

APPROVED
New Castle Historic District Commission
April 3, 2014

Work Session re: Stephen & Katie Eldred, 180 Portsmouth Ave., Map 15, Lot 5

Work Session re: D. Murphy & C. Strong, 25 Piscataqua St., Map 18, Lot 41

Work Session re: Clarissa Christensen, 87 Piscataqua St., Map 17, Lot 37/38

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 re: Stephen & Katie Eldred, 180 Portsmouth Ave., Map 15, Lot 5:

GUESTS: Stephen & Katie Eldred; Donald Cook, Builder; Jan Gleysteen, Architect;
Attorney Bernie Pelech, representing the applicants

The Chair announced this was a work session for Stephen & Katie Eldred, 180 Portsmouth Avenue, Map 15, Lot 5.

Don Cook, Builder, introduced Jan Gleysteen, Architect, who will present their revised proposal from the previous work session of 3-6-14.

Jan Gleysteen, thanked the Board for allowing them to return this month with revised changes to their proposal. He discussed three topics. 1) Observations of the HDC architecture; 2) Gateway to New Castle from Portsmouth Avenue. They are aware of the sensitivity of this project, their property is on a very heavy wooded site and the majority of the site is wetlands; 3) They have simplified the design for the HDC and they understand the design was too ornate for the style of the historic district.

Topic #1 - Some observations of the HDC architecture – Gleysteen said they were on the periphery of the HDC. In the center village, there is a consistency of several gabled colonial houses right on the street. He described the styles of various houses on the street and the village and distributed photographs of various homes coming onto the village of New Castle from Portsmouth Avenue, the village, and several homes on Main St. and Cranfield St. in the historic district of New Castle, (Attachment A.)

Topic #2 - Gateway to New Castle from Portsmouth Avenue – Gleysteen discussed several gateway houses on Portsmouth Avenue and showed photographs of these homes, Attachment A. As one enters Portsmouth Avenue, one will see a boat house and a large expanse of woods. When one looks beyond the cemetery to the right, there is a very grand victorian house and that is what you see up the avenue. When one looks over to the far right beyond the cemetery, there is another house. If you walk through the cemetery, you will see a partial gambrel house with a long overhanging porch. When you come to the fourth view, there is also an attached garage with a large round window, an attached boardwalk and a cupola, Attachment B.

Topic #3 – Simplified the design for the HDC – Based on conversations with Stephen Eldred and Don Cook, the Board’s comments from the work session held 3-6-14, they understand that the house appears too “ornate” in comparison with many of the older homes in the historic district. They have made the following adjustments to simplify the exterior of the home to be more in keeping with the HDC.

Exterior trim, overall details have been simplified in detail and scale;

The roof rakes are being flattened from a 14” projection to 3”;

Windows have been changed to have mullions on the top and bottom sashes, which is more consistent with the Colonial Style;

They left the bottom half of the octagonal Breakfast Room window without mullions for the water views on that corner;

They have also included louvered shutters which is more consistent with the Colonial Style;

Arched window and curved paneling on the side elevation facing Portsmouth Avenue eliminated;

On the front elevation, the (5) panel curved bay windows are replaced with (3) panel rectangular window box bay. Again fewer complexities;

On the front elevation deleted the two Palladian Windows and replaced them with (2) window double hung windows to be less ornate;

Front Façade

They sited the front of the house to create a type of lane;

They eliminated two Palladium windows with two double hung windows;

They eliminated the bow bay window and they will replace with a triple window, double hung;

South Façade

They eliminated the arch window with panels in between, converted all the windows and added shutters;

Rear Elevation & Garage

They are adding mullions to the windows and plan on having a plain white chimney;

Chairman Smith asked for the Board’s comments.

Bush feels the plans still seems elaborate, i.e., the gambrel elevation. She indicated that the windows have a big improvement.

Rowland concurs with Bush. He pointed out that this particular area was developed at a time when different architecture was introduced to the area. It is also very important to note that the Historic District was created very late in this community. He feels the revised proposal has definitely moved in the right direction. Yes, there are gambrels in the historic district but this proposal has too much. This has twin gambrels on the front elevation, couple that with the half round window and the front curved door pediment.

Rowland applauds the window and chimney changes, as they are definitely in the right direction. The windows could be brought down a bit more. There is 6/6; 10/10 and 4/4. There are too many different styles of windows around the house.

Murray agrees with Rowland. She said that the historic district is very village like. This is not in the village historic district. This house has become more simplified and she is not as bothered as some of the board members because it is not located in the village.

Reed has a different concern that has nothing to do with the architecture. His concern is regarding the automobile traffic and individual traffic. He also has concerns over the row of red cedars along the side of the road that would tend to blind your view going forward.

Attorney Pelech replied that the Conservation Commission did a site walk and they will defer to them as to the location of the row of red cedars. The owner would like some buffering from the street. They believe they may have to remove the cedars from the right of way as they feel this location is very popular for joggers. The house is set back enough so that they can move the cedars off the property line.

Nollet questioned the setback from the property line.

Attorney Pelech replied the setback is 20 ft. from the property line and they comply with the ZBA.

Gleysteen said they can pull back the line of cedars.

Nollet agrees with Murray and appreciates all the improvements.

Cohen feels the applicant is going in the right direction and concurs with the comments that have been made. She commented on the Prince house by the cemetery and feels that most people cannot see the back side of this house. She fully disagrees that one would not be able to see the proposed house. Again, she walked slowly and she sees that the front elevation of this house would be quite visible and believes the front elevation is more exposed than what the architect thinks. She pointed out that the three elevations need a level of scrutiny.

Cohen disagrees with the board's comments and is not sure that she would make a judgment that it has to be reflective of what is in the district. We are trying to take into account what is in the entire district, not just what is in the village.

Cohen said the design is going in the right direction but she would say still that the front elevation entrance with the curved entrance is not representative of anything that is in the historic district. She emphasized that is the more highlighted part of the design that does not fit with the flavor of New Castle. The side elevation and the rear/back elevation do not represent the HDC characteristics of the district.

Gleysteen hopes the Board will allow them to go back to the drawing board. He would ask for reconsideration of the rear elevation.

The Chair pointed to the curved arch that does not fit into the historic district.

Rowland would like to do a site walk on this property to see the stake lines.

Gleysteen noted that they walked the site with the Conservation Commission last week.

Follansbee said his concerns are the main entrance and the rear elevation on the second floor. The applicant has made great strides in simplifying it but the applicant needs to be aware that if the Board accepts something that is not in the district, they are setting precedence that they will have to live with it forever.

Attorney Pelech said they will return for another work session and a site walk next month.

Chairman Smith closed the work session for Stephen & Katie Eldred.

Work Session re: David Murphy & C. Strong, 25 Piscataqua St., Map 18, Lot 41:

GUESTS: David Murphy and Chris Strong, applicants; Anne Whitney, Architect

Chairman Smith announced this was a work session for David Murphy and Chris Strong, applicants; 25 Piscataqua St., Map 18, Lot 41.

Chris Strong, applicant, said they purchased the property on 25 Piscataqua St., with the intention of making it their home. They have engaged Anne Whitney, Architect, to work with them to generate a plan that will retain the historic nature of the property, contribute to the beauty of the neighborhood, and provide a home in which they can live in for many years to come. They appreciate the HDC coming this evening for a site walk as they thought that might be helpful.

Anne Whitney, Architect, said the concept that they came up with was to change the existing cape from a one story. To remove the dormer that is currently on the back of the property and the small addition in the back would also come off. They would do a connector addition with a fairly low pitch roof and try to keep the height down and go back to a 24 x 36 two- story structure with a 8/12 pitch.

She showed photographs from the main view of the property as one was coming down 25 Piscataqua St. and discussed the East Street View; the West Street View; Existing Front & East Side View; Existing Rear View; Existing West View; the Existing one-story Ell to be removed; and the Existing Front Elevation, (Attachment C.)

Whitney explained her project:

Complete Exterior & Interior Renovations of Existing 19' x 44' Cape. New windows, doors, siding, trim & roofing;

1 & 2 Story Connector Addition at Rear of Existing Cape with Kitchen, Stair, Pantry & Mudroom on the 1st floor & Bedroom, Laundry on the 2nd Floor;

2 Story Rear Addition with Garage & Living Space on the 1st Floor, Bedrooms & Baths on the 2nd Floor;

Rear Entry Porch Addition, 6' x 12';

Whitney said that Piscataqua St. is primarily occupied by two-story colonials and she felt by going to a two-story structure in the rear was not out of keeping with the neighborhood and the fact that one is not going to see much of it from the streetscape.

Whitney discussed the fenestration on the existing house and pointed out that the existing windows are quite small. They are proposing to use modern clad windows, simulated divided lights, Marvin windows and 7/8 muntins between and trim to match.

The Chair asked for the Board's comments.

Follansbee asked if the applicant could find a way to lower the garage part. In his opinion, it seems out of scale. Also, he would like to see all of the windows that could be seen from the road to be in similar style.

Follansbee asked Whitney if the windows on the west elevation, second floor, were egress windows. Whitney replied yes.

Whitney asked for the Board's comments on the picture window.

Follansbee would like to see an option on the windows when the applicant returns before the Board.

Rowland replied it is a question of balance concerning the windows. The applicant has done a wonderful job in protecting the original house. If there ever was a house that he would want to put a sign saying "New Castle" in front of, it would be this house. What he likes about it is the simplicity, it really speaks to the origin of New Castle. He understands the windows and he will think about those but when they throw in the doors, he gets really nervous. He feels they have too much going on in the door. They have columns going on, side lights on both sides, it is taking it to another level.

Reed agrees with Follansbee and Rowland and the applicant needs the changes to be simplified.

Murray has concerns regarding the massing in the back of the property but after the site walk she does not feel that anyone would see it from the road.

Nollet said the site walk helped a great deal. She also has concerns regarding the door.

Cohen discussed the elevation in the back and she feels it does matter a little more just being sure about that roofline. The goal is to not see the roofline of the back structure. There are aspects of it that is visible from the street.

Rowland said the National Park Service in setting their new standards said “new construction shall not overwhelm or conflict with the original structure.” The Board does not want to lose that original house.

Cohen said it was great that the applicant has kept the front of the house, as is, and are honoring that part of its history.

Chairman Smith asked for public comments.

Jeff Clause, Piscataqua St., has concerns about the streetscape and the concrete steps do not help it at all, and he has concerns regarding the fenestration that is all over the place. Most old houses when you look at them look very simple.

Chairman Smith agreed the Board discussed fenestration and the applicant agreed to make the house look more uniform.

Clause said in an historic house there are certain proportions to the window and, based on principles that have been around for a long time, if the principles, you end up with something else. He also expressed his concern about the applicant’s driveway.

The Chair replied that is not a question for this Board. It is not the HDC’s concern. They have been discussing the placement of the driveway at the site walk and they are not planning to take out the entire ledge. They will need to take out part of the ledge as they do need to lower this driveway in order to get into their property because they cannot go over it. The structure of the garage is on the side where it is because they wanted to have some view from the addition and that is the reason the garage is on the side it is.

Clause pointed out that he loved their ell.

Rita Fusco 33 Piscataqua St., distributed her letter to the Board, (Attachment D.) She also has concerns about the new driveway which will be very close to her property.

Chairman Smith reiterated that the driveway is not in the HDC’s purview. She asked if the Board had further comments.

Rowland agreed. The HDC does not speak to driveways.

Cohen assumes that the setbacks are all within the boundaries. She asked about conserving and preserving property values which is really about not having modern architecture.

Nollet said this proposal will improve the property next door to the Fusco property.

Pam Cullen, 11 Becker Lane, is not sure that she is enamored with a large house such as this but given the size of the lot she can understand what they are doing. She is more concerned with the skylight windows. She asked if the skylight windows were asked to be removed.

The Chair replied no.

Cullen also expressed her concern about this district that has been over built already. It is very important that the Commission understands the impact to the area as it is. It is very congested and everyone wants more expansion. She asked the Board to consider what is happening to this building in our neighborhood. She asked the Board to be very careful in what the Board does and what their objective is to be in the historic district and to be cognizant of what it is in the future.

Ann Tarlton, 15 Piscataqua St., said the applicant was very gracious and came back before this Board to try something different and to try to comply with what we are doing in our neighborhood.

Tarlton said if you're going to save that tiny little house, there is not a whole lot you can do with it. She agrees with the door, she agrees with the fenestration, she feels they could lower the roof a bit more, and she also understands the Fusco's concern because they are being squeezed by what happened on the right hand side of their property and now there is going to be a bigger house on the left. She believes the applicants are working very hard to work into the neighborhood and in a way that will be acceptable. This is a big balancing act for the Board and asked that the HDC think about the size of the house.

The Chair asked if the public had further comments.

Craig Strehl, 62 Main St., feels they are probably going to see more of this house than most. They like walking down the street and they appreciate the applicant saving this part. As far as the rear side they are not concerned because they have screen plantings, a short fence, and they do not have a concern about the elevation of it. Regarding the concerns and comments some of the neighbors have, he feels the applicants have kept the architecture consistent with the HDC guidelines. They have no objections with the proposal.

Jeff Reilly, 70 Main St., has reviewed the plans and shares the comments made about the height of the property on the side and in the back. He suggested some changes to lower the roofline by adding two dormers and feels this house will look fantastic from the street.

The Chair asked for additional public comments. There were none. She asked if the Board had further comments.

Cohen expressed her concerns regarding the skylight and where it is visible.

Chairman Smith closed the work session for David Murphy & Chris Strong.

Work Session re: Clarissa Christensen, 87 Piscataqua St., Map 17, Lot 37/38:

GUESTS: Clarissa Christensen, applicant; Michelle Shields, Architect; Attorney Bernie Pelech, representing the applicant

Chairman Smith announced this was a work session for Clarissa Christensen, 87 Piscataqua St., Map 17, Lot 37/38.

Michelle Shields, Architect, said they propose to remove the majority of the existing rear addition; they plan to add a 2 car garage with a very small living room connecting to the original house; the living room addition is small but it is consistent in style with the original house and with what they are allowed; the garage is now removed back from the side setback so that it does not encroach on the setback. Shields addressed the project:

Demolish large portion (approximately 24' of existing non-conforming rear addition, which is not original to main house and less than 2' from right setback. This addition's exterior trim is not consistent with the original home's historic details.

Build new two car carriage house (conforming to side setbacks) with small living room connecting to original house, small covered porch to replace the one removed, and re-build small portion of original addition for new bathroom on first floor. The new second floor will include a new master bedroom and bath with access to original home through small bedroom over the living room.

It is the intention that all new construction will be consistent in style with the existing original home, and that all trim details are to match as precisely as possible (within fractional inches). Visually the objective is for the new addition to be a beautiful complement to the original home. As permitted by code the porch columns, rails and balusters will be used again on the new porch. The height of the railings is below code for decks over 18" from the ground, so there may be some very slight grading to maintain the current height.

The new addition is the same height as the original home so as not to dominate. This limits the useful living area above but is consistent with the small cozy rooms found in this traditional home.

The new addition would be as much as possible a replica of the front in terms of all the trim and detail. They are keeping the ridge of the addition the same height. The back portion is not consistent at all as it has 6/6 windows, the proportions are not the same, it is ugly and it is going down. She has tried to keep all the window proportions exactly the same as what is on the original house. We also have a side porch and the existing railings and the columns will be used again, (See Attachment E.)

Shields said looking at the house from the front, to their left, is another home which has an addition on the back with a garage addition that has a shed dormer previously approved by the HDC. They were looking to mimic that in some degree and, specifically, the garage doors previously approved by this Board.

Shields pointed out that one of the areas that she would like the Board's feedback on is the main ridge of the addition. She kept the ridge of the addition the same height but would like to know if the main ridge of the addition could be a bit higher. She asked for the Board's comments.

Murray questioned the bump-out?

Shields replied they came up with another option that they eliminated the bump-out; however, they need to submit exactly what was submitted to the other Boards.

The applicant said she would like the bump-out to be even with the kitchen wall.

Reed asked for clarification regarding the property line.

Murray replied this property is now a condominium lot.

Follansbee questioned the ridge height for the garage.

Shields discussed the proposed ridge height. If one would imagine that the 12/12 pitch garage went up. The height of this exterior wall would stay the same but we would have a lot less space underneath it so that it would appear that the visual part of that dormer would be shorter. As the ridge went up, that dormer, the roofline would increase its pitch slightly but it also would be more handsome. When she brought it down to match the ridge height, she thought, visually, it was a mistake. She is not sure that the 1 ½ ft. is any more massing. She is not sure that it would be accepted at all.

Follansbee asked why she could not lower the entire building. Regarding the 8 ft. garage door, they only have 2 ft. of head room over the 8 ft. garage doors. It seems like a very tall structure relative to the rest of the house.

Shields replied the eave line is lower than the existing main house.

Follansbee said the garage is too overwhelming in front of the house

Rowland emphasized that you do not want the addition to overwhelm the main house.

Cohen suggested that this project merits a site walk. She emphasized that massing is an issue of the HDC and that a site walk would be very helpful.

Shields wondered if the eave line would drop down and if we reduced the height of the shed dormer it might be better. Again, she is less concerned with the ridge height because of the visibility of where it is. It is so high up in back it is almost not seen. She thinks because of both, façades of the shed dormer and the garage, are where one sees the impact. That might be the opportunity where they might bring that eave down so that it would bring you closer to where the porch level is.

Follansbee feels that is a very big shed dormer.

Rowland wondered what would happen if they mirrored the dormers. They have two individual window dormers on the front of the house, what if the applicant mirrored that over the garage to make it blend more with the original structure.

Shields thought that would have a devastating look.

Follansbee said the applicant already has a full dormer on the other side, maybe the applicant can give up some space on the other side. He is talking about the shed dormer over the garage doors.

Shields did not understand what the HDC wants. She said the neighbor's house looks exactly like that and the HDC approved it.

Follansbee said it looks similar but it is not the same.

Rowland said this Board is trying to make this addition less impactful on the original structure. There is a lot of mass to this because you have the big garage doors and a big dormer on top of it where the original house had the full dormer.

Chairman Smith said that smaller dormers have a more delicate look.

Follansbee suggested they use a gabled dormer on top of that garage instead of a shed dormer might be an option that the Board could look at. He would like to see some options on the garage roof. He said there is a lot of space between the top of the garage door and the floor joist.

Shields will double check but she did not feel there was too much space left between the floor joists on the main building. She asked if transom windows over the garage doors would help lessen the impact?

Follansbee feels that would be too contemporary. He suggested going with a 9 ft. door garage door.

Attorney Pelech said they would return next month with some options for a gable dormer and a dog house dormer above the garage.

Chairman Smith said the Board will do a site walk on their property before the next meeting. She closed the work session for Clarissa Christensen.

Review of HDC Minutes of March 6, 2014:

Nollet moved for the Board to approve the HDC minutes of March 6, 2014, as amended. Murray seconded the motion. Approved.

New Business:

Chairman Smith submitted her resignation from the HDC Board effective this evening and pointed out that Rodney Rowland would now become a regular member of the HDC. The Board will have to nominate a new HDC Chairman this evening. The Chair thanked the Board for all their help and enjoyed working with everyone. She learned a great deal and she will miss everyone.

Election of HDC Chairman:

Nollet moved for the Board to appoint Rodney Rowland as Chairman of the HDC. Cohen seconded the motion. Approved.

Adjournment:

The next HDC meeting is scheduled for the second Thursday of the month, May 8, 2014, instead of the first Thursday of the month.

Rowland announced that the site walk for Clarissa Christensen will also be held on May 8th at 6:30 p.m. before the HDC meeting. Nollet moved to adjourn the meeting. Rowland seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Anita Colby, Recording Secretary

- Attachment A: Photographs of various homes coming onto the village of New Castle
- Attachment B: Photographs of several gateway houses on Portsmouth Avenue
- Attachment C: Photographs showing the main view of the property of 25 Piscataqua St.
- Attachment D: Letter submitted by Rita Fusco re: 25 Piscataqua St.
- Attachment E: Photographs of the existing home re: Clarissa Christensen property