

# *City of Somersworth, New Hampshire*

## ***Historic District Commission***

Minutes of Meeting held on Wednesday, 22 January 2014

Adopted unanimously on 26 February 2014

Members present: George Poulin, Chair; Councilor Marcel Hebert; Madeline DeSantis; Arthur Hendrickson; Albert Marotta; Beth Poulin; Tim Metivier, City Code and Health Office; Charlie Murray, Secretary.

Members absent: Julie Rowe

Petitioners present: Tony Doan (on behalf of HDC#25-2013) who arrived at 7:15 P.M.

Call to Order: At 7:00 P.M. by the Chair

Introduction and Welcome: The Chair introduced and warmly welcomed the city council's new representative to the Historic District Commission, Marcel Hebert.

Approval of minutes of previous meeting: Motion to approve the minutes of 26 November 2013 and 19 December 2013 as submitted was made by Mr. Marotta and seconded by Mr. Murray. Motion passed unanimously.

Projects of minimal impact: Mr. Metivier reported that no projects of minimal impact had been approved since the Commission's meeting on 19 December 2013.

### Old Business:

- A. My Mobile, on behalf of Tony Doan, is seeking a certificate of appropriateness to erect signs on property at 59-65 High Street, in the Business Historic (BH) District, Assessor's Map 11, Lot 63A, HDC#25-2013.

Mr. Hendrickson asked why this project was assigned to HDC. Mr. Metivier responded that the sign requested was a wall-mounted sign that could only be wooden with vinyl or painted lettering. The original rejection for this petition indicated that the wall-mounted sign did not conform to city ordinance. There was then an extended discussion on whether or not specific colors were permitted or not. The Chair stated that the compositions of signs (including color) must blend in with the overall composition of the area. Mr. Metivier furthermore confirmed that while specific colors were not prohibited, signs were to blend in with the area. Another issue with My Mobile is that the window sign covers more than 50% of the window, in violation of city ordinance. In fact, Mr. Metivier said that no more than 50% of each pane of glass (in case a window had more than one pane) could be covered.

Councilor Hebert inquired why people would not show up to explain their petitions before the HDC if requested to do so. The Chair responded that as he got more experience he would learn which petitioners would come and which wouldn't. Mr. Metivier called them "repeat non-attendees." Mr. Hendrickson called them "frequent fliers."

Motion to deny HDC#25-2013 was made by Mr. Murray and seconded by Mr. Hendrickson. Motion passed unanimously.

At 7:15 P.M. Mr. Doan walked in to explain HDC#25-2013. Motion to reconsider HDC#25-2013 was made by Mr. Murray and seconded by Mr. Marotta. Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Doan reported that he wanted to hang a two-sided sign on the front of his building. He asked about erecting a neon-colored sign. The Chair replied that in the historic district in which his shop is located only hand-painted wooden sign would be acceptable. Mr. Doan inquired if it would be similar to the type of sign hanging in front of the China Panda; Mr. Metivier replied that the materials comprising the China Panda sign would be acceptable. Mr. Hendrickson said that historically the use of plastic (such as the neon-plastic House of Pizza sign) was not permitted as the signs on businesses were to match the surrounding neighborhood. Mr. Murray asked how much such a sign would cost. Mr. Hendrickson remarked about \$200. Mr. Doan asked if it could be vinyl lettering. He Chair responded no and recommended that Mr. Doan contact a local sign company and arrange for a hand-painted sign.

Mr. Hendrickson also noted that a window sign in Mr. Doan's building took too much space. City ordinance requires that any sign must cover less than 50% of any pane. The purpose is to protect the public. Mr. Doan agreed to make the signs in his store window conform to city ordinance.

Motion to approve HDC #25-2013 with the stipulation that the outdoor sign be a hand-painted wooden sign was made by Mr. Murray and seconded by Councilor Hebert. Motion passed unanimously.

- B. Them Tran is seeking a certificate of appropriateness to replace stairs on property located at 76-78 Elm Street, in the Business Historic (BH) District, Assessor's Map 10, Lot 193, HDC #29-2013. This is an after-the-fact, or post-construction, certificate of appropriateness.

Since no one was present to describe the construction involved, motion to table HDC #29-2013 was made by Mr. Murray and seconded by Mr. Marotta. Motion passed unanimously.

- C. Them Tran is seeking a certificate of appropriateness to replace stairs on property located at 68-70 Elm Street, in the Business Historic (BH) District, Assessor's Map 10, Lot 191, HDC #30-2013.

Mr. Metivier explained that although Mr. Castro's name appears as the contractor involved, Mr. Metivier does not believe that Mr. Castro actually did the work. It is Mr. Metivier's belief that when the actual contractors learned that permission from the HDC was required they hired Mr. Castro to represent them. Mr. Metivier did say that the stairs represented a convenient replacement; however they do not conform to city ordinance which they must do. Mr. Hendrickson asked what the HDC's authority is in such cases. Mr. Metivier replied that the stairs could be forced to be taken down because they do not conform to city ordinance.

Because the petitioner was a no show, motion to table HDC #30-2013 was made by Mr. Murray and seconded by Mr. Hendrickson. Motion passed unanimously.

D. The Chair reported no additional Old Business.

New Business:

A. The Chair reported no additional New Business.

Workshop Business:

- A. Mr. Metivier provided a first draft of a sign for the Historic District Commission which was warmly received by the Commission. Mr. Metivier furthermore reported that the company that worked on the first draft donated time and labor. Concerning the color, green, Mr. Metivier said that although green is not an official city color (Hilltower blue is) he liked the color and format of the proposed HDC sign. The Chair stated that three such signs should be made and put at the three borders of the city's historic district. The Chair also asked Councilor Hebert if he would be willing as the city council representative to the HDC to obtain funding from the city for these signs. Councilor Hebert agreed.
- B. The Chair requested scheduling another HDC workshop on the second Tuesday in February, 18 February 2014, at 6:00 P.M. at City Hall. The Chair also threw out some ideas for the possible workshop including discussion of the proposed HDC sign, issues with the use of vinyl products in the historic district, segmentation of the historic district into smaller neighborhood districts, and classifications of property (a project being worked on by Mr. Marotta).

The purpose of the topics is to help the HDC develop updated guidelines that could be applied more consistently, suggested Mr. Metivier. Mr. Hendrickson brought up the idea of landlord licensing which was considered appropriate for a future workshop but would need city council approval. Mr. Metivier also brought up again the payment of a nominal fee to the HDC by property owners in the historic district which could be pooled and possibly augmented by a matching grant to assist historic district property owners bring their buildings up to code and maintain them.

C. The Chair reported no additional Workshop Business.

Communications and Miscellaneous:

A. The Chair reported no further communications or miscellaneous business.

Adjournment:

A. Motion to adjourn at 8:10 P.M. was made by Mr. Hendrickson and seconded by Mr. Marotta. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Pius Charles Murray

Pius Charles Murray  
Recording Secretary