

SOMERSWORTH HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
MINUTES OF MEETING
June 28, 2023

MEMBERS PRESENT: Laura Barry Chair, Adam Young, Matt Gerding, Richard Brooks, George Poulin, Kimberly Shoen, and Tim Metivier

EXCUSED MEMBERS: Elizabeth Nguyen, Timothy Monahan

STAFF PRESENT: Dana Crossley, Planning Technician

The meeting was called to order at 7:00pm.

1. Approval of May 24, 2023 meeting minutes.

Discussion:

Brooks stated the minutes are not yet ready for review and due to his schedule, he may need to relinquish his secretary role.

Barry suggested meeting minute-taking can be discussed later in the meeting either in Workshop Business or in Communications and Miscellaneous.

MOTION: Tim Metivier MOVED to CONTINUE the approval of the May 24th, 2023 Meeting Minutes until the next meeting scheduled on July 26th, 2023.

The MOTION was SECONDED by Brooks.

The MOTION CARRIED 7-0-0.

2. Projects of Minimal Impact Report.

Crossley stated there were no Projects of Minimal Impact to report for the month of May.

3. Public comments by visitors.

None.

4. OLD BUSINESS

- a. Any old business to come before the Board
None.

5. NEW BUSINESS

- a. **Silas Moylan is seeking a certificate of appropriateness to repair a porch roof, install a railing, and replace decking and posts for a property located at 123 Main Street in the Business with Historic Overlay (BH) District, Assessor's Map 10 Lot 182, HDC#16-2023.**

Crossley provided an overview of the application. She stated the applicant is proposing to repair the porch roof to include the repair of uppermost horizontal structural beam to be wrapped in a white trim to match the existing. The applicant is additionally proposing to repair or replace vertical posts with concrete lally columns, and wrap and trim to match. They will also raise the height of a handrail to be code compliant and replace decking in kind as needed. She noted a few historic applications for the property such as roofing, vinyl siding, various repairs to the exterior, and the replacement of shingles.

June 28, 2023 HDC Minutes

The applicant, **Silas Moylan** was present to represent the application. He stated his intent to be granted a building permit to repair the porch, the roof structure above the porch, and the posts below it. His repairs would be in-kind with the current structure with the exception of the height of the handrail and changing the trim as needed.

Metivier asked about the material the applicant is proposing to use.

Moylan stated he plans to use three-quarter-inch, white-painted primed pine for the trim from the lumberyard depending on availability and affordability, which would match the existing trim. For the structural portion below, he'll use a concrete lally column with an appropriate fastener at the base and top. For the beam, where it's elevated above ground level and covered by a roof, he'll use framing lumber wrapped in pine and painted white.

Metivier asked the applicant if his intention is to enclose the lally columns with the trim and whether the detail will match what is currently on the structure.

Moylan stated yes, he plans to reuse as much of the material as possible.

Metivier asked whether the turned columns that are currently being used will be replaced if needed.

Moylan stated if there are any portions that need to be replaced, he'll add on to the top or bottom but he doesn't know whether he would replace those entirely due to the cost of materials. He stated that currently, the handrail on the upper porch is about thirty-two inches and he'd like to bring it up to either thirty-six inches or forty-two inches depending on what is required by Code Enforcement for the safety of future tenants and insurance.

Metivier stated with regard to increasing the height of the handrail, the railing system would not need to meet current building code as its location in the Historic District makes it exempt from the code. The handrail was up to code when it was installed. He noted the insurance company may want him to improve it but he does not necessarily need to change the height of the railing.

Shoen asked for clarification on whether the applicant will be the contractor for the project.

Moylan stated he listed his father on the Building Permit Application, and both he and his father will be doing the work.

Brooks asked if there will be any work done to the rest of the building in addition to what is listed in the application.

Moylan stated what is listed in the proposal are the most urgent exterior repairs. Once he completes those items, he plans to submit another Historic District application to change the asphalt siding back to wooden clapboards.

Barry stated that hopefully the wooden clapboard that exists below the asphalt siding is in good condition and can be reused.

Gerding referenced the two back stairwells on the property. He noted the railings appear to be metal pipes or wooden dowels of some sort. He asked out of curiosity whether those are going to be replaced in any way to match the railing on the front and side of the porch.

June 28, 2023 HDC Minutes

Moylan stated he doesn't plan to change that railing but could include that in the scope of work. He said he'll take a look to see materials are available.

MOTION: Shoen MOVED that the request of Silas Moylan seeking a certificate of appropriateness to repair a porch roof, install a railing, and replace decking and posts for a property located at 123 Main Street be APPROVED.

The MOTION was SECONDED by Young.

The MOTION CARRIED 7-0-0.

- b. SOS Recovery Community Organization is seeking a certificate of appropriateness to install an acrylic wall mounted sign, an acrylic projecting sign, and a hanging wood sign for a property located at 69 High Street in the Business with Historic Overlay (BH) District, Assessor's Map 11 Lot 63, HDC#18-2023.**

Crossley stated the applicant is proposing to install new signage for a new business at this location. The material of the proposed signage is acrylic and wood. The property has had a few applications through the Historic District Commission including one for a commercial renovation of the exterior and various other applications for signs.

Emmet Soldati was present to represent the application. He stated he is the former business owner of Teatotaler at 69 High Street and is representing the application for John Burns, the owner of the new business, Fold'd, at the location. He noted their effort to conform to what was previously permitted to avoid changing the look and feel of the building. He stated they are working with Sundance Signs who completed the installation work for the current painted, acrylic sign for Teatotaler, which will be removed. He referenced the proposed painted acrylic projecting sign and stated there was a permit granted to Teatotaler for it, it was just never installed. The wall-mounted center sign would also be painted acrylic and the hanging signs would be upgraded to wood signs that would hang directly below the awning.

Brooks asked about the appearance of the proposed painted acrylic sign.

Soldati stated the proposed sign would have the same appearance as the current Teatotaler sign that is on the building. The material is made out of PVC but it's painted with exterior paint so it has a painted wood look.

Gerding asked whether the new signs will go in the exact same location as the current Teatotaler sign.

Soldati stated yes, the only difference is the logo. There are rectangular cut outs for the building that were never utilized and the goal is to put words and signage in those spaces.

Metivier asked whether the wooden hanging signs will hang from underneath the awning beneath the canopy.

Soldati responded correct, the plan is to make them after the signs from Sundance are made.

Barry stated her concern regarding clearance for pedestrians. She asked if the applicant is sure of the height the three signs will be and their distance from the ground.

June 28, 2023 HDC Minutes

Soldati stated the three hanging signs will be higher than the hanging signs below the awning, which will be even higher than the height of the original, round hanging signs.

Shoen asked whether the whole façade will be sign-covered.

Soldati responded yes. He noted that when he was the tenant, Teatotaller only occupied the left two-thirds of the building. The right was most recently occupied by a sign for a hair salon. He stated the entire first floor is going to be this restaurant.

Shoen asked whether he feels this proposal fits in with the community in terms of the signage.

Soldati stated yes, originally the historical design would include signage in the cut outs on the building façade. He stated their goal is to utilize those features to honor the historical character of the building.

Gerding asked whether Soldati could provide more information on the brackets that will hold the proposed project sign onto the building. He stated the packet shows a projecting bar with the brackets and would like more detail on what the brackets will look like.

Soldati stated he could get more detail from Sundance Sign Company, who are doing the installation. He stated bolts were used for the other sign design and he said this one would likely be similar.

Metivier referenced the projecting sign Gerding was speaking on. He asked where the sign on the building façade that will be mounted.

Soldati stated there is brick trim on each side of the building and the intent is to locate the sign on the left brick trim.

Barry stated she is happy to hear this project is moving forward. She said she is particularly in favor that the proposal is using the banding around the building that that was historically used for either advertising or signage in the 1940s or 1950s, especially for diners. To Brooks' point, she stated she is happy the sign will be painted and have a high finish. She said she is very much in favor of this proposal and thinks it's going to work well with the building.

MOTION: Poulin MOVED that the request of SOS Recovery Community Org. DBA Fold'd for a Certificate of Appropriateness to install acrylic signs for a property located at 69 High Street be APPROVED.

The MOTION was SECONDED by Matt Gerding.

The MOTION CARRIED 6-1-0, with Shoen opposing.

- c. 85 Elm Street LLC is seeking an amendment to a certificate of appropriateness to add additional residential units, remove underground parking, and alter exterior building materials for a property located at 85 Elm Street and 20 Green Street in the Business with Historic Overlay District, Assessor's Map 10 Lots 177 and 176, HDC#31-2022.**

Crossley provided an overview of the proposal. She stated the applicant is seeking to revise their previously approved certificate of appropriateness in November 2022 to construct a 128-unit building and demolish three structures. The proposal is to change architectural features by adding

June 28, 2023 HDC Minutes

residential units in place of a previously proposed underground parking garage. The applicant is also seeking for changes in the materials of the building.

Robert Previti, Ben Stebbins, and Project Architect **Adam Morrill** were present to represent the application. Previti stated since their approval in November 2022, they are seeking to make two revisions to the design. The first proposed change is to remove underground parking, they had around thirty-five underground parking spaces on the Elm Street side of the building. The second is to make changes to the proposed building material of the exterior. Previti stated these changes will improve the streetscape along Elm Street. He said in the past year, brick prices have increased dramatically and those costs would make the project infeasible. He said they have considered brick alternatives including Dryvit but found that it is not easily insurable for residential buildings and difficult to find contractors to install. To decrease costs and stay in keeping with other buildings in the neighborhood, they are before the Commission to propose changing building materials from brick to clapboard. He noted that the previously approved use of stamped concrete has been removed from the application as the applicant feels that material has a neutral impact on the project.

Morrill stated they had prepared renderings to show the Commission on the projector but because members had the same renderings on paper, he referenced those instead. He provided a page-by-page overview of the renderings and pointed out proposed changes to their building design, including the replacement of brick with clapboard siding, the use of fiber cement, and different color samples for the siding. He stated it was their goal to try to keep the character of the previously approved project in its massing. He said they have investigated other materials and there were concerns about insurance and product quality. The consensus was that fiber cement would be the longest lasting product for this property and would maintain some of the character that was previously presented. He said that the proposed accent materials could provide some of the same support that the previous brick proposal had incorporated while also creating efficiencies for the project.

Barry checked with other Board members to see whether they wished to see the projected renderings as they already had paper copies of the renderings before them. The Board agreed they did not need to see the projected renderings and had enough information before them for a discussion.

Barry asked whether any abutters or members of the public would like to speak on the application.

Matthew Dinola, an abutter to the project, asked if he could view the proposed renderings. He indicated he had no further questions or comments.

Shoen offered Dinola her copy of renderings to view. She stated she was not in support of the proposal. She reminded the applicant that the Board cannot take finances into consideration when voting on an application. She stated one of her concerns is the proximity of the proposed building to the historic agent's house on the site. She said she doesn't think this project fits in the Historic District.

Gerding stated he agrees with one part of the applicant proposal, and that is the request to add additional units in the lower floor. He stated he is disappointed that the applicant is back before the

June 28, 2023 HDC Minutes

Commission to request major changes that are not in line with what was initially discussed and agreed upon. He noted the parking spaces the City has leased to the applicant and the freezing of the tax assessment on the building for seven years. He said he feels like they have come to the HDC with two contradictory statements being that they want to increase the number of apartments and increase expense on the developers, yet they are unwilling to bear the costs of the expenses they had previously agreed to. He urged the applicant to go back to the drawing board to come up with alternate ways that do not impact the previously approved plans for the building exterior.

He said he would like to see the project happen as the community and downtown businesses would benefit from the additional housing. He said he doesn't think what the applicant has brought forth is in line with historic district regulations and if the building proposal were to be approved as they are proposing tonight, it would set a precedent for the Historic District that would impact other proposed buildings in the future.

Metivier stated he is in agreement with Gerding's points. He noted the Board's denial of the applicant's previous proposals for different forms of siding in lieu of brick. He stated he is not opposed to the removal of the parking garage and the addition of residential units. He noted changes in the window design and layout. He stated due to the lack of acknowledgement of the process involved with reaching the previously approved design, he would not be in support of the revised proposal.

Barry stated she does not find the proposed building design unappealing, however, she mimics other Board members that this design does not fit in with other buildings in the Historic District that have brick, masonry, and cement. She asked the applicant for clarification on the intended use of 67 Elm Street.

Previti responded yes, and they have other existing, offsite parking.

Barry stated she is happy to hear that parking at 67 Elm Street might be part of this project. She also noted she is pleased the revised proposal is consistent with the Commission's interest in the building having the appearance of a 3-story building. .

Brooks stated he is unfavorable of the overall size and scale of the project. He stated he has come to accept the size of the building. He said if the applicants are proposing to remove brick from their plans, he thinks it would benefit the building's appearance for the first floor to be brick, but the building would need other design components to look like a mill as currently, the building renderings are too modern.

Barry asked whether archways could be incorporated into the building design as they are a key feature of historic buildings in the District. She stated she would also like to see the first floor have brick or stamped concrete to break up the material. She said if the first floor were different in some way, she would be more amenable to changes.

Morrill asked for clarification on Barry's inquiry about arches.

Barry provided further detail regarding the arches she would like to see surrounding the windows on the first floor of the building.

June 28, 2023 HDC Minutes

Poulin stated he is in agreement with Brooks and Barry that he would also be in favor of the first floor having a brick component.

Stebbins stated they could put brick on the building but to make the project feasible, the upper floors would have to be vinyl. He stated if they were to proceed with their original proposal, the project would be too expensive to build.

Gerding stated he wants this project to work. He expressed his disappointment that the applicant is returning to the Board with a different proposal after having received approval on their initial plans. He noted his understanding of cost change. He stated additional proposed units would make the project more costly and may be potentially accounting for these other changes with the siding.

Previti stated he also likes brick and it would be his preferred choice of material for the building. He stated when the project was started a year and a half ago, they spent six months at HDC meetings during which time interest rates doubled. He said banks are not quoting interest rates for projects like these right now. He stated that switching out to apartments increases the cost but it also increases the revenue. He said that is the reasoning behind why they invested in the parking lot at 67 Elm Street. He stated that until architectural drawings are provided, firm bids cannot be determined. Right now, using brick would add \$1 million dollars to the project which sinks their budget.

Barry stated the Board cannot take finances into consideration. She said the Board understands it is an aspect but it's not supposed to sway their opinions.

Gerding provided two recommendations, one for the Board to deny the application and the other to the applicant to take the Board's comments into consideration. He stated the Board seems amenable to the proposed additional apartments but we would like to see a design that better fits what was initially approved and includes the recommendations and preferences that the Board stated tonight.

Barry asked whether the applicant has looked into stamped concrete and if that could be used on the first floor of the building. She stated she would prefer stamped concrete rather than the entire building being completely board and batten. She stated the material would not have to be brick necessarily but something to break up the board and batten.

Previti stated he is unsure about the first floor but they could incorporate some back into the design if that would be helpful.

Barry stated the application could be tabled for further review or voted upon, and that it is the decision of the applicant.

Previti stated they will take the vote.

Shoen stated brick is the material that the Board had asked for and what was agreed upon in the original application. She said what was previously approved cannot be changed. She stated it is important that the Board remain consistent in their requests of the applicant.

Barry stated she understands Shoen's point about consistency. She noted that every project is different and the Board has to do what is best for every project.

June 28, 2023 HDC Minutes

MOTION: Shoen MOVED that the request of 85 Elm Street Somersworth LLC, to amend the certificate of appropriateness for new construction of a multi-unit building be DENIED for the following reason:

1. Change in proposed material resulting in the absence of brick, as previously approved; and
2. The removal of brick would not fit in with the character of the area.

The MOTION was SECONDED by Gerding.

The MOTION CARRIED 5-2, with Barry and Poulin opposing.

6. WORKSHOP BUSINESS

- a. Any workshop business that may come before the Commission.

Barry asked if the Board would like to discuss street signs.

Brooks stated the Board had previously discussed the text in the lifted middle of the sign saying “Historic District.” He stated he had mentioned at the previous meeting that there might be a problem if the signs are stacked at an intersection where the lifted middle is located.

Gerding stated that is a great point. He said he thought Metivier has mentioned the signs are held up by brackets which might mitigate that.

Metivier stated the Director of Community Development and Planning, Michelle Mears, had mentioned there were brackets that would be used to hold those signs up that are different from the way street signs are currently mounted. He said they are more artistic and antiquated.

Gerding suggested that if it does become a problem in terms of stacking, maybe just the top sign have the bumpout and then have the bottom signs could be stacked as is.

Brooks stated if they do move forward with these signs, he thinks Beacon Street should be one of the first streets to receive signage. He noted that the last wooden sign that exists is located on Beacon Street so it would be a neat way to replace it.

Gerding stated he loves that idea.

7. COMMUNICATIONS AND MISCELLANEOUS

Barry stated she understands that Eyes on 30 is considering historical markers and they have identified a few locations. She asked Gerding if he could provide a background on that.

Gerding stated that through the mayor’s office, there are ten historical markers across the City which the Eyes on 30 Committee will select locations for. He said this is a program that the City is hoping to have long term and add additional markers to more locations over time. He said the signs will be on the smaller side with sixty-six characters at the most for the text on each sign. He said a number of historical sites have been located across the City for signage which have been recommended to go

to the Cultural Commission that came out of Eyes on 30 and then will go to City Council for a vote.

June 28, 2023 HDC Minutes

Barry stated she thinks it's great to mark historic items in Somersworth and that the list won't stop at ten. She said she is looking forward to hearing about which properties are on the list.

Poulin asked Gerding whether the signs are already cast in stone.

Gerding stated the markers have been approved by Eyes on 30 and they are now going before the Cultural Commission. They will be looking at the sites, layout, and the style. The markers will be cast iron.

Poulin asked whether Board members could provide input on possible locations for markers. He suggested there be a marker dedicated to Horne Cemetery.

Gerding responded yes, he stated he is on the cultural commission and will bring any ideas to them to get their thoughts. He said if the suggested site doesn't make it in the first ten signs, it is the goal to add more signs every year.

Barry stated she is working on getting documentation for how the Town of Rye does their plaques so she can reference it and write up a similar one for Somersworth. She stated she will coordinate with Poulin to attend a future museum committee meeting at the museum to see if they are interested in partnering with them.

On a different note, Metivier asked about the retaining wall that has never been finished that they see cement blocks at on Winter Street. He stated his observation that numerous businesses in the Historic District have window signage that is not appropriate for the District. He said they are not consistent with the HDC's Rules of Procedure and Sign Ordinance.

Crossley stated she does not have an update to provide regarding the retaining wall on Winter Street at this time. She said she is aware of the properties Metivier is referencing in regards to signage and will share this information with the Code Compliance Officer.

Gerding circled back to the historical marker signs and stated they will be twenty-four (24) by eighteen (18) inches. He stated the signs will include the City seal, feature a blue background with white lettering, and outline the history of each site. He shared names of selected site locations which include Willand Pond and Central Park, Pearl's Bakery, Fred Brown at the old City Hall, Great Fall Manufacturing Company, Noble Pines, the General Electric Building, Citizen's Place, and the John Wentworth House. He also noted there will also be a sign dedicated to the original Somersworth name spelled "Summersworth." He stated he will share the idea for an historical marker for Horne Cemetery.

Poulin stated he intended for the Horne Cemetery sign to be in a more public location like downtown rather than in the actual cemetery.

Barry asked whether the HDC has ever reached out to the Cemetery Committee about opening up Horne Cemetery as an Adopt a Spot. She noted the site would benefit from further maintenance.

Gerding stated he thinks that's a great idea. He noted the site has been included in past City Clean Up Day events.

June 28, 2023 HDC Minutes

Metivier shared that Aclara is in the process of receiving a new Certificate of Occupancy in Portsmouth and will vacate their Somersworth location imminently.

MOTION: Shoen MOVED to adjourn the meeting.
The MOTION was SECONDED by Metivier.
The MOTION CARRIED 7-0-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:11pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Anna Stockman, Planning Secretary