

APPROVED
New Castle Historic District Commission
August 1, 2013

Work Session re: Christine Strong & David Murphy, 25 Piscataqua St.
Discussions re: Demolition of old Fire House on Main St.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Irene Bush; Patty Cohen; Peter Follansbee; Kate Murray;
Elaine Nollet; Peter Reed; Rodney Rowland;
Marjorie Smith

Chairman Smith called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Work Session for Christine Strong & David Murphy, re: 25 Piscataqua St.

GUESTS: Christine Strong and David Murphy, applicants; Steve McHenry, Architect

Chairman Smith announced this was a work session for Christine Strong and David Murphy, applicants, regarding 25 Piscataqua Street.

David Murphy said they have a Purchase & Sales Agreement on the property until they can figure out what they can do with the property. One of the questions they have for the Board is whether they could raze the building and build a new house on the site. In his opinion, there appears to be a lack of any original details to the house, and he feels that it would work better as a new structure.

Murphy would like the Board's input and if people thought that was a good idea or not because they do not want to come to a new town and do something that all the neighbors in the community do not want to have done.

Chairman Smith asked Murphy whether the building was salvageable. She looked at the photographs and, obviously, the interior has been stripped of any moldings and detail. The building was built around 1750. The Board needs to decide whether this building should be preserved. The Board also needs to know details as to why this building should come down, in Murphy's opinion.

Murphy said he had a contractor look at the property, structurally, and he did not feel it made sense to salvage the building. Steve McHenry, Architect, also looked at it and he did not feel it had any historic aspect left except probably the chimney and fireplace.

Steve McHenry said he had a similar issue a few years back with the Mayo residence. He looked at this building and it is obvious that all the surfaces, both inside the building and outside the building, have been altered or replaced. It is very apparent from the basement there is exposed floor framing that shows the existing original timber frame and some of the exposed stonework from the foundation that is fairly intact. It also sits on an area of ledge that is close to the road.

McHenry said there is nothing apparent in the rest of the structure that is visible without doing some selective demolition to find out how intact the framing is. Unfortunately, it has been subdivided into two units within the house although it does not appear to have two units from the outside.

As a result, the partitions have been changed, staircases have been added, and if there ever were ornamental molding or wainscoting, chair rails, high end baseboards, door frame trim, original door hardware, or interior doors, there is very little evidence of the original building. Windows and doors have been replaced. The rear frame has been altered to add insulation because they, obviously, tried to get as much space to be occupied on the second level, though that has been altered, as well.

McHenry further said there is very little evidence of the original attic as that has been completely made invisible by the sheetrock that is there or has been reinforced to make sure the drywall and insulation has been held in place. There is no original plaster seen, the fireplace location is there and seems to be in fair condition but all the mantel pieces have been updated to the 19th century in very simple form but the original mantel is not there that they can see.

Other factors to be considered include how the historic house can contribute to the neighborhood, including its location or whether there is any kind of historically significant person associated with the house, as those are the type of factors they take into account if you give an official report on the house. It is fairly apparent that most of the interior of the house has changed and much of the exterior has changed. The frame of the house is intact. All of the other roofing, siding, the floor surfaces have changed, although there may be some of the original floorings underneath.

McHenry said it goes back to “it has always been there.” The house sits very close to the roadway and close to a big granite outcropping. In terms of making the structure more visible or more code compliant, almost nothing in the house helps them do that. In order to make that work for someone to live in it, in this century, almost everything has to be drastically changed or altered to make it more livable.

McHenry said that it seems drastic to request demolition but, in this case, it seems like the only solution. The configuration of the lot, the shape of the lot, and the current code setbacks will force anyone who is building new to come away from the roadway and away from the property line to the current zoning setbacks. What this will do is make the house a better neighbor to other houses around it because it would not be right up against the road and it would not be as intrusive on the side yard setback to the other houses. Anything short of demolition would make the house not as livable and not as safe as a new structure.

The Chair asked for the Board’s comments.

Rowland asked if the house indicated that it needed to be torn down structurally?

McHenry replied the house would have to be looked at more closely to know that. If Rowland is asking if the house is dangerous right now, he cannot answer that question without further review.

Bush said that the HDC has no purview regarding the inside of the house. The HDC is only concerned with the outer structure.

Follansbee said his initial reaction is he prefers to work with what is there, not to change the character of the neighborhood by increasing the setbacks and altering the appearance of the street. It may be in a condition that the house may have to be torn down but, if it is, he would like to see something very similar put back in its place, in the same footprint. That is his initial reaction.

Cohen agreed with Follansbee that it does not comply with the current setback regulations, but, if you look at the context of the neighborhood and the character of the neighborhood, the houses are all within that setback and it would be altering the character to move it out of the footprint as well as making it a case for why you are demolishing a house that was built in 1750. It has to be a very strong case in the historic district for demolishing a house.

McHenry discussed the question of setbacks and the streetscape. He said it is hard for him to advise someone as it would require anyone to enlarge the house to make it livable. In order to do that, they would need to go to the ZBA and ask for a variance.

Cohen told McHenry that he would need a variance if he was altering the footprint from what exists. She questioned the square footage on the house.

McHenry replied 1700 square feet of house.

Nollet said that the applicant needs more information on what is needed in order to tear down the structure.

Rowland agreed with Nollet. He would have a hard time considering tearing down the building. He would want to do a site review himself. The two things that need to be done are: 1) is it livable and; 2) rebuilding a new home would have to abide with current setback laws and the entire streetscape would change if new construction on the house occurred. He would have a hard time with that.

Reed said the applicant would have to stay with the same footprint.

McHenry feels this is an old cape that is beyond repair.

Chairman Smith asked if the Board had further comments.

Follansbee remembers there was a familiar situation that the Board ran into several years ago where an old cape was beyond repair. This was a very extreme case structurally. The Board approved the application to tear it down but they had to rebuild within the same footprint of what was there.

Rowland said the applicant would need to have an Historic Structure Support Document and whether the house is on its original foundation and this can be done by an Historic Preservationist. This is a Specialist that can analyze the house, as a whole.

The Chair asked for public comments.

Ann Tarlton, 15 Piscataqua Street, researched the history of this house and John Tarlton built that gray house for his daughter and emphasized that her name is Ann Tarlton. She has issue with the history of this community slowly disintegrating. She has seen really old structures disintegrating. Her question is whether there is some way of using the basic outside of that structure, i.e., the chimney and fireplace, etc.

Rita Fusco, 33 Piscataqua Street, is concerned regarding the streetscape. She also lives in an old house. She bought an old house and she has concerns that the streetscape is changing. She believes in preserving the neighborhood. Once it's gone, it's gone.

Rebecca Reilly, 70 Main St., said that she, her husband and two children live in a 1000 square foot house. They needed to justify every inch of the barn they rebuilt and they needed to think carefully.

Cohen feels there is a great reason for maintaining the original footprint.

David Murphy said he would not want to proceed after he has heard all of the neighbors comments. He has no interest in going against the wishes of the Town and the neighbors.

Christine Strong appreciates all the emotion and passion from the neighbors and appreciates their feedback and concerns. They want to be a part of the community and their hope was to be able to build something that was close to what was there.

Chairman Smith asked Murphy what his future plans might be.

Murphy replied they want to rethink their plans and take it under advisement. They now have a good idea on what the community would like.

Chairman Smith closed the work session for David Murphy and Christine Strong.

Review of HDC Minutes of June 6, 2013:

Cohen moved for the Board to approve the HDC Minutes of June 6, 2013, as amended. Bush seconded the motion. Approved.

New Business:

Selectman Dave McGuckin discussed future plans regarding the demolition of the old Fire House located on Main Street. The Board agreed to meet at the site at 6:15 pm on September 5, the next HDC meeting.

Adjournment:

Rowland moved for the Board to adjourn the meeting. Nollet seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Anita Colby,
Recording Secretary