

APPROVED
Historic District Commission
May 7, 2015

Public Hearing Re: Portsmouth Yacht Club, 76 Piscataqua St., Map 18, Lot 13
Work Session Re: David Murphy/Christine Strong, 25 Piscataqua St., Map 18, Lot 41

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Irene Bush; Jeff Hughes; Kate Murray; Elaine Nollet;
Peter Reed; Rodney Rowland

BOARD MEMBER ABSENT: Patty Cohen

Chairman Rowland called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and said that Hughes will be a voting member for this meeting.

Public Hearing Re: Portsmouth Yacht Club, 76 Piscataqua St., Map 18, Lot 13:

GUESTS: Russell Bookholz, General Contractor, representing the Portsmouth Yacht Club

The Chair announced this was a public hearing for the Portsmouth Yacht Club, 76 Piscataqua St., Map 18, Lot 13. The applicants are requesting to replace the front entry door with a four (4) panel light raised door. The public hearing has been properly advertised, abutters have been notified and all fees paid.

Russell Bookholz, General Contractor, representing the Portsmouth Yacht Club, said they are requesting to replace the front door that was built in 1938 with a fiberglass four (4) panel raised door that will have 4 small lights at the top and will be painted the same color as the present door, (Attachment A.)

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

Craig Strehl, 62 Main St., said the door that is proposed is identical to a door that is across the street and pointed out that the present door is a liability.

Nancy Gulley, 166 Wild Rose Lane, Commodore, Portsmouth Yacht Club, said the door that Strehl referred to is identical to some of the neighbors on Piscataqua St.

The Chair asked if the public had further comments. There were none. He asked if the Board had further comments. There were none. He closed the public hearing for the Portsmouth Yacht Club.

Bush moved for the HDC to approve the application for the Portsmouth Yacht Club, as presented. Hughes seconded the motion. Approved.

Chairman Rowland closed the public hearing for the Portsmouth Yacht Club.

Work Session Re: David Murphy/Christine Strong, 25 Piscataqua St., Map 18, Lot41:

GUESTS: David Murphy/Christine Strong, applicants; Anne Whitney, Architect; Martin Gorham, Engineer.

Chairman Rowland announced this was a work session for David Murphy and Christine Strong, 25 Piscataqua St., Map 18, Lot 41.

Anne Whitney provided the Board with a Project Description from the first work session on 3/12/14.

Project Description:

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

1 & 2 Story Rear Connector Additions at Rear of Existing Cape with Kitchen, Stair, Pantry & Mudroom 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'.

The Chair pointed out this is a new work session for 25 Piscataqua St., given their last one was held 18 months ago, and hopes the Board will do a site walk regarding this project in the near future.

Anne Whitney gave a history of the house on 25 Piscataqua St. The existing house on 25 Piscataqua St. is a one-story house with a dormer on the back, a minimal 1 ½ story structure. They are proposing to keep the form of that structure except for the dormer.

Additionally, they are adding a low two-story addition to provide enough headroom to use as usable space. The addition will connect to a story and a half addition, a garage and more living space.

Whitney said that at the previous work session she had a rear two-story structure to do a knee wall structure with dormers. She distributed drawing plans to the Board and explained the difference between the previous work session and the present work session, (Attachment B.) The drawings show the garage side as it was drawn at last year's work session - she had a lower pitch roof and a two-story structure. She thought that might be more imposing and changed it where she now has a 4 ft. knee wall that goes in 3 ft. on either side and the entire structure has been lowered down to 18". She had to increase the pitch of the main part of that roof in order to have the head room to put the dormers in.

Whitney addressed the drawings and said she had taken photographs of the original model and she has the new model drawn showing the front elevation, east elevation, west elevation and the west elevation, rear addition. The drawing shows the scale after cutting the roof line down, (Attachment D.)

The drawings shows the front elevation, rear addition; the south elevation, rear addition; the east elevation, rear addition and the east elevation, rear addition with the connector addition, (Attachment E.)

Materials: this building has simple trim details; they plan on replacing windows – Marvin clad – SDL divided lights; the small addition is on the back side as one comes in the driveway with a small entry porch.

Whitney said they have found that the existing structure is in very poor condition and asked Marty Gorham, Engineer, to look at the present house. She feels that rebuilding this home as a replica would make more sense than restoring it at this point.

Marty Gorham, Structural Engineer, said the applicant called him to look at the present house. He has concerns about what he was seeing in the basement. The original structure is approximately 18' x 44 ft. The first thing one sees when you walk up to it is that part of the siding is below the exterior grade. There is also a 10' x 12' shed addition on the back which also has exterior grade above the exterior siding. At some point in the past, someone added a shed addition to the entire back of the roof. If you stand in back and look at this building, you can see that the exterior wall of that dormer has some displacement. Also, there is an entrance to the basement on the gabled end and you go down three steps to a relatively new concrete slab that is there but the first floor structure is all exposed and is in poor shape.

The floor framing is 4 x 4's, approximately 23 to 24" on center and they stand 9 ft. and those are supported on 10 x 10 timbers. The ends of these 10 x 10 timbers were originally supported on the sills/foundation but over time, due to decay and due to some poor workmanship on the floor, they had to go in and install steel screw jacks. Those screw jacks are apparently just supported on a slab.

Gorham pointed out there is a chimney which is pretty sizable. Some of the framing is supported by that chimney and then it transitions to a crawl space with a dirt floor. There is probably some ledge there but you do not see the ledge. This portion of the floor is supported on 4 x 4 wood posts that are bearing on small concrete pads that are even to the soil.

The first floor is in very poor shape, the foundation itself is fieldstone. Originally, it was set in lime mortar and the latest repairs that this foundation has gone through are parging of the concrete

Gorham said they could not find out if any lime mortar is left inside but probably over time the lime mortar has deteriorated and pointed out that there is some dubious value to the foundation.

He suspected that some of the quality on some of those details on the first floor will carry through the building and the first floor does not look too bad as it has high ceilings. The second floor has very low ceilings and the floor itself, in his opinion, is out of level 6 to 8". Gorham feels either some of the areas of the foundation have settled or some wood framing has decayed causing some settling in local areas. He said that if the shed dormer comes off it will be a very challenging project. He feels that trying to preserve the structure that is there, as is, would cost a hardship for the applicants. He asked the Board for comments.

The Chair said he would like to see the site first before he comments on the project.

Whitney said they would like to completely rebuild this building from the inside out. In the past twenty-five years, her main work has been restoring existing historic buildings. In the past twenty-five years she has only taken down two buildings in the historic district. She displayed some photographs of before and after of those two buildings, (Attachment C.)

Whitney described the inside of the present building and pointed out there are absolutely no great features you would want to keep. The plaster is gone and the sheetrock has been chopped up. There is one fireplace that would have to be rebuilt. They would keep the chimney, take it down and put it back up. They can replicate the building and in this case, they would rebuild the foundation, use similar materials, trim, new windows. Even with renovating this building they are going to be completely residing and putting new windows on the exterior and redoing the loose trim and putting a new roof on the building. She hates to take down historic buildings but she feels the site walk will be very helpful to the Board in terms of pointing out some of these issues.

Chairman Rowland asked if it is the applicant's intent to file for a demolition permit for the original structure.

Whitney replied yes, they want a total removal and they will need a demolition permit. Another issue - the building is very low to the ground. In the back yard the land slopes up and a lot of the building is close to the grade. Possibly, if they were allowed, they might bring the entire building up 9" or so. Another option would be to put up a foundation wall – raise the foundation wall in the back corner and they would have the same exact floor height and everything else would be the same.

The Chair asked if the Board had further comments.

Nollet asked if there was any consideration for grading and for lowering that back building as it is so high.

Whitney replied it really is not that high when you look at the photographs. This building is only 24 ft. wide and it is only 25 ½ ft. high on top of the gable. In relation to this the building is higher but in relation to the neighboring buildings, it is lower than most of those buildings.

Nollet wondered if you could see the structure from Main St.

Whitney replied you can see a piece of the dormer from Main St.

Windows: The existing windows are 2/2 and they are fairly small. This was discussed at last year's work session to bring the windows up. Presently, the windows are 33" off the floor. The new windows would be 33 x 60" and would be more like a 9 x 12 window, a typical colonial window, (Attachment D.)

Reed questioned where the new driveway was going to go and asked for clarification on the granite outcropping.

Whitney replied that was going to be cut back as they have received approval from the Planning Board.

For the record, Chairman Rowland said that the HDC has no purview over granite outcropping and has no jurisdiction over ledge.

Murray said the demolition of the structure comes as a big surprise to her as that was not in the Board's packet. She has concerns regarding the massing of the addition and one thing she has learned is if it looks massive on paper it is even more massive in real life. She would like the applicant to do a balloon test to be able to see. The streetscape is not just Piscataqua St. it is a number of streets around it and she needs to have an understanding how this is going to affect the other streets.

Murray further discussed the garage door on the plans that are still shown as a double garage door. She emphasized that the Planning Board approved a single garage door.

Whitney replied they have worked with the Building Inspector and he has resolved that the turning radius is such that it works with a double door. At this point, they are going back to a double garage door. They have done their due diligence in terms of turning radius.

David Murphy, applicant, said the Planning Board approval is conditional on making the turn.

Murray has several concerns. She is not sure how the double eaves fit into that; on the east elevation - it is a very fancy door compared to the door that was there originally; the south elevation; the rear addition again – there are three or four different panes of windows.

The Chair replied that the site walk will determine what can be seen from the street.

Murray commented on the east elevation and feels that can be seen from the street.

Whitney replied in the negative. She might have the north/south mixed up. Regarding the rear elevation, she will re-label the elevations. There might be a glimpse of the upper dormer from Main St. but most of this is not going to be seen from the street. Most of the windows are double-hung except in the connector and some of the upper gables which are casements. They also have the two French doors, a triple and a double.

Murray commented on the skylights and feels that the balloon tests will help the Board a great deal at the site visit as to where one will be able to see the skylights.

Whitney replied there are four skylights that are located at the rear of the existing structure and those will not be able to be seen from Piscataqua St. They might to be able to be seen from Main St. but it is a distant view. The two skylights in the kitchen – the site walk will show that one of the skylights will not be able to be seen at all and you might see an oblique view of the second skylight that is over the door. She said there is some precedent for skylights in the historic district.

The Chair discussed the south elevation, rear addition and questioned the two-story bow window.

Whitney miss-labelled the drawings. It was originally to be a two-story bow window but they have brought it down to a one story bow window, (Attachment E.)

Bush asked Whitney if it would be possible when the Board does their site visit to use a spray can to outline the building itself.

Whitney replied she will stake it out.

Murray asked if they could have more balloons to know some of the heights of the elevations.

Whitney agreed

Chairman Rowland said he was very surprised by the idea of demolition of the original structure as it was his reference point for the rest of the project. He suggested a second work session to hear the applicant's ideas on what the replica would look like. He heard that the applicant might raise the elevation.

Whitney said she might bring some more details of this building to the June work session. The information from the site walk is going to happen after the deadline so if she could bring this information to the meeting in June it would be helpful.

The Chair said that the Commission, as early as a month or two ago, previously discussed demolition in the historic district and he hopes the Board will be allowed to see both the exterior and the interior of the building. The decision will be based on what the Board believes the structure adds to the character for the streetscape of that area of the district. Finally, what the historic value of the structure is.

Whitney agreed this Board would be allowed to go outside and inside the building.

Chairman Rowland is concerned about massing. He appreciates the fact that the applicant has tried to minimize the addition. He still feels that it is a lot of building on a very small original structure. He also sees a lot of glass and, again, without the reference of the original structure it is going to take him some time to figure out how it fits.

Hughes is very concerned about the mass and peaks that are visible from the bookends of the chimney. In his opinion, it looks out of place.

The Chair asked if Whitney knows the square footage of the existing structure versus the addition.

Whitney does not have the figures but they did meet all the zoning requirements for height and volume.

The Chair said the site visit will be scheduled for Wednesday, May 27 at 6:00 p.m. and this will be ten days before the next work session.

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

Catherine Colliton, 42 Piscataqua St. said her family has owned the home she lives in since 1930. She read from the zoning ordinance book in the historic district section the following wording: *“to preserve and protect the buildings and the historic and architectural landscape of the historic district.”* If you have tears to shed prepare to shed them now.

Colliton said the applicant's project is a wonderful display but not for Piscataqua Street. To hear it said that the original structure would be taken down was a thorn in her heart. The HDC is here to *preserve* the historic district. A wonderful presentation but it is not for Piscataqua Street. Take it to the big city. An addition here and an addition there is not Piscataqua Street. It is a desecration to the town and she cannot believe that the HDC would allow this to continue. If one chooses to be on this Commission the HDC must preserve and protect the buildings and the historic architectural landscape of this historic district. She does not know why people want to build a modern home on Piscataqua Street.

Craig Strehl, 62 Main St. said they did a complete makeover to their home a few years back. Their original plan was to do just the back end of the house, a new dormer and a new kitchen. They finally had to go from the back side to the inside of the house and they had to do a complete makeover to their home. Their house has all the old character that it previously had.

Strehl emphasized that if an old house does not get renovated from the inside, it will fall down. As Catherine Colliton said there is the historical character that needs to be preserved and he pointed out that the applicant plans to put the exact same thing down. The fire code will be better, the older house is not energy efficient and the chimney code is not in code. He is asking the Board to look at tearing down the original structure and putting back the exact same thing.

As an abutter, Strehl would like to see the balloon test and he would like to know when the Board will do their site walk. He is in support of the project and as far as taking it down, he feels it is a consideration and once it goes back up the town will assess the value of it.

Ann McAndrew, 27 Steamboat Lane, said there seems to be some contradiction this evening about this building in question. A year ago this building was to be restored to its original grand style. She wondered at that time because this house was never a grand house, this house has always been a very simple house, a fisherman's house. The house has always been very plain.

Regarding a dirt basement, if there is a dirt basement combined with ledge they get by with no problems. McAndrew has a dirt basement and she gets along fine. She is asking the HDC to take into consideration to not have great major changes in the neighborhood.

Holly Biddle, 7 Piscataqua St. questioned the back of the house and asked if that were to be removed, would that not be compromised.

Whitney said when the dormer was put on they compromised the building. If they keep the building they would have to stabilize it in order for the building to not fall down.

Rita Fusco, 33 Piscataqua St. said the house is beautiful but it is too much house for that particular spot and as an immediate abutter, she feels the house is going to be intrusive. The HDC will figure out if it is better to tear the house down or renovate it. She does not know enough about that and trust the HDC to figure this out.

Fusco does have a concern about raising any elevation at all. She knows there are two Building Inspectors in New Castle and she spoke with one of them and he told her that the turn-around would be impossible.

Fusco also has concerns that there will be living space in the back and there will be more than two cars. Instead of having all these problems afterwards, she wants to make sure that the HDC does a good job. She thinks the house is nice but the back is too high, and too intrusive from her point of view. She would request a site walk with the Board to come into her back yard to consider the whole picture. Balloons for the height would be great but she feels that is hard for people to visualize. She hopes the Board will take this very seriously because this is the most precious part of New Castle.

The Chair said that the Board will do a site walk in her back yard. He asked if the public had further comments.

Strehl asked the Board to make sure all of the abutters know what time the site walk will be scheduled.

Chairman Rowland said the site walk will be scheduled on Wednesday, May 27th at 6:00 p.m. He distributed three letters from the abutters, Sarah Flause, dated 5-7-15; Rita & Phil Fusco, dated 5-6-15 and a letter from Nancy McArdle dated April 2, 2014, (Attachment F.)

David Murphy, applicant, said he has two tenants in the building and only the HDC Board will be allowed in the interior of the building. The Chair agreed.

Chairman Rowland closed the work session for David Murphy/Christine Strong.

Review of HDCMinutes of April 2, 2015:

Hughes moved for the Board to approve the HDC minutes of April 2, as presented. Murray seconded the motion. Approved.

New Castle School Addition:

The Chair said that the New Castle School is located in the historic district but town buildings do not have to come before this Board officially and are exempt from zoning. The addition part of the project is in the back left corner and is located in the least visible area. It will be about 1000 square feet and it will look like the present school. He emphasized the school is not going to change in looks.

Discussion followed on the new windows.

Adjournment:

Hughes moved for Board to adjourn the meeting. Murray seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Anita Colby
Recording Secretary

- Attachment A: Photograph of front door and sketch of the front & rear door
- Attachment B: Drawings of Proposed Lot Sketch Plan
- Attachment C: Photographs of the Before & After torn down buildings in Portsmouth
- Attachment D: Diagram showing the existing and proposed window plan for front elevation
- Attachment E: South Elevation, Rear Addition
- Attachment F: Letters from abutters