



SOMERSWORTH HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

Date: 22 April 2015

Place: City Hall, Somersworth, NH

Workshop Minutes: Adopted as Amended

Present:

George Poulin, Chair
Albert Marotta, Vice-Chair
Martin Dumont, City Councilor
Laura Barry, Alternate
Madeline DeSantis, Commissioner
Beth Poulin, Commissioner
Tim Metiver, Building Inspector
Pius Charles Murray, Commissioner/Secretary

Members Absent:

Arthur Hendrickson, Commissioner
Julie Rowe, Alternate

Agenda

I. Call to Order by the Chair at 6:30 P.M.

II. Workshop Business

The topic of discussion concerned fences in the Historic District.

The Chair began the discussion by describing what occasioned the controversy of allowing differing types of fences in the city's Historic District. The Chair stated that Mr. Smith's fence on his property at the corner of Page and Maple is not intended as a permanent addition but yet is viewable publicly; how is the HDC to deal with such structures or applications to the HDC for such structures. The Chair inquired whether or not Mr. Smith had applied for a building permit for this fence. Mr. Metivier responded that Mr. Smith had indeed applied and been granted a permit; the decision to consider the fence a project of minimal impact rather than bring it to the entire HDC for a decision was a judgment

call. According to Mr. Metivier, Somersworth City Ordinance specifically defines what constitutes a fence including criteria that the materials match the rest of the area, and that it be less than 8 feet. There are stockyard fences and chain-link fences existing already in the historic district.

Councilor Dumont remarked that if the guidelines are too vague, perhaps a definition of allowed materials is needed in the city ordinance. Mr. Metivier offered another example of a different type of fence (e.g. an iron-wrought fence, or one which could be constructed out of rock or of concrete.

The Chair read the description of fences from the HDC Guidelines. He stated furthermore that the HDC has already approved composite materials as acceptable for fences.

Mr. Metivier reported that as of now he has not yet received an application for a chain-link fence. He would rather not automatically approve a chain-link fence but some do exist in the historic district. One issue with a chain-link fence is the subjectivity with which it may be considered a fence by one individual but not by another. The decision is more artistic than scientific thus he wishes clearer wording in the city ordinance or better guidance from the Commission.

The Chair stated that among the options which could be considered would include having the Commission examine each application on a case-by-case basis, or leaving them as projects of minimal impact.

Ms. Barry brought up the issue of fence repair and asked what percentage had to be repaired for a project to be considered major impact which would then have to be brought before the full HDC. Councilor Dumont inquired how big an issue repairing fences was. Mr. Metivier replied that there were no rules regarding what percentage of a fence had to be repaired to become a project of major impact so to date there was no real issue.

The Chair responded that allowance of composite materials in the construction of fences has reduced problems. But he also gave the example of a circle fence surrounding a flower bed in public view; would that constitute major impact requiring HDC action?

Mr. Metivier gave another example of a new house that could be built across from the school using a chain-link fence; since the school already has a chain-link fence, the house's fence would fit the criteria of meeting the "surrounding area."

Councilor Dumont recommended leaving this issue as incidental, or as projects of minimal impact. If judged to be a greater scope in the judgment of the Building Inspector, then the application could be brought to the entire Commission.

The Chair recommended extending a fence on one side as a goal determining whether minimal impact or not.

Ms. Barry asked if there was a difference between public and non-public views. Mr. Metivier responded that set-backs outside of public view are ok as projects of minimal impact. Mr. Metivier further recommended that property owners be prepared to sacrifice 1 ½' to 2' of their property to make the holes of the fence to be installed. He then inquired if the goal of the workshop was to recommend to the city council a change in the language of the city ordinance.

The Chair recommended leaving fences as projects of minimal impact. Mr. Marotta recommended added photographs of the types of fences already existing in the historic district to assist property owners to know what was allowable. Ms. DeSantis remarked that the HDC did not expect to offer advice to property owners; to which the Chair replied that would be one reason to leave fences as projects of minimal impact. Mr. Marotta then recommended leaving everything as is but consider adding photographs. Ms. DeSantis said she would like a moratorium on chain-link fences, to which Mr. Metivier replied that chain-link fences may not constitute projects of minimal impact.

Councilor Dumont asked if constructing fences required a permit; to which Mr. Metivier replied that they did; building a fence without a permit was unacceptable. Mr. Metivier added that if the HDC wanted chain-link fences to come before the Commission, would it have to recommend changing the city ordinance to reflect that?

Recommendation of change to 19.14.E:3.a “Erection, construction or repair of a fence, *with the exception of a chain-link which would not constitute a project of minimal impact*, shed or garage provided the following criteria are met:”

Mr. Marotta asked if he could discuss briefly his classification project for the historic district. However the Chair ruled that because it had not been listed on the Workshop’s Agenda it was out of order but could be taken up under Communications and Miscellaneous on the regular agenda.

III. Adjournment.

The Chair adjourned the Workshop at 6:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Pius Charles Murray

Pius Charles Murray, M.L.S., M.P.A.
Commissioner/Secretary

N.B. An audio recording of this HDC Workshop is available. Please note that when microphones are used, voices are much clearer. Please remember to use your microphone for best recording. == PCM