracknell noted that the applicant was also doing re-roofing and flashing work.

3. 105 Daniel Street

The request was to place a drier vent on the rear of the building that would be painted to match the color of the brick.

4. 93 High Street

Mr. Cracknell said the condominium association decided to restore all 25 windows on the building and replace the storm windows with triple-track ones. The Commission decided to stipulate that a dark green color would be used to match that would best match the sash.

Stipulation:

- 1) The storm windows shall be the darkest green color available from the manufacturer, or field painted to match the sash.

*Vice-Chair Wyckoff moved to **approve** Administrative Items 1 through 4, with respective stipulations as shown above. Ms. Ruedig seconded. The motion **passed** by unanimous vote, 7-0.*

II. PUBLIC HEARINGS (NEW BUSINESS)

1. (Work Session/Public Hearing) requested by **Nobles Island Condominium Association, owner and Michael Street, applicant**, for property located at **500 Market Street**, wherein permission is requested to allow new construction to an existing structure (replace brick dumpster enclosures) as per plans on file in the Planning Department. Said property is shown on Assessor Map 120 as Lot 2 and lies within the Character District 4-L1 (CD4-L1) and Historic Districts.

DECISION OF THE COMMISSION

*It was moved, seconded, and passed by unanimous vote (7-0) to **postpone** the work session to the April 7, 2021 meeting.*

III. WORK SESSIONS (OLD BUSINESS)

A. Work Session requested by **Anne Moodey, owner**, for property located at **180 New Castle Avenue**, wherein permission is requested to allow exterior renovations to an existing structure (expand front deck and rebuild (1) chimney) as per plans on file in the Planning Department. Said property is shown on Assessor Map 101 as Lot 23 and lies within the Single Residence B (SRB) and Historic Districts. *(This item was postponed at the February 10, 2021 meeting to the March 10, 2021 meeting).*

DECISION OF THE COMMISSION

*It was moved, seconded, and passed by unanimous vote (7-0) to **postpone** the work session to the April 7, 2021 meeting.*

B. Work Session requested by **Mary H. and Ronald R. Pressman, owners**, for property located at **449 Court Street**, wherein permission is requested to allow renovations to an existing structure (add 4th floor addition and roof deck) as per plans on file in the Planning Department. Said property is shown on Assessor Map 105 as Lot 6 and lies within the Character District 4-L1 (CD4-L1) and Historic Districts. *(This item was continued at the February 10, 2021 meeting to the March 10, 2021 meeting).*

DECISION OF THE COMMISSION

*It was moved, seconded, and passed by unanimous vote (7-0) to **postpone** the work session to the April 7, 2021 meeting.*

D. Work Session requested by **Stone Creek Realty, LLC, owner**, for property located at **53 Green Street**, wherein permission is requested to allow the demolition of the existing structure and the new construction of a 3-5 story mixed-use building as per plans on file in the Planning Department. Said property is shown on Assessor Map 119 as Lot 2 and lies within the Character District 5 (CD5) and Historic Districts. *This item was continued at the February 10, 2021 meeting to the March 10, 2021 meeting).*

WORK SESSION

Project architect Carla Goodnight was present, along with Jeff Johnston and Rob Simmons of Cathartes. Ms. Goodnight reviewed the site plan and focused on the massing, setbacks, greenspace, parking, and walkways. She said the building's mass was decreased and that a larger space was made between the proposed building and the AC Hotel. Mr. Johnston briefly reviewed the landscaping, the proposed mural, the wayfinding, and commercial spaces.

Ms. Doering said there was only one option for the massing shown as a fait accompli instead of a variety of options that could fit on the site and match the Historic District guidelines in terms of

shape, size, and setback. She said she didn't understand how the applicant got to that point because she didn't see any other options. Ms. Goodnight said the volume of the building for the size of the site was extremely restricted and defined by zoning and other constraints. Mr. Johnston said the plan wasn't fully maxed out but that it incorporated the Commission's prior comments and was moved away from the AC Hotel.

Mr. Ryan agreed that there were forces on the project that left the applicant with very few options. He said the landscape plan looked great but suggested that the applicant provide public access to the back lawn. He said he missed the arches and thought they would break up the building's monotony by being placed throughout its base. He suggested a vertical green wall to supplement the granite on the building. He said the signature features of the balconies helped break up the massing and thought some of the commercial elements could be pushed to the pond side. He said the buildings were too flat and suggested putting decks along the roof. Vice-Chair Wyckoff said he liked the separation between the AC Hotel and the proposed building. He said the existing dock added a whole new element that could allow the public to dock for a while and visit the building. He said an entrance could be made on the back of the building, or a grand staircase could be built going up to the second-floor balcony level so that the people on the path and boaters could access it. He said it was important to retain the arches and maybe put more of them on a small section closer to the path. He said the 50-ft shoreline buffer demanded the applicant's site plan. He thought continuing the sidewalk from the AC Hotel was a positive thing and liked the way the parking was hidden.

City Council Representative Trace said the back of the second-floor balcony was relegated by separation to each of the apartments on every balcony level and wasn't accessible to the public, so people on the path would only be looking into the garage and there wasn't much activation for them. She agreed that the path between the AC Hotel and the building was much better because there was more open space. She said she still had concerns with the massing of the building on the front side because it was so vertical, with no relief. She said the long stretch of building was visible from other viewpoints and thought the building was much too massive for the space.

Ms. Ruedig said she agreed that it would be helpful to see some preliminary sketches so that the Commission could understand what was tried and proposed. She said it was a big building but it was on a large parcel, and the context around it was other large buildings, so the site plan made sense. She said she liked a lot of what she saw and thought the building's general design was pretty simple, and she thought the treatment of the first-floor level had improved. She said the art work with the connector space was great. She agreed with Vice-Chair Wyckoff that the commercial space on the front was an improvement to what existed and she appreciated the rework of the front of the building, noting that the parking grills gave the building more texture. She also agreed that the arches should be incorporated and referred to. She said she wasn't sure if the massive building could be made smaller because the footprint was so large but thought it could be carved back here and there to make it less imposing. She said the building would be a big change from the building that was there now, but she also noted that the existing building wasn't really contributing to the City.

Ms. Doering asked the applicant to include viewpoints from the pathway. Chairman Lombardi said he agreed with the comments about the arches and thought the garage screening could have some art. He said the first floor of parking needed some work visually. He said he was concerned

about the high wall mass and wondered if the top floor could be set back more. He said the project had come a long way from the previous meeting. Mr. Ryan said the private deck could have an element that helped tie the building to the back lawn, which would help keep the architecture from looking like it was a fortress. He said he liked that the front courtyard would be nicely done but didn't think there was a distinction between the walking surface and the vehicle surface, so he suggested that bollards separate the vehicle area. He said he liked the way the front met the ground as opposed to the way the rest of the building did.

City Council Representative Trace said she would like to see closer views from the towers looking up to get a better perspective and she thought the tower's base. She suggested shaving off more of the fifth floor because it added to the overwhelming size and mass of the building. Ms. Doering said the pond side of the building was alienated from the public and suggested that the landscape be backed up against the garage by placing terraces so that people could sit and enjoy the views of the pond. Mr. Johnson suggested a site walk before the April meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Rick Becksted of 1395 Islington Street said he was speaking as a resident. He said he appreciated the intent of providing housing, especially with the current shortage in Portsmouth, but he thought the proposed building looked like all the other surrounding buildings and had no distinction. He pointed out that the Sheraton Hotel had dormers that differentiated it, and he thought the proposed building's fifth floor could have that detail. He said the building would be the first thing people would see driving in from Market Street Extension and that it should stand out. He said he was intrigued by the arches at first but thought the building now looked like a hotel. He said the building had to say 'Portsmouth' and be unique.

Ms. Bouffard said the building looked like everything else and wasn't exciting, especially for a gateway building. She said the massing seemed huge and that she would have liked to see more options that would make the building look different. Ms. Doering suggested incorporating some elements from the building that was proposed at the North End Vision Project. Vice-Chair Wyckoff said there were only quick sketches of the building that were presented then. He said the proposed building looked similar to the surrounding buildings because it took a lot of design cues from Maplewood Avenue, especially with the window fenestration. He said the massing could be kept but that punched openings similar to the Sheraton could be introduced, which would be something different that could be done to the fifth floor instead of dormers. He said the building looked like a hospital-type building instead of a residential one. City Council Representative Trace said all the recent buildings in the north end were the same rectangular style and that the applicant's building wasn't anything special. Ms. Ruedig agreed that the buildings did look similar but that a lot of present-day architecture was bland because it wasn't the historic architecture people liked, with gable and hip roofs and built in the same time period. She said the modern buildings would perhaps be appreciated in the future for what they were – all built at the beginning of the 21st century. She said she was amazed that anyone would want to praise the Sheraton building because it was completely out of context with its surroundings, but it created a context for all the new buildings.

Mr. Adams said the building had no corners and had walls of glass instead of windows, noting that the glazing panels were larger than some of the sides of his house. He said the building wasn't appropriate at all. Mr. Sauk-Schubert (via a phone call with Mr. Cracknell due to a mike that didn't work) said the current iteration was far better than the previous one and better than all the surrounding buildings in terms of scale, massing, appeal, and consistency. He thought more work had to be done on the interface between the private and public spaces, and he agreed with Ms. Ruedig about the architectural challenge of putting buildings in the north end in the 21st century and recognizing the context.

Mr. Johnston said he would study the Commission's comments and give them a building they could respond to. Mr. Ryan said the massing was fine and would be successful due to the signature elements, which he thought had to be played up, along with the greenspace that was the building's distinction from the surrounding buildings. He said it was a modern building and that removing the fifth floor wouldn't look right with the surrounding buildings. Ms. Doering said she would agree more with the massing if the building weren't on the water and seen from a roadway at water level and from residences across the pond.

Chairman Lombardi closed the public session.

DECISION OF THE COMMISSION

*Mr. Ryan moved to **continue** the work session to the April 7, 2021 meeting, and Ms. Ruedig seconded. The motion **passed** by unanimous vote, 7-0.*

E. Work Session requested by **Ross D. Ellenhorn and Rebecca J. Wolfe, owners**, for property located at **279 Marcy Street, Unit #3**, where permission is requested to allow new construction to an existing structure (construct recessed deck on 3rd floor) as per plans on file in the Planning Department. Said property is shown on Assessor Map 103 as Lot 45-3 and lies within the General Residence B (GRB) and Historic Districts. *This item was continued at the February 10, 2021 meeting to the March 10, 2021 meeting.*

DECISION OF THE COMMISSION

*It was moved, seconded, and passed by unanimous vote (7-0) to **postpone** the work session to the April 7, 2021 meeting.*

IV. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joann Breault
HDC Recording Secretary