

HISTORIC DISTRICT MEETING MINUTES SEPTEMBER 3, 2015 – 7pm

Board Members Present: Rodney Rowland, Chair, Irene Bush, Lorn Buxton, Kate Murray, Elaine Nollet, Jeff Hughes, and Peter Reed.

Meeting called to order by the Chair at 7 pm. Rowland advised that Item 3 had been scratched from the agenda. Item 4 has had several letters submitted, including opinions of counsel, and all had been circulated to the commission for review.

In anticipation of a contentious meeting, Rowland asked participants to follow certain decorum for the evening. The HDC was created by the people of New Castle as a land use process. Members are volunteers who believe in the HDC process and procedures. He asked for respect and that comments be made directly to the commission, not the public. If there is a questions for architect, the commission will ask.

Irene Bush will be a voting member. If she is unable to vote, Peter Reed will be voting member, except that Jeff Hughes will vote on Item 4.

PUBLIC HEARINGS:

Item 1. Kevin & Deborah Callahan, 26 Oliver Street, Tax Map 16, Lot 41. Kevin Callahan, property owner, submitted an application to extend the fence on the easterly portion of property, an extension of an existing fence which was approved by the HDC commission. The aesthetic nature of the property and abutting properties seems incomplete.

Questions: Board members Hughes & Nollet are neighbors and agree the extension would look better on subject property.

Questioned on the length of the extension, Callahan advised he is requesting a 50 ft extension.

Chair Rowland asked if the height is up to 6 ft? Callahan advised that yes and the materials are all the same as original fence and the same design. The fence will stop more than 21 ft from road.

Rowland closed the public hearing.

Elaine Nollet motioned to approve Callahans' application for extension of the fence. Irene Bush seconded. Passed unanimously.

Item 2. AJ & Cathy Homicz 8 Main St, Tax Map 18, Lot 63

Lorn Buxton recused himself.

AJ Homicz, property owner, at corner of Main & Wentworth. The property has two decks – one behind the house and one on the Wentworth side both of which need to have the rotted vertical spindles replaced. The front deck will be replaced exactly as exists. Owners would like to replace spindles on back deck with horizontal stainless steel cable, which by code have to be 3-4" apart. The reason for this

is that stainless cable is easier to maintain, is nautical and you can see through it. The deck has minimal exposure from Main St. AJ Homicz presented pictures showing rotted spindles. There is a house on Piscataqua Street that has cables and was approved by HDC. The top rail will remain the same, may change bottom rail. Looking for approval to bring cables to deck.

Irene Bush stated Homicz has a lovely cape and triangle garden. The cable will seem out of keeping with the house. AJ Homicz advised that they like the nautical look and the view from Wentworth Rd is pretty minimal. You really look through the cable as it is not noticeable.

Phil Llewellyn owner of property at 12 Main St which abuts premises, supports the change; they have direct view of deck. Feels this change doesn't impact historical view. The cable will not be seen and achieves the lower maintenance.

Rowland closed the public hearing.

Elaine Nollet stated that although it is difficult to go from traditional to cable, she approves the application. Kate Murray asked about the bottom horizontal and asked if they were looking for possibly not replacing it? AJ Homicz stated they may choose to leave as is depending on cost.

Rowland stated that he is not a fan of 2nd story decks as he feels they are not a feature that belongs in district but were here before the HDC was formed. Will vote for application b/c less intrusive on the district.

Reed motioned to approve as submitted on proposal dated 9-3-15 with permission that applicant has flexibility to retain or remove lower rail in place of cable. Hughes seconded. Passed unanimously.

Item 3. Determined could not be seen from public way so permitted to make changes to shed.

Item 4. David Murphy and Christine Strong, 25 Piscataqua St, Map 18, Lot 41.

Irene Bush recused herself.

David Murphy, owner, thought a lot of progress was made last meeting and hoped to continue to work collaboratively to get this done tonight. It has been a long process for all, having been redesigned several times after listening to the community & HDC. They have complied w/all zoning and believe the design keeps in line w/all surrounding properties. Would like to restore the cape to its original shape taking off the addition. They will use historic windows, with a salt box style. Their proposal has lower roof heights than other properties. They have worked hard on a historic design and believes the windows are historic. They need sufficient light in the property to make it livable. Murphy showed a photo of the existing rear of house, stating it was being removed and they were replacing with a smaller addition and garage. The owners are converting a 2 family house to 1 family which will be less traffic and parking. Doing everything possible to make this a beautiful property in keeping with the community. They have done everything required and complied with the HDC.

Anne Whitney, architect for the project, walked through the process & drawings. The property doesn't go above 1st floor window heights when viewed from Main St. Google Earth photo of this neighborhood shows much open space around this building. There is lots of density in the neighborhood, however, this building has more light & air around it. Drawing 1 of 6 shows existing &

proposed; existing windows are 2 over 2. Proposed using existing window openings going to 9 over 6, Marvin wood double hung, thermo pane w/SDL muttuns so wouldn't need storms. The windows will have ½ screens.

Whitney referred to page 1 of 6 (attached) and stated on left side, the upper window (A) is an existing window. The present structure has an odd kitchen window which she would like to change to 2 windows with trim detail to match. Front door has been rescaled, not quite as tall. Will have architectural asphalt shingles for roof. Will use red brick if chimney needs replacing. Will go w/wood windows, or w/wood frame can put clad sash in or wood sash that's painted. If need to go all wood, will go all wood.

Drawings of before and after (page 2 of 6). Nothing will protrude above the ridge of present house; have changed to salt box shape and added shed dormer. Changed full view door to 9 light door which will operate as a dutch door with a 9 over 6 window near door. 6 over 4 windows in other portion, same pane size. Will install a couple of skylights in what is going to be the Living Room.

Page 3 of 6 shows right side elevation of additions. The existing house, porch addition and into the salt box which will be the garage on an angle. The salt box is 18 ft. gable w 3 ft knee wall with dormers on either side. This also shows the progression of changes from May to June which dropped to 4 ft knee wall w/dormers and August which brought down an addl. 3 ft 2". Shows a sense of how the massing has changed over the process.

Whitney showed Piscataqua St neighboring residences advising that most buildings are full 2 story bldgs. some w/additional attic space. Whitney thought they are proposing a building smaller than most of neighboring buildings with lots of green space around it.

There was some concern over how do you add on and have compatible windows that do not compete w/old? Page 6 of 6 shows a blow up of the windows. The existing building has 3 sizes. On the addition, 6 over 6, 4 over 4 are two basic sizes for double hungs. The window in master w/view, has two 4 over 4 with 6 over 6 in middle (F). Windows back to 5' tall. Utilizing one size casement everywhere on back side of building. There is a little awning window in bathroom. Windows are compatible w/each other. Slightly larger but not big departure from existing building.

Question from Rowland: from the windows you say are in the addition, which styles will be visible from Piscataqua? Whitney: F & I window will be seen from Piscataqua, H and J will be seen at oblique angle; G window is on other side above garage.

Page 4 of 5, there are clapboards on existing, will be clapboards on connector. As it wraps around to garage, will have cedar shakes and corner boards. The rear elevation will also be Cedar shingles. Will have the same roof singles throughout. 5/8" sdl on windows and 7/8" sdl on doors. The muttuns on doors are a little fatter than on the windows.

Rowland: talk about porch addition. Is that straight 6 x 6? Whitney: Yes. Existing house is simple trim, almost no trim. Currently has no eve trim at all, has fallen off. Proposing a bigger rake trim, front elevation will have wood gutter to help w/water. Rake trim will come past it to cover gutter.

Rowland: you have a note here that any exposed new foundation would be either brick or stone (page 4 of 5). Whitney: the client would prefer stone. Two locations (1 of 6) would need stone and parge it. The other location, as wraps the one story part of left side addition and continues along garage, will be either brick or stone. My inclination is to go to brick; the client prefers stone. Non parge stone.

Elaine Nollet - Why did you put 2 skylights over Master bedroom? It's the Master and wanted light; building behind is tall and completely obscuring it.

Open to Public – Gordon Hand – have some concerns about building. Like renovating structure as is, going from 2 family to 1 family. What is the square footage of small addition?

Whitney: Around 2834 gross sf (including existing house), original was 1750 sf. w/full dormer.

Hand: The house behind is a 3 story close to 2800 to 3000 SF. Trying to keep houses in same size. I'm against big changes and changing street scape of property, taking out rock and putting in garage. It's a dangerous road, that curve is very bad section of street.

Rowland: driveway issue not before the HDC. Let me talk about legal notices that were received. One abutter retained Justin Richardson Esq. to weigh in on question of ledge. Rowland read letter as well as response of town attorney. In addition to two opinions, I met with someone from Dept of Resources who concurred that HDC cannot make determination on driveway or ledge unless can determine it is historic.

Rita Fusco asked to have letter from preservation dated August 6th read; Regan Roo member of Portsmouth HDC. Read by Rowland. (get copy)

Sharon Platt – owner 64 Piscataqua St, a historic cape. Letter you read implies lot of my thoughts. I was very attracted to historic area in New Castle. Purchased in 2011 w/intention of completing historic restoration. Also important to protect integrity of property in historic district. My restoration complied w/highest preservation standards and my restoration would be an asset to historic district of New Castle. The addition plans here are very lovely but not appropriate as an addition to a relatively small cape and will overwhelm the historic cape Ownership here in historic district is a privilege and benefits all residents who want to live here.

No precedent when comes before HDC; not bound by the past on future decisions.

Donna Kearns – 73 Piscataqua St. Asked commission how they felt about granite being blasted away. It's part of the landscape and part of the driveway.

Rowland – my opinion is that considering what the attorney came up with, I have two criteria I can use. Does the driveway add to historic character of neighborhood? No. Whether the ledge outcropping is a significant characteristic or defining feature of house? I would argue that is a detriment to the house. Water comes down and damages house. I do not define as characteristic of house but yes, of streetscape.

Kearns - HDC ordinance specifies streetscape. Any other opinions?

Nollet – most difficult thing before this board, emotional.

Rowland – each commissioner can consider it.

Kate Murray – I think we should consider it. The impact on the character of the district.

Fusco – it's not all their rock. I don't see how it's possible. Do appreciate they brought down the size (of house) but it's still too big for site.

Sara Flause – 46 Piscataqua St. I took some pictures of beautiful houses in historic district. Reason I did this was because I wanted to address the massing of proposed new construction. Have been lots of references to comparatives and I have continually felt we haven't been comparing houses to 25 Piscataqua St. I took pictures of the types of houses a realtor would use as comparables. Went to town hall and researched square footage from the numbers on tax cards. The effective square footage includes 1st & 2nd floors of living, % of basement space, includes outside entry landing and % of attic, even if just crawl space. For clarification, there has always been reference to 25 Piscataqua being less than 900 SF; however, the ground floor alone is over 900 SF. Effective SF is 1710 SF. Of my group of typical small houses – more than 50% are smaller than existing cape today of 25 Piscataqua – these are houses that families live in w/kids. What is actual SF of addition? None of these houses come to the size that 25 Piscataqua is destined to be. All but one is under 2,000 SF. The proposed addition to 25 Piscataqua will make it one of the biggest houses; significantly out of historic district

Classia Christensen – I have been here five times b/c I was one of the outsiders who bought a darling old house and I did renovate and I realize what a tough job you have. Thank you for not letting me do what I wanted to do. So many people walk by and tell me what a lovely house I have. We're asking you as a neighbor to not let this rock be blown up.

Peter Worrell. I thank the commission for their volunteer efforts b/c a democracy is sometimes messy. I'm concerned about the streetscape. After listening to the letters read, I believe it said HDC has right to hear the issue on the ledge. Would hate to have historic character damaged by blowing up ledges.

Holly Biddle – Piscataqua St. Wonder if you are considering what kind of effect this has on Fusco's property? The 2nd story of the garage will surely stand out. I speak as a realtor – if this project is approved will surely dwarf Fusco's salt box and deflate their property.

Jeff Riley – 70 Main St. I live in a place that is affected the most of any abutting neighbor. I've seen significant change each year and many people go before HDC, zoning, and planning. This particular space would be really great, so much subjective and objective information. I don't think I've seen any couple go through this much. If the Planning board decided something it shouldn't be brought up here, it just fuels the fire. One of the things I looked at was Google Earth view of 25 Piscataqua – think of % of property this new structure will cover and compare to other buildings and lots of land. This structure is less than most others on street.

Peter Rice – 11 Atkinson St. to be right up front – unequivocal support for their project. Since last HDC meeting, I have done homework and take temperature of several people who live in Piscataqua, Atkinson & Main Street residences. Most are townies. There is a common bond for preservation of the historic district. Passions and sentiments run strong. I understand those concerns for the ledge but it compromises tree roots. Murphy is conducting himself in a sincere manner and intends to put roots down. New Castle is growing with a few areas of new construction, additions, etc. Growth does not come w/out pains, change is hard. Murphy & Strong respond to requests and concerns of neighbors.

Ann Tarlton – my husband's family arrived 1683. They would not recognize what they see here today. Does not mean we do not love the historic district. Process of bringing Murphy & Strong back and going

over and over the plans has caused a schism in our neighborhood. They have realigned, made smaller, make do. Want to Maintain the historic district but to what year? Change is not always a bad thing.

Dave Murphy – take issue w/one thing – I am the least popular one here. Have worked hard to enter this neighborhood and make everyone happy but cannot make everyone happy. Tried to restore original building but cannot lay out space in an efficient way. Have asked Anne “how can we make this smaller?” I feel bad that there a number of people here so upset. Most people here are not our abutters b/c they support us. They are going to be looking at this property and they don’t think we are going to be destroying everything in New Castle. I think the reaction is more a group getting together b/c they don’t like the additions but it’s not affecting them. I can’t believe the issue of the rock is coming up again. We’ve gone over this already. We’re taking out a very small portion of the rock. We’ve worked extremely hard, been patient, have not always been treated w/respect. We’ve done what is right and have worked w/the community.

Phil Fusco - This has dragged on for so long. I tend to oversimplify but live on basis of risk and reward. Risks are foundation, trees, losing landscape, damage to water mains in street when jack hammering ledge.. What is the benefit? Is there benefit to town? Benefit to more than one family? Seems to me you have obligation to support majority. Is it the right thing to do? I heard the applicants are being treated badly. Not in our case; what’s true is we don’t like what they are doing. We appreciate they have made concessions. Be mindful of the balance – they have right to add on to their cape but appropriate to district ordinances and guidelines. It’s a historic injustice in the name of progress. Scale of their home would have negative impact on our property, peace of mind, and safety. Your job is to preserve and protect the historic district.

Chris Strong – 25 Piscataqua. David & I have been active members of any community we have lived in. Never any accusations that we have damaged properties, ours or neighbors. There are accusations about how we will cut the ledge. Main Street has gone through many changes in past 2 years, with construction and new garages. I’m happy for those homeowners – they are in historic district. Many houses in neighborhood are larger than what we propose. We are improving the property value, reducing volume on the property, and improving safety of driveway. There has been aesthetic review of this property for two years and we have responded each time to the planning board, HDC, select board. We’ve responded to everything we’ve been asked to do. We’ve operated in good faith. When you have citizens coming in good faith, operating within guidelines set forth, we’ve let our abutters speak their opinions. We’ve adapted, adjusted, made changes. Allow us to heal relationships that are so fragile. Want to build a home w/the changes you have put in front of us. Ask you to help us move this through so we can build an appropriate structure w/care and concern for abutters.

Larry Gormley – attorney representing Strong & Murphy. My issue is only that you have heard emotional testimony with suggestions you should support majority. I suggest there are standards within this process. If standards are observed, then this process works. It must be reduced to town ordinance and state statute. If these people have produced a structure that satisfies you then they have complied w/requirements. I trust you will base your decision on facts and not on emotion.

Karene Worell – Steamboat lane. Glad I don’t have your job, you work hard and it’s crazy. Think back on Barbara Becker – we have to live w/your decisions.

Anne Whitney – 25 Piscataqua Street is a very unusual lot. We didn’t change this driveway location on a whim. Considered how this property be used for years . . . bringing the driveway in gets away from

Fuscus' property. The additions are happening on the back. We are doing a complete landscaping – right now everything runs into the street. We will be improving the streetscape. The cut in the ledge can be dealt w/aesthetically. When I looked at this as a design problem way back, it's part of how can you connect to this old structure. We are well within the zoning.

Rowland: close public hearing. Time for discussion amongst commissioners. Not entertaining any additional comments.

Jeff Hughes – one thing we all share in this room is our love of this community and trying to preserve its character. He thanked the applicants and Anne Whitney, who have demonstrated patience and a willingness to change the plan. They are preserving and restoring a valuable piece of real estate in town. Applicant has addressed size of structure, demonstrated sensitivity to existing structure and neighboring structures. I am in favor.

Kate Murray – still considering thoughts on some of this. Have concerns on lack of cohesion on windows and the structure probably will be that big. Property owner has a right to do what they want within zoning regulations. Project has called for a lot of compromise. We should be glad they are restoring the house; they have reduced the size of addition by about 1/3. Still concerned about what you can see when you walk by. They have compromised and every time they come back they have improved the plan.

Nollett – I concur w/what Jeff said. The new construction respects the architectural heritage.

Lorn Buxton – on size issue that's pretty much determined by town ordinance and the proposal meets all the established rules. As far as the architectural implications of the addition, I think the applicants and architect have done a nice job visually on the addition with the original structure. Many older houses in town have grown through time w/various additions. The important thing from an architectural point of view is that viewer can distinguish those eras of architecture. I was at a meeting of Warner House built in 1714 – 1716 but there's a piece on the back called the "summer kitchen" which was added in early 1800's. Virtually all historic houses have been added to. Applicants' shed dormer was not original and it will be removed so actual historic piece will be truer than has been. Houses grow over time. Important thing is that you recognize the visual the distinctive architectural eras. Third point I find more troubling is the question of the ledge; I find the term historic difficult to deal with. Most landscapings have places completely regraded. What makes ledge historic? Not sure; I struggle with that and will have to resolve.

Rowland – I look at this project as a number of elements. First the original house which through this process we have come out w/a positive – it is being preserved and part of the street scape. The second, the addition - when this process started, I thought there was no way you could put an addition on this structure I would be happy with but it's a give and take process. I do have concerns on the elevation visible from the existing driveway; I'm most concerned there are 4 window styles visible from the streetscape and 2 sky lights – that bothers me. In terms of the massing, give the architect and applicants a lot of credit. The salt box and the way it's angled diminish impact on the original house. Lot of public opinion on this and am taking into consideration. And we have legal opinions which are all part of the process.

Jeff Hughes motioned to approve the application of Strong/Murphy as submitted w/one change – the agreement of foundation going to stone. Nollet seconded. Murray stated she is concerned about the windows on left side.

Hughes, Nollet, and Buxton voted in favor.
Murray and Rowland voted against.

Rowland – you have your approval.

Rowland – there are no minutes from last meeting. Hold on new business til next month.

Motion to adjourn. MSP 9:39 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Diane L. Cooley
Recording Secretary