



SOMERSWORTH HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

Date: 27 May 2015

Place: City Hall, Somersworth, NH

Workshop Minutes: First Draft

Present:

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

Members Absent:

Martin Dumont, City Councilor
Arthur Hendrickson, Commissioner
Beth Poulin, Commissioner
Julie Rowe, Alternate

Agenda

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

II. Workshop Business

The Chair introduced the topic of discussion discussed options for re-sizing Somersworth's Historic District. The Chair reminded the Commissioners that this was strictly a discussion whose purpose was to encourage the Commission to think about alternatives. Mr. Murray asked if re-sizing historic districts was an issue for other districts in the state; to which the Chair responded, "Not necessarily," but that it had been brought up by one of the City Councilors at a city council meeting and that previous to the City Councilor's inquiry the HDC had already begun to consider the issue. The Chair explained that the HDC had considered cutting out Washington and Main Streets from the historic district, to which Mr. Metivier added also potentially Broad and Elm Streets. Ms. DeSantis said that given all the recent work by Mr. Marotta on his system of classification for the historic district she would feel more comfortable continuing to determine HDC guidelines for different classifications

within the HDC, particularly for non-contributing structures. Ms. Barry inquired if anything had been left out of the historic district; since the state criteria is fifty years there may have been some structures overlooked and never included.

Mr. Murray asked what specifically occasioned this discussion on re-sizing the historic district. Ms. DeSantis replied that there had been an article in the local newspaper that covered a discussion at a city council meeting between Dave Sharples and the council. As another reason to consider re-sizing the historic district, Mr. Murray said that Somersworth has the largest such district in the state, to which Ms. DeSantis corrected that Somersworth's is the largest congruent historic district in the state whereas Portsmouth has the largest number of structures. Because the state is cutting a lot of its budget, Ms. DeSantis said it has been losing grants which makes less money available for historic districts and/or maintenance of buildings in local historic districts.

Ms. Barry mentioned the possibility of grants from NAH for the historic district. Mr. Metivier explained that the NAH provided a kitty with matching funds; it would assist with a percentage of a project that was considered beneficial to the local historic district. Mr. Murray mentioned that the HDC had considered creating a fund to assist in bringing a structure up to HDC guidelines; the Chair said it would take time for the HDC to obtain any grants. In addition, the problem is, according to Mr. Metivier, that all funds are required by City Charter to go into the General Fund where they would not necessarily be used for a historic district project. Mr. Metivier reported that he had brought the idea of an HDC fee to the state of New Hampshire whose representative loved the idea but would take quite a while to sell to the various levels of government to make it work; moreover, selling yet another fee to property owners in the historic district would require a marketing strategy.

The Chair, Ms. Barry, Ms. DeSantis, and Mr. Murray expressed a preference to keep the Somersworth Historic District as currently configured.

Mr. Metivier mentioned that it was not the size of the district that mattered primarily, but rather the importance of individual structures within it. The Chair underscored that this would be another way to emphasize the importance of Mr. Marotta's system of classification in the historic district. Mr. Marotta stated that he too was not in favor of shrinking the historic district in part because we do not know how its configuration was originally decided. Furthermore, Mr. Marotta questioned why the city council brought this up in the first place: was it based on a single complaint, or had the council been considering this previously?

Mr. Metivier mentioned that the Seacoast area's growth followed the development of the New York-Boston-Portland Railroad. There did not seem to be any common denominator in types of structures constructed throughout what became the historic district. He suggested as a possibility identifying different grades within the historic district, a type of historic district within the historic district, as Boston has done.

The Commission decided to follow-up with another workshop discussion on re-sizing the historic district.

III. Adjournment.

The Chair adjourned the Workshop at 7:03 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Pius Charles Murray

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

Adopted as amended at HDC Regular meeting on 22 July 2015

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

