

Dear Mr. Gilbo,

Regarding tomorrow's agenda item, I have a comment about the property at 111 State Street.

I live at the Parkside (77 State Street) and believe this renovated building and the business located therein to be excellent additions to the neighborhood. However, the equipment on the roof is an eyesore. Attached are two photos taken from a vantage point similar to an earlier depiction of the work planned at this site. The earlier image, however, did not include air conditioning units on the roof as are visible not only from our apartment, but also from the street.

My request is for some kind of attractive camouflage to be installed that will obscure the machinery on the roof.

Thank you for your consideration.

Ann Birner

77 State Street

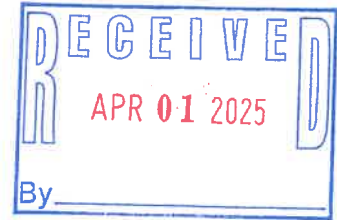
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Reagan Ruedig, Chair
Historic District Commission
City of Portsmouth, NH



Dear Ms. Ruedig and Commissioners,

Below are listed my concerns for the 445 Marcy, 20 Pray project. I have read and considered the HDC guidelines for New Construction in an Historic District. It is that which I have relied upon to arrive at these items of concern.

One primary question I have concerns the definition of the historic character of a neighborhood? **Does historic character only apply to buildings or is there any consideration for open space?** I have heard over and over that the HDC "has no purview" but why? **This lot**, unbuilt (with the exception of the Candy Store) for close to 100 years, **has, in and of itself, defined the character of this historic neighborhood**, the very value the HDC is charged to protect.

Following this line of thought, my suggestion is the City should seek to relieve the burden of ownership by purchasing these lots and protecting them from development. At the same time the City would acquire a tiny house in the form of the historic "Candy Shop" to house a single City worker who can't afford to live in Portsmouth but provides vital services to us all. Housing essential workers is a goal of the City. Another consideration for the City is that these lots will cost less now than the cost of the buy outs for owners as recommended in Portsmouth Historic Vulnerability Assessment , Strategy 11, voluntary buy out program.

However because this plan is before the HDC for a work session to review design criteria my comments address this below

Regarding the height of these new structures:

At the last meeting I requested that the architect present a rendering which shows this house and 445 Marcy and the houses further down Pray St. I also requested adding a person for scale. I made the same requests when the previous design was presented for this parcel. I am expecting this to be included in the new plan. It might help **all** to visualize the impact of height on the character of the existing historic block.

1. The architect has again referenced the tallest houses to justify what I feel is the excessive height of these two new structures as well as the ADU. My understanding of the plans is that the height of 20 Pray St. is 32 ft. The height of the house across, 17 Pray St., is 26'. 39, 43 and 53 Pray Street are all **much less tall**. 469 Marcy is 27'. The ADU height, at 24' , **is the same height as that of the primary residence** across from it

- on Partridge .
2. 20 Pray st., at 32 ft, located right on the lot line, 5' in from the street, will tower over Pray Street and the adjacent properties.
3. 445 Marcy, at 30' will significantly alter the character of that corner.
4. I am paraphrasing but at the last session, I heard "all the houses will have to be raised to this height at some point so that [height] shouldn't be a concern".
5. **I respectfully but fervently disagree with that as justification for setting a new height standard within this block. The HDC may have to update their design criteria to account for climate change but should do so before allowing designs to be approved that are not consistent with the existing guidelines.**

Regarding the Density of this plan:

1. This is a very dense plan proposed for a lot with a **small** buildable footprint, in the Flood Zone and within 250' of the shoreline protection zone. It includes 5 total buildings. I am concerned that this will negatively impact the existing historic structures which surround it. I question the use of a map from 1880 or 1910 as justification for that same density now. At that time the whole lot was buildable. Now almost half of the lot is compromised by the Flood Zone See below: Regarding Flood Zone.

Regarding the Architectural Design:

1. The two big bay windows of 20 Pray St. are inconsistent with the design of the surrounding historic homes. Houses with bays in the neighborhood have 1 bay window only, in scale and balance with the structures of those houses and their circa 1900's historic style.
2. There is no design precedent for the double steps to the entry . They are inconsistent with the characteristics of the neighborhood historic properties.
3. I have to admit, other than these obvious issues, I did not look at the details deeply. I feel it is premature to be discussing window fenestration or the like prior to addressing the bigger density and water issues.
4. As I remember my HDC review, the HDC made a huge issue of requiring wood frames and sills (at ongoing extra expense to me) because the "house was historic and close to the street and many people walk by it". **I would like to see the HDC develop such detailed criteria addressing design specifics for new construction in a historic district prior to**

ruling on a proposal instead of setting new precedents without wholly considering the impact on existing taxpayers. Instead I heard subjective comments from Commissioners such as "I like it" . One would have thought the HDC was talking about ice cream cones.

Previous concerns articulated at the March 4, 2025 work session:

These concerns may well be beyond the purview of the HDC but should not be ignored by the HDC as they impact the overall design concept. The HDC's primary purpose is the protection of the existing historic neighborhoods and homes.

Cars and Parking:

1. Two driveways for the primary houses, 20 Pray St and 445 Marcy St. are side by side and sited on Pray St. a very congested, commercially trafficked narrow street. 445 Marcy St. realistically must enter and exit on Pray, but could use a treatment similar to the corner of Partridge and Marcy..20 Pray does not need to.
2. Historically this lot may have had more structures, but it did not have the issue of cars. Pray Street is a short dead end, commercially traveled, narrow street. Daily, numerous Lobster Pound trucks, service vehicles and in the summer, customers to the lobster pound, utilize it.
3. There is the potential, given the length of the drives, for 3 cars each , a total of 6 entering or exiting on Pray Street.
4. Reducing, rearranging or removing the ADU would allow for all of 20 Pray St. parking to be off of Partridge. This would reduce congestion and make it safer on Pray St. For 20 Pray Street. There are two curbs cuts. Per the DPW, only one is permitted on one lot.

Flood Zone , 250' shoreline projects

1. My primary concern is the potential impact of water displacement from such a dense project in the Flood zone and its impact on already compromised neighboring historic homes.
2. I believe this project will be subject to at least 2 variances . Along with those, and DES approval, the developer will have to demonstrate compliance with Section 10.1320 Drainage No person shall perform any act or use of land in a manner which would cause substantial or avoidable erosion, create a nuisance, or alter existing patterns of

natural water flow onto any adjacent property. Because of this I would like to see a study (hydrology?) which addresses this.

3. The construction of the 2 houses and the 3 other structures must not pose an additional threat to existing historic properties in this neighborhood .

I am hoping to hear these concerns articulated out loud and addressed at the April 2 meeting.

Sincerely, 
Susan MacDougall

39 Pray Street
Portsmouth, NH

City Of Portsmouth Planning Department
Attn: Historic District Commission
City Hall
1 Junkins Avenue
Portsmouth, NH 03801

Letter delivered via email

Re: Concerns Regarding Proposed Development at 445 Marcy and 20 Pray Street

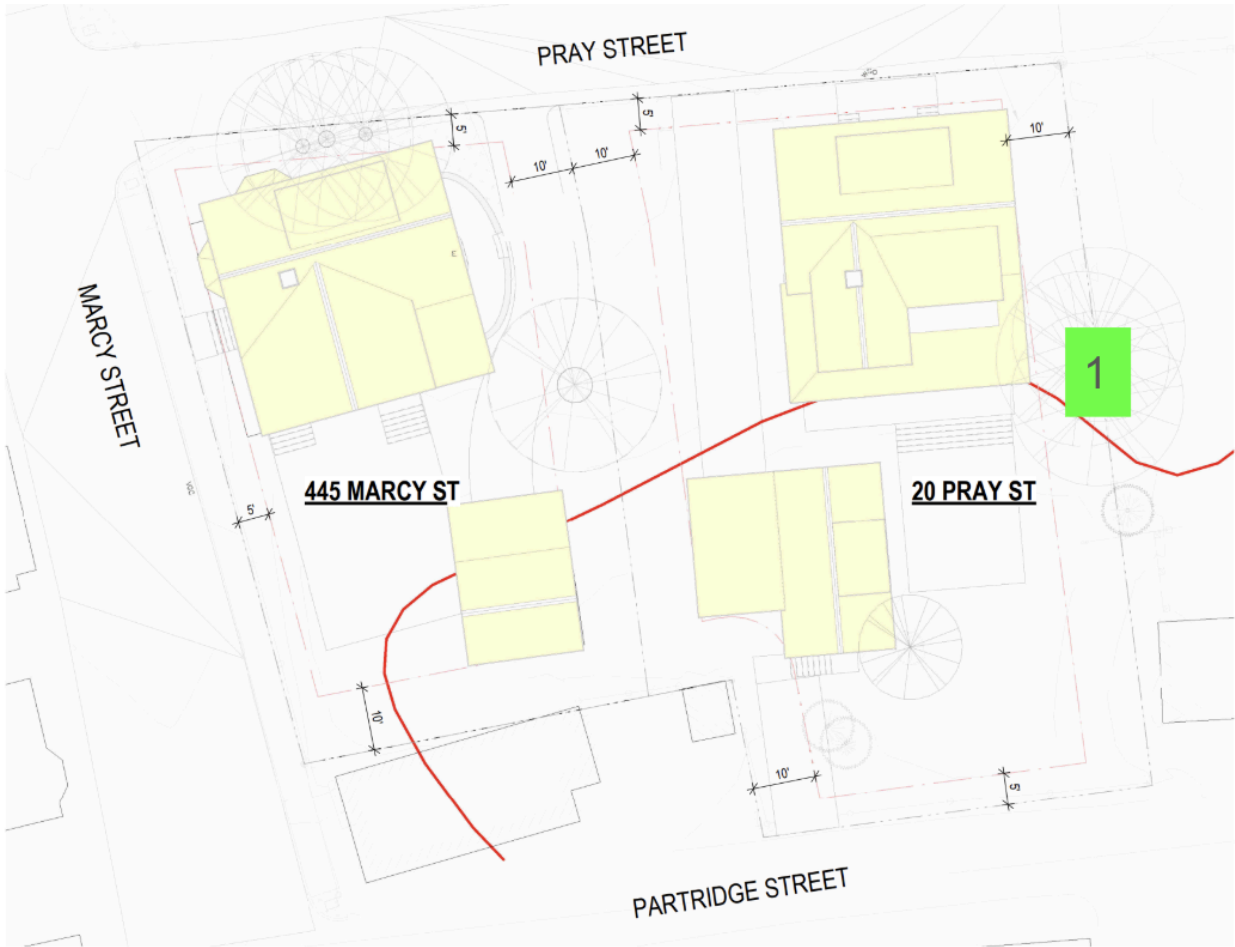
Dear Members of the Historic District Commission,

I am writing to express my concern regarding design aspects of the proposed project(s) encompassing 445 Marcy Street and 20 Pray Street, as first discussed at the March 5, 2025, work session.

As an abutting homeowner at 475 Marcy Street (*Built in 1875*), I spent considerable time studying the actual water behavior and topography of this area prior to my purchase, primarily as it relates to flooding and drainage patterns. I did not want to end up being one of those property owners whose house flooded. While maps and plans are good tools for planning and prediction, the actual field research and observations I made years ago have proven to be solid and my house has not suffered the effects of flooding water levels or high volumes of drainage onto my property.

The 445 Marcy/20 Pray property has a large natural depression that often fills with water, and at times beyond 100-year flood line which is reflected on plans. It is well-documented that water traveling up Partridge Street from the Piscataqua and down from surrounding uphill locations accumulates in this low-lying area, creating a drainage and retention function. You can visibly watch the flow into the area; as a result, it is often filled with water, sometimes for days. Any alteration to this flow; like structures, driveways, fill, etc proposed within the natural depression, could disrupt this essential balance, exacerbating both the flood risks and flood severity for surrounding properties. This letter specifically addresses my concern that it could change; what for me, has been a flood free existence by both design and decision.

The included photos below are examples of the actual water retention. (Green number 1 shows the same grouping of trees from the site plan to the photo for viewer orientation)







Since purchasing my home in 2021, based on extensive prior research on the local water movements, I have not experienced any flooding. I am concerned that development proposed in this specific area could alter water movement in a way that increases the flood vulnerability. Given the historic nature of this district, the value of the properties, and the city’s responsibility to protect both its built and natural environments, this simply cannot be a situation where “their water problem is transferred into my water problem.”

Section 10.1320 Drainage

No **person** shall perform any act or **use** of land in a manner which would cause substantial or avoidable erosion, create a nuisance, or alter existing patterns of natural water flow onto any **adjacent** property.

Our historic structures are not preserved in isolation; they rely on their surrounding context—including topography, drainage patterns, and resilience to hazards—to remain viable.

The HDC's protective measures and preservation mandate extends to any site alteration or development design that could negatively affect the district's historic and architectural integrity. Increased flood risk directly threatens that integrity by endangering the structural stability of abutting historic buildings. I urge the Commission to thoroughly evaluate the hydrological design and impact of this project before moving forward, both utilizing maps and plans, but most importantly taking into account the observable reality of the flood conditions.

Whatever is ultimately designed and built, has to function in "real life" in a way that does not negatively impact other properties. I support development, but I remain nervous about how a solution for this water retention area can or will be built without negatively affecting surrounding homes. It's easy for me to visualize a river running through my yard if no one actually figures it out based on actual conditions that exist today, and have existed for decades.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate the significant commitment you make to preserving Portsmouth's historic and environmental integrity. We are all very lucky to live in such a place.

Sincerely,

Tyler Markley

475 Marcy Street
Portsmouth, NH 03801

Historic District Commission
City of Portsmouth, NH
Work Session—April 2, 2025



Re: 445 Marcy Street and 20 Pray Street

To Whom It May Concern,

I have thoroughly reviewed the *Plan Portsmouth* and *Historic District Commission Guidelines*, with particular attention to the sections addressing **Groundwater Flooding in Historic Portsmouth** and **Small-Scale New Construction** in the Historic District.

1) Groundwater Flooding Concerns

The *Groundwater Flooding in Historic Portsmouth* resource states:

- Groundwater flooding “can damage basements and foundations... and could cause damage to bricks, mortar, and building foundations.” (Page 2)
- This issue “that is already occurring but hidden and often overlooked, is much more widespread and pressing than previously thought.” (Page 3)

As a homeowner in a flood-prone area, I am particularly concerned about how this new construction will impact groundwater displacement and, consequently, the foundations of our historic homes. I respectfully request that a professional study be conducted to assess these potential effects to the foundations of nearby historic homes.

2) Compatibility with Historic Character

Key excerpts from the *Small-Scale New Construction* guidelines emphasize:

- “All new construction should be compatible within the property’s surrounding context.” (Guidelines Introduction, Page 13)
- “New buildings should be designed in a manner that is consistent or compatible to their surroundings to preserve the cohesive historic context.” (Guidelines for Small-Scale New Construction, Page 1)

The Marcy, Pray, and Partridge block is characterized by smaller homes with simple, unadorned exteriors, modest rooflines, single doors, and single windows. In contrast, the proposed homes are significantly taller and feature architectural elements such as dormers, multiple rooflines, double windows, double doors, bay windows, pergola, farmer’s porches, roof deck, and multiple exterior staircases. These elements, while suitable in a different setting, are incompatible with the existing character of our neighborhood and detract from its historic integrity.

I urge the Historic District Commission to carefully consider the aforementioned concerns when evaluating the proposed development.

Sincerely,
Michele McLaughlin
469 Marcy Street