

RE: 53 Green St
Meeting-05/12/21

Dear Members of the Historic District Commission,

Did you ever play the “compare two pictures” game? Here is one you may enjoy. Please take a moment to review the 04/14/21 HDC submission vs HDC 05/12/21 submission. Comparing April’s page 8 to May’s page 1, only a few things seem to have changed on the building itself: the top balconies are smaller(look good), the bottoms on the endcaps are black (looks better) and the top is now looks all white instead of gray.

On the water side the May submission shows a lot more trees which **will NOT be there**. This is a conceptual design and does NOT match the actual landscape plan on page 18. *The only new plants found on the landscape plan are 3 bushes to the left water side of the seating area and 3 bushes by the outfall-great additions to the water’s edge.* There are NO plants on the balconies as depicted. The areas in front of the first floor garages will have *rhododendron bushes* NOT clusters of tall trees. The vast green area between the greenway and the edge of the water will be half that size and is really shown with some newly added trees and bushes to the long grass. **Reviewing the actual Landscape Plan (pg 18) would be helpful.**

The building is still massive in size but rounding the ends, the stepped floors with open ends and making the balconies smaller has softened its immensity. Should it be pulled out of the 100’ buffer more? Yes, but adding more restoration to the shoreline is sometimes more attainable, less long grass and a lot more bushes on the water side of the greenway.

All the white and large steel framed windows as presented will provide a lot of visual reflection! The water side is presented with **white on the overhangs and white balconies** which tie the whole building together and provides a striking accent to the rounded areas which will be seen from a distance. These would be nice if they stayed as presented. The rounded areas **below the overhangs** could have wood textured/colored metal panels or clapboard style panels providing a more New England feel. Another thought would be to use darker tones than the white (dark gray, black, dark blue, dark green) on the rounded areas, *which complement the brick*, to allow the eyes to rest on the building and recognize ALL the design features, even some wrought iron pieces to break up the white would be nice.

The Green St side seems very busy and is that way to fit everything in. One clean white line across the entire top would tie it together. Keeping all the balconies the same color or at least follow a pattern. It looks like gray where the commercial is but white on the far end by the garage doors. The stark white top floor really draws the eyes to it, toning it down would be more inviting. This will be seen when walking down Vaughn St possibly as far as Port Walk, visually looking massive in height, especially next to the black AC Hotel and the lower Arts Space building.

It would be nice if the development team could demonstrate different colors or textures in the white areas as well as remove all the non-existing plantings to really depict what it will look like. Brick where the orange is presented will give it the classic Portsmouth look, the newer metals and window styles will provide a new Portsmouth look. It’s finding the balance and not overwhelming one look with the other.

This is a challenging site and it’s been filled with a lot of building. Only a few things have changed visually since the last submission. Each change brings a more Portsmouth style as it will welcome visitors on Market, Russell and Deer Streets to Portsmouth.

Respectfully,

Elizabeth Bratter
159 McDonough St
Portsmouth Property Owner

Izak Gilbo

From: Brendan Cooney <br_cooney@me.com>
Sent: Thursday, May 6, 2021 11:28 AM
To: Planning Info
Subject: Comment to HDC Work Session B, May 12, 2021

To the Chair and Commissioners of the Historic District Commission:

We are writing as neighbors and abutters to Susan Alex, Trustee and owner of 50 Mt. Vernon Street. Susan has shared with us the plans and elevations for proposed new construction of 2nd-floor dormers on the existing garage structure on her property, and we fully support her request. In our opinion the construction she proposes seems to be completely within reasonable use of the structure; the style and design align well with the existing structure and the style of her primary residence on the property; and the proposed design fits well with the surrounding neighborhood.

Thank you for your consideration and for your service to the City.

Kind regards,

Brendan Cooney & Megan Tehan
57 Mount Vernon St
Portsmouth

May 10,2021

To Portsmouth, New Hampshire HDC Committee Members,

Eleven years ago, we purchased the house at 278 Court Street, known as the Captain John Loughton House, from Strawberry Banke. After a year and a half of historical restoration by Bedard Preservation of Gilmanton, NH, which was praised by the HDC for its attention to detail, we moved into our new home. So, it should come as no surprise that we are disappointed in the proposed development at 93 Pleasant Street, which is actually mostly on Court Street, directly across from us. We are concerned with the enormous size of the project and its intended use.

As you walk down Court Street from Pleasant, you are on the only street in the city to pass two of the most important historical museums in the City of Portsmouth, The Governor John Langdon House and Strawberry Banke. Court Street is the ONLY street that leads directly to both museums, Prescott Park and The Piscataqua River. The proposed 3 story building, will actually be close to 4 stories tall at street level, due to its location on the existing granite wall that lines the sidewalk, and will dwarf all surrounding structures.

Our concerns follows

- 1.The enormous size of the proposed building and modern materials are in strong contrast to the surrounding historic properties.
2. The number of windows proposed, due to the number of units in the building, will create glaring nighttime lighting on a streetscape that has attractive softly lit lampposts.
3. The proposed underground parking garage, which will require much blasting of ledge near the surrounding properties, is of great concern to us. Our original mid- 1700 stone foundation and center chimney are fragile. Excessive vibration and drainage are real concerns.
4. In addition, the proposed entrance to the underground parking through the very charming, very old granite wall, is directly across the street from 2 other driveways (278 and 300 Court), and right next to the Temple parking. It is already difficult exiting and entering onto Court Street, due to its narrowness and its increase in traffic the past few years.

We are aware that something will be built on this piece of land, but we strongly believe that the proposed project sets an unfortunate precedent that attempts to diminish the efforts of residents and the many Portsmouth non-profit organizations that strive to preserve and share the important history of Portsmouth, the Seacoast and its surroundings.

Janet and Peter Dinan

Izak Gilbo

From: John Guy <jrguys@yahoo.com>
Sent: Monday, May 10, 2021 10:35 AM
To: Planning Info
Cc: John and Christine Guy
Subject: Dagny Taggart, LLC 93 Pleasant Street - Abutter Guy John R / Guy Christine G 242 State St #A Portsmouth, NH 03801

05/10/2021

Good Morning,

I would like to register for the Planning Meeting via Zoom Conference Call on 5/12/2021;

My concerns are parking:

23 parking spots for 61 residents

How will they make sure that residents work in the city of Portsmouth as a requirement to live there? Will non Portsmouth workers be able to live there (retires/ former Portsmouth workers? Can they require some residents not have cars, in order to live there?

As it is the Parrot St lot is full most of the time.

There is a new affordable housing going up down the street near the fire station on Court st, again more residents than the parking spaces allotted

Will there need to be blasting at the site? Living in a building close by that was built in 1814 (was probably in the fire of 1813) blasting is a concern.

Thanks,

John & Christine Guy

PACKER'S PORTSMOUTH TAVERN

Packer's Tavern stood at the northeast corner of present-day Portsmouth's Court and Pleasant streets and remained a tavern during most of its existence. The term "Tavern" in this period refers to a home with special accommodations for public functions and entertainment. So the "Packer Tavern" was primarily the Packer family home.

"Black Portsmouth: Three Centuries of African –American Heritage" states,

"It was the most favored meeting place of the New Hampshire government in the first half of the eighteenth century."

"On the Road North of Boston: New Hampshire Taverns and Turnpikes, 1700-1900" by D.B. Garvin says,

"The most prominent among the taverns which served the government during the early 1700's was that owned first by Dr. Thomas Packer and later, by Thomas Packer Jr., the provincial sheriff."

The Packer Tavern was also described in "Brewster's Rambles About Portsmouth."

"There was a stone wall higher than the present iron fence, and on that wall an open fence. There were many stone steps to pass over before the front door was reached. The house was of two stories, of a dark color, and the whole of the premises had more the appearance of a castle than of a common dwelling. Here High Sheriff Thomas Packer lived in 1768, when he executed Ruth Blay. And in front of these premises that night the effigy was displayed."

Dr. Thomas Packer erected his home in about 1696 and soon after enlarged it to accommodate the provincial Council and courts. Sibley's "Sketches of those who Attended Harvard College" states:

"The Packer family lived on the corner of Court and Pleasant streets, Portsmouth, in a fine brick mansion in which the province rented living quarters for the governors and rooms for the meetings of the legislature and the courts."

By about 1705, it had both a "Great Room" and a "Wainscot Room", the latter undoubtedly a well-paneled room of the type that began to appear in the more affluent Portsmouth houses in the years before 1715. Both had fireplaces and were furnished formally with a dozen chairs, several tables and large looking-glasses.

Perhaps these two rooms were those in which the colonial government met. From the House journal of May 13, 1718:

“Mem: itt being ye time of ye Sitting of ye Superior Court ye house adjournd from ye Court house to ye great room in mr Speakr Packers house”

That is, the Superior Court required the use of its room in the Packer Tavern, so the House of Representatives moved from that room to another.

“On the Road North of Boston” goes on to say:

“Packer’s tavern was constructed some time after 1696 and by the very early 1700s, the building served increasingly both as meeting place for the governor and Council, for the Assembly or House of Representatives, and as a courthouse, with occasional use by Dr. Packer as a hospital as well. Packer may have made architectural changes to the building to accommodate these functions, because it is clear that by the time of his death in 1723, one end of the tavern, containing at least two well-finished rooms, was referred to specifically as the “Court House and Council Chamber”.

The importance of Col Packer’s house as a seat of government and a potential place of refuge had long been known. Because it stood on what was then regarded as the remote western fringe of the town, in a letter to the Council dated August 20, 1705, the Governor, “advises and directs that they forthwith fortify Mr. Packer's house at the (Strawbery) Bank, either with Square Timber and two regular Flankers, or with Stone and brick, and that the Line of the town be Re- formed, and the Watches duly kept”.

The Committee of Militia of the town of Portsmouth then “ordered Col. Packer’s house to be fortified as a Garrison House for the defense of the Subjects against the French and Indian Enemy.” The Governor then reiterated that “Colonel Packer’s House in Portsmouth be forthwith fortified in good form, to receive the women and children, etc”. Perhaps it was this early use as a garrison that gave present-day Pleasant Street, in front of the house, where militia drills were held, its original designation as “the Parade”.

Dr. Packer’s daughter, Susanna, inherited lifetime tenancy of the property upon his death in 1723, together with the tavern license associated with the house. This license was exercised by Susanna herself as a widow (of Joseph Small, DOD 10/4/1720 - Pt of Graves), and still later by herself and her second husband, Benjamin Rust, a former cooper. Rust made further improvements to the building and bought new furniture for it in 1731 including an elaborate “beaufait” or corner cupboard.

The Packer home continued to serve governmental functions until at least mid-century as the Sheriff submitted a bill dated July 11, 1746, to the Governor for reimbursement of candles and wood consumed by the colonial assembly at the Packer Tavern.

Eventually, the difficulties of conducting government business in taverns led to the construction of buildings strictly for that purpose, the first being the State House of 1762. Two examples of the ongoing difficulties of conducting government in taverns were addressed by the following two resolutions passed by the Assembly in July, 1701:

“The Publicque Affairs of the House of Representatives being much Obstructed by Persons Sitting and Lying on the bed, Voted That Whosoever hence forward Either Sitt or Ly Down Shall forfeit three pence To the house.”

“Whereas the Publicque Affairs of this House Is much obstructed by Reason of several Members thereof Soe often withdraw themselves Into the Chimney to take tobacco and sitt Talking And not Attend the Affairs of the House. Voted that Whosoever Shall Soe doe for the future Shall pay A fine of three pence. . . .Except leave be givein etc.”

In 1764, Thomas Packer Jr., the Provincial Sheriff, wrote to Boston to find a carver to decorate the still-growing house, noting that “my housewright informs me that I have as much worke to do as will employ a man of that business one month.” The result was that it was handsomely embellished by Joseph Burbeck in that year. The Burbeck family of carvers was employed in the 1760’s on Boston’s Harvard Hall and Faneuil Hall which is now a part of the Boston National Historical Park and a well known stop on the Freedom Trail. But this was clearly not its only remodel.

It is said that Mrs. Packer was fond of making extensions to her domicil, and therefore, when her husband was absent from home on any long journey, he would find some addition to the house on his return. The house was thus so enlarged that it became desirable for a public house.

Sheriff Packer died in June 1771. It is written that the Packer family soon after vacated the premises. The Sheriff’s Will specified that their Portsmouth mansion house be left in possession of his widow, Martha. But testimony by Executor of the Will, Governor John Wentworth, which was recorded in Canada, leaves open the possibility that he did not turn it over to her. Consequently the occupancy and possession of the Packer home immediately following the Sheriff’s death have not been resolved. However, future events confirm the Packer family retained ownership of the mansion for nearly another thirty years, primarily as landlords, renting to notables and businesses substantial enough to make proper use of a premiere residence.

"John Langdon of New Hampshire" page 142 states that upon his marriage to Betsey Sherburne on February 2, 1777, "Langdon and his bride installed themselves in a spacious mansion on Pleasant Street, the house formerly belonging to Sheriff Packer".

The elegance of the Packer home which John Langdon selected for himself, is underscored by Langdon's own stature – Signer of the United States Constitution, Continental Congress 12 years, Administered Oath of Office to George Washington, first Senator of New Hampshire, first President Pro Tempore of the Senate, Governor of New Hampshire for six terms, host to George Washington and refused Vice Presidential nomination in 1812. When Langdon entertained the Marquis de Chastellux there in 1782, the French visitor described the building as “elegant and well furnished and the apartments admirably wainscoted.”

In 1783, John Langdon vacated to build a home on the adjacent corner of Court & Pleasant Streets which survives to this day. The widow Sarah Purcell moved to the Packer home leaving behind her family residence on Middle Street, now the "John Paul Jones" house so-named because he resided with her in 1781-2 during the fitting of the Navy's 74 gun ship, USS America. Once in the Packer home, Widow Purcell opened a boarding house. An interesting coincidence is that Sarah Purcell's full name was Sarah Wentworth Purcell. She was actually the daughter of John Wentworth, Judge of Probate, whose participation in the administration of Sheriff Packer's 1771 will was being contested at that very moment by Thomas Packer III in his attempt to reclaim assets of the Sheriff's estate from the Wentworths and others!

In 1786, Col. William Brewster, who then occupied the Bell Tavern on Congress Street, changed residences with Mrs. Purcell. Not merely exchanging residences, Widow Purcell and Col. Brewster exchanged trades as well. Col. Brewster left the tavern trade and elevated the Packer home to a "genteel" boarding house while Widow Purcell entered the tavern trade in his stead. Despite its frequent additions and remodelings, the Packer mansion house seems to have remained impressive. One visitor to Portsmouth in 1787 called it “an elegant house kept by Mr. Brewster for entertainment.”

In May, 1789, while Thomas Packer III still had a presence in Portsmouth, his former home, still Brewster's Boarding House at that time, was where John Jay lodged. Jay was one of the founding fathers of the United States, having been elected President of the Continental Congress. During and after the Revolution, he was ambassador to Spain and France and helped secure favorable peace terms from the British. He co-wrote the Federalist Papers with Alexander Hamilton and James Madison. At the time he lodged at the Packer home during his visit to Portsmouth, Jay was serving as the first Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court.

Later that same year, Colonel Brewster's Tavern in the Packer home was selected above all others for the accommodation of President George Washington during his four day visit to Portsmouth, probably because it was unique among Portsmouth's inns in being able to offer "such Gentlemen as wish for private lodgings" rooms where they might "be as retired and free from interruption, and be entertained with as much elegance as in any private house whatever." George Washington's diary of October 31, 1789 records,

From the Town House I went to Colonel Brewster's Ta'n, the place provided for my residence; and asked the President, the Vice-President, the two Senators, the Marshall, and Majr. Gilman to dine with me, which they did.

The escort referenced by President Washington to escort him from the State House to his lodgings included (New Hampshire) President Sullivan, the Council, Senator Langdon, Marshal Parker, and a company under arms.

Not often noted is that Washington's trusted personal aide and friend was a Portsmouth native, Tobias Lear. His fifteen year association with the Washington family began in 1784 when he was recommended as a tutor for Martha Washington's grandchildren after which he served as personal aide to George Washington through his two terms as President and continued until the President's death. Tobias Lear was present at Mt. Vernon in December, 1799 when George Washington died. In fact, he was the person to whom Washington spoke his last words, "'Tis well". The strong personal friendship between Tobias and the Washingtons was in full view when, during Washington's 1789 visit to Portsmouth, he dedicated a day to a walking inspection of Portsmouth, but made a point of stopping to enjoy tea at the Lear family home with Tobias and his mother.

During his time as a guest at Brewster's (Packer's) Tavern, Washington wrote an address of well wishes to the people of Portsmouth thanking them for their hospitality and support of his recent election as President. According to "George Washington in New Hampshire" by Elwin Lawrence Page, "on the evening of Monday November 2nd, 1789, John Pickering and his committee waited upon the President, probably at the Brewster Tavern, and delivered to him the address of the Town. The statement is often made that the address was presented at the State House on Saturday, but the diary, the newspapers, and the dating of the address are in clear agreement. . . . doubtless, Washington's answer was ready for delivery in exchange." Washington's original address survives in the collection of the Portsmouth Athenaeum. Photos of it and a transcription appear in Genealogical Photos.

The Packer mansion and tavern had been the Packer family's center of wealth and power for more than a century when it finally left the family. It was sold by Dr. Packer's great-grandson Matthew Bramble Packer to a John Greenleaf in June, 1800. Fortunately, that sale has left us with a detailed description and dimensioned drawing of the entire property. Reconciling the residence dimensions with the accompanying room count and inventory indicates the home was substantially larger than 4,000 square feet - absolutely gigantic for the time.

John Greenleaf died only four years later leaving the property to his only daughter Mary, by then the wife of Deacon Enoch Clark. The Clarks were in residence when disaster struck.

Sadly, after more than one hundred fifteen years, the Packer home and tavern was destroyed when the great Portsmouth fire of 1813 began in a stable across the street. Included on the accompanying CD is an image of a map of Portsmouth dated 1813, which details the extent of the fire. Packer's Tavern is depicted on the northeast corner of Pitt and Pleasant Streets and appears to have been on the very edge of the fire's destructive path.

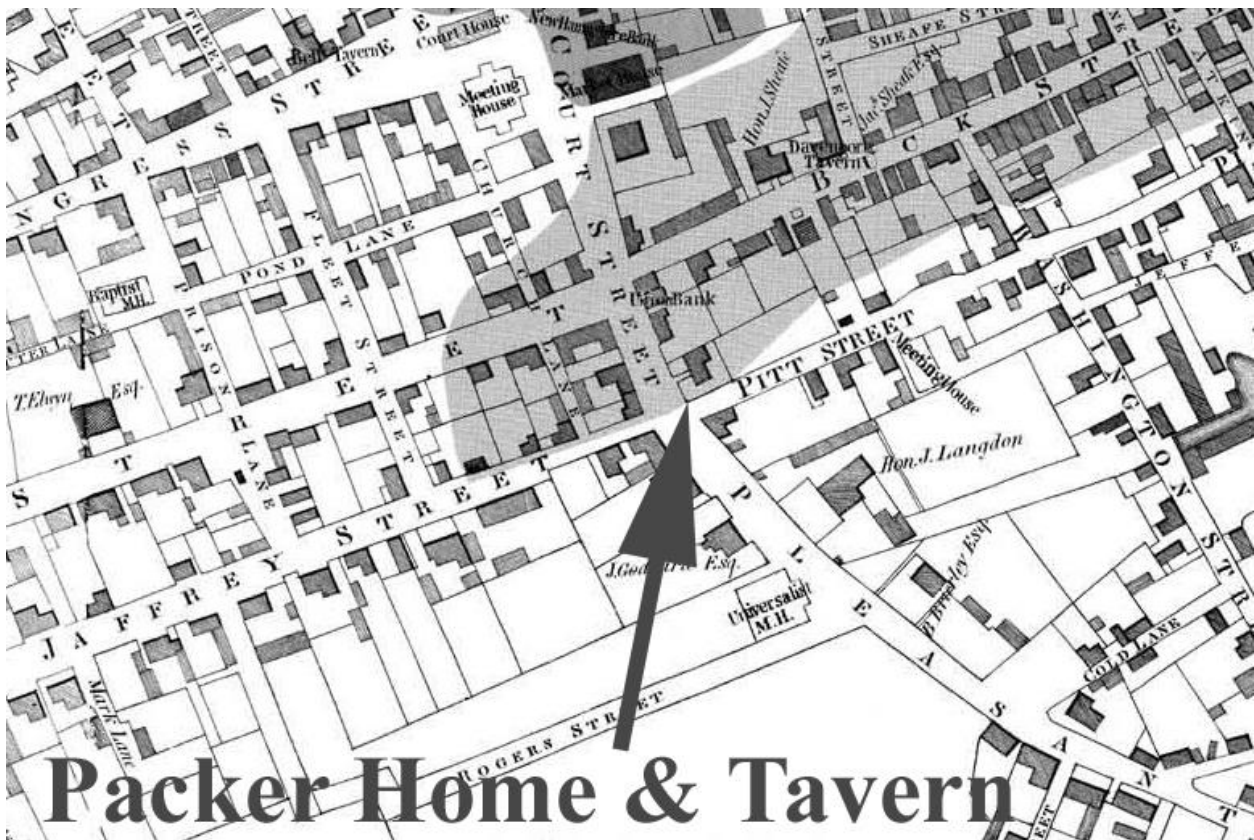
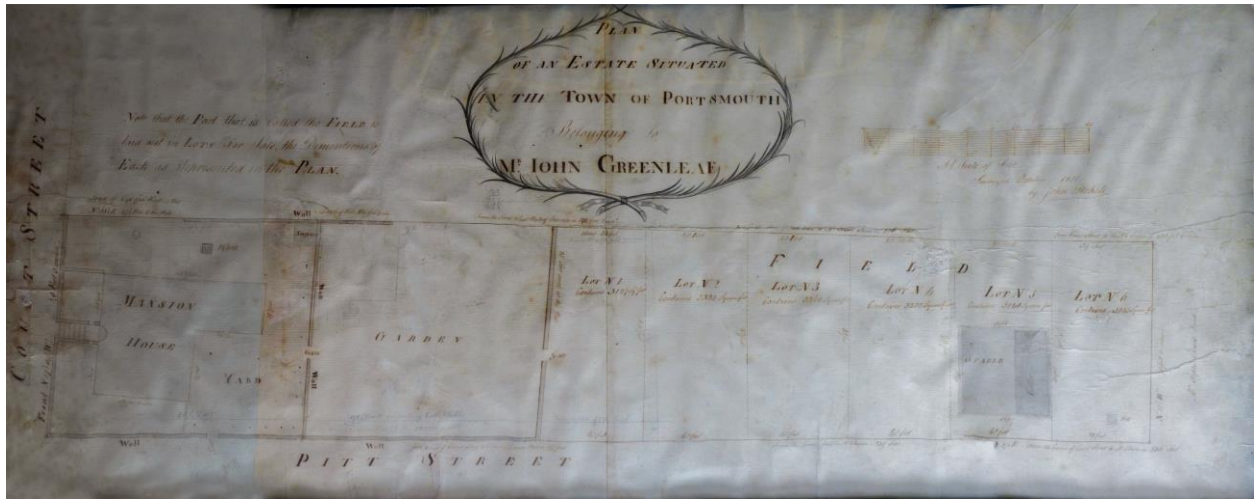
Across Pleasant Street on a parcel now occupied by the South (or Stone) Church stood a boarding house with barn. Years later it was discovered that the barn fire that started it all had been deliberately set by a disgruntled servant of the owner, Widow Woodward. Apparently a boarder gifted the servant woman some bottles of wine. The explanation offered was that the gift of wine was a simple gesture of friendship. Widow Woodward, however, suspected an unladylike dalliance had played a part. As a result, Widow Woodward confiscated the wine and the young servant woman retaliated by setting fire to the barn.

It was Sunday, December 22, 1813 and strong winter winds immediately blew embers across Pleasant Street onto the former Packer home and eastward. The inferno raged for six hours, until about 1 o'clock on the morning of December 23. Forty people arrived from Salem, MA around three o'clock in the morning and kept an eye on the smoking ashes while exhausted townspeople who had battled the flames all night found somewhere to sleep. The following night, Christmas Eve, Newburyport sent eighty or ninety men to help guard the charred remains and stacks of belongings that littered the streets.

The fire destroyed State Street from the burning barn to the Piscataqua River shoreline and even torched the Portsmouth Pier and all its warehouses at the end of the street. One report states, "Among the losses was an historic, castle-like mansion once owned by Sheriff Thomas Packer, who was notorious for hanging Ruth Blay, the last woman executed in New Hampshire. The house where Daniel Webster lived, on the northwest corner of Court and Pleasant Streets, also burned. Portsmouth's library and about a thousand books were lost."

Destroyed were approximately one hundred and eighty homes and sixty-four barns and shops; some estimates put the destruction as high as two hundred and seventy-two buildings. Fifteen acres of the center of Portsmouth were in ruins. The Packer home was one of the first structures lost to the inferno. The Clarks survived but did not rebuild, instead selling the property four years later in 1817.

On the site of the Packer Tavern at Court and Pleasant streets, a brick mansion was then built which stands there still. After the death of Robert Treadwell, an affluent Portsmouth merchant, his widow Anne purchased the property from the Clarks and built this mansion in 1818. Construction of the house complied with the 1814 Brick Act, which resulted from the fire of 1813 which had destroyed the Packer home. It required every new building in downtown Portsmouth over one story high to be built of bricks.





Temple Israel

An Engaging, Diverse Jewish Community
Portsmouth, New Hampshire

Kaya Stern-Kaufman, Rabbi
Robert Zimman, President

May 11, 2021

Historic District Commission, City of Portsmouth, NH

Via email: planning@cityofportsmouth.com

Re: 93 Pleasant Street (Abutter Notice received)

Dear Commission members,

On behalf of Temple Israel and its congregation of nearly 300 families, I am writing to share some thoughts and questions about the proposed project for 93 Pleasant Street, our immediate neighbor.

Temple Israel is generally supportive of this type of housing project in Portsmouth. We welcome the chance to comment on some specific areas of concern for the plans we have seen:

1. Possible damage to our nearly 200-year old historic structure from the need to remove ledge under the current parking area, which is adjacent to our building.
2. Reduction of sunlight on our preschool playground, which is inside the fenced area shown on the plan, immediately adjacent to the proposed new three-story building.
3. Possible damage to the historic stone wall along Court Street, which is over 250 years old and is reportedly the oldest stone wall remaining in Portsmouth.
4. Can the work be completed without removing or damaging trees on temple property?

Thank you for your consideration of these matters.

Sincerely,

Robert Zimman
President, Temple Israel Board of Directors