

HDC MEETING  
MAY 3, 2018

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

Not Present: Judy Groppa

Chair Rowland called the meeting of the New Castle HDC to order at 7:00 pm and advised that there are two public hearings and a continuance from a prior public hearing on the agenda tonight. Rowland also advised that anyone wishing to speak, must please sign in. The Chair, Jeff Hughes, Tom Maher, Kate Murray and Elaine Nollet will be voting.

1. Public hearing for Peter and Daphne Schwab, 63 Piscataqua Street, Map 18, Lot 11-2 for photovoltaic panels and replacing one window with a door.

Guests: Applicant, Peter Schwab; Craig Strehl, Sandra Bissett

Chair Rowland advised that the application was publicized, all fees had been paid and all abutters had been notified.

The applicant appeared last month for a work session on a photovoltaic installation. Chair Rowland stated he wanted to break the application down to two votes. Mr. Schwab showed plans of the existing west elevation, the proposed elevation and a sample of the door, which will be on the back of the house, facing the neighbor (the Federos) and it cannot be seen from Piscataqua Street. The door will allow the Schwabs to exit the garage and get out to the dog run area. Mr. Schwab will put new shingles to match what is on the garage now; it will be a pretty clean replacement.

There being no questions from the board, Kate Murray moved to accept the application to replace a window with a new door as presented, Tom Maher seconded. All members voted yes, including the Chair.

Peter Schwab next presented his plans for photovoltaic panels saying that what is changed from the work session of last month is that the array has been centered on the garage roof. It was previously tucked into the top left corner. They tried to fill in the space on the garage roof where it abuts the house, over the entry door, but it was not working in a way that was appropriate so they centered the panels to make it look better. There are nine panels on the garage roof. The applicant also had a spec sheet on the proposed LG panels which are just like the ones the Chamberlains used in their installation; there have been no material changes to that product. The third page of the proposal shows the garage with no photovoltaic panels on it.

Peter Reed commented that your eye is immediately attracted to the old shingles at the top of the roofline on the house and the garage roof where there are no solar panels and asked if there is a way to cover this up or make it blend in better? Peter Schwab stated they were not able to find a material or faux panels to customize the photovoltaic panels and help them blend in. Reed asked if they considered replacing the roof shingles with a darker color so they blend in better with the

solar panels? Mr. Schwab stated the roof shingles are only a year old but they could replace them with a darker color. Reed reinforced that the eye is drawn to the areas of shingles without panels and Mr. Schwab added that it was a little challenging to address given the roof entry, dormer and geometry of the panels. Chair Rowland said that given the roof is only 1 year old, it would be a hardship to ask the Schwabs to replace the shingles. Elaine Nollet asked why the panels were moved to the center of the garage roof and Schwab thought it looked more symmetrical but it's a very subtle difference from the plan presented at the work session.

Chair Rowland asked if there were other questions and opened the hearing to the public.

Craig Strehl of 62 Main Street wanted to get the committee's opinion on PV or ST system and how it has the least impact on public view. He stressed that the board should give an opinion on "least impact" and "public view" adding that he believes the Schwab's installation is in plain view. Chair Rowland said the board will focus on the new regulations and criteria that have recently been set, adding that the applicant did a good job trying to make the panels blend in. Unfortunately the roof color is not quite the same as the panels which makes the shingles more obvious and the panel array is constrained by dormers which prevent complete coverage of the roof with the photovoltaic panels. So there are a couple of differences from the Chamberlain installation. The Chair believes the streetscape is quite visible as he has driven by the Schwab property many times. Tom Maher was concerned about the garage roof as it is more visible, however, the roof on the house is high so it is not as noticeable, but the garage is almost at eye level. Chair Rowland referred to the language in item 2 of the guidelines which says "least impact" stating that he doesn't believe the garage meets this criteria. Irene Bush said that ideally the only part you cannot see is on top of the dormer. Kate Murray added that she thinks the main roof is fine but also believes the panels on the garage roof are quite visible.

Craig Strehl said he wanted to know what the commission thought of the orientation of the roofline vis a vis Main Street, asking how the roofline lines up with the curve of Main Street? His concern is that if this application is approved, there will be solar panels along Main Street in the heart of the historic district. Chair Rowland didn't understand how Mr. Strehl was tying this installation into Main Street and advised that what the board decides tonight does not extend to other applications, as each application is decided on its own merit. Mr. Strehl was very concerned about a precedent being set, to which the Chair stated there is a legal opinion from the State that land use boards cannot set precedents.

Again, Mr. Strehl asked how does the HDC define "least visible impact"? Elaine Nollet advised that the technology has improved so much on solar panels and the board is trying to stay open to the future. It is a dilemma and it's very difficult as the board tries to keep the integrity of the historic district, but it also doesn't want to deny homeowners the ability to conserve energy and save money. She believes the Schwabs have tried everything possible to comply with the guidelines while trying to be energy conscious.

Mr. Schwab advised that the house does face south and the panels are not compromising the way the building looks. Tom Maher addressed Mr. Strehl, asking if his concern was that the panels were orientated toward Main Street and was Mr. Strehl suggesting the photovoltaic panels would be highly visible from Main Street? Maher stated that he and other board members had all taken walks by the property and taken a good look adding that they had all raised concerns about the

garage roof, but he believes the installation on the main roof would be fleetingly visible. Kate Murray stated that she thought Mr. Strehl was concerned that houses along Main Street that face south and are orientated on the street the same way as Mr. Schwab's house, would also want solar panels on the south or front of the house facing Main Street, as opposed to people on the other side of the road that wanted solar panels would install them on the back of the house, away from the road.

Craig Strehl wanted to affirm that his issue is not with the applicant's roofline but confirmed that he is worried about the next applicant who may come in and put solar panels on a house in the heart of Main Street. His concern is the "least visible" from the street and he believes Mr. Schwab's installation is fully visible from Atkinson Street. Tom Maher said that he would probably direct anyone to wait for Tesla to come out with a solar panel that is a replica of asphalt shingles or a product so near to that, that board members would be more apt to approve them as opposed to large panels on Main Street. Mr. Strehl said that technology now exists, that they are making solar shingles, and urged the committee to consider if there is another way to minimize the view from the street for the application of this technology. Tom Maher said that if the board were to place that onus on the Schwabs, they would be waiting at least 2 years and Mr. Schwab confirmed he had looked into Tesla shingles and they are backlogged 2 years and the shingles are very expensive. Mr. Strehl stated the Town of New Castle has a 400 year celebration coming up and he is emphatic about retaining the town's historical nature and would like to preserve the charm and character of the town. He stressed that the technology will come and he himself would like to use it, as the northeast has very high electricity rates but he would like the committee to think long and hard about the best way to apply the technology

Sandra Bissett, Chair of the Energy Commission thanked the board for reviewing the guidelines and strategy, and she thinks Peter Schwab has done a great job of integrating a historical house with new technology. Ms. Bissett said we all need to look at how to reduce our carbon footprint and hopes that some type of agreement can be reached, opining that the installation on the main roof is well situated and due to its height, few people can see it from the street. She suggested putting the garage on hold and complete the main roof as a first step. Ms. Bissett commended the board for the re-written standards.

Chair Rowland asked the board for comments and questions. Vice Chair Hughes said that each board member's purpose in being on the historic district commission is to preserve the historical character of the town and the board is trying to weigh changing technologies and property rights. He credited the Schwabs as they have worked collaboratively with the HDC, having had numerous meetings, and have helped board members understand the technology. Mr. Hughes stated he is in favor of photovoltaic cells and he is also concerned about the impact on Main Street adding that the board will have to evaluate Main Street when an application comes before it. He is also concerned about the array of photovoltaic panels on the Schwab's garage and asked the applicant whether they would limit the photovoltaic panels to the roof of the main house.

Irene Bush said that another item in the new guidelines is that any changes would not disturb the character or structure of the house and that is true of the Schwabs' house as the panels are removable; Elaine Nollet agreed. Tom Maher said that Vice Chair Hughes' comments were spot on and noted the Schwabs' progress in restoring the home and working with the board through the entire process. He added that the garage is difficult to justify given the newly written

guidelines but he is comfortable that the main roof's design has been done in such a way to keep it low impact. Chair Rowland stated that he doesn't disagree with board members' statements adding that New Castle is not the only town struggling with this issue and there is great debate between environmentalists and historical preservationists. The National Park Service, Secretary of the Interior Standards say there is no room for panels in a historic neighborhood if you can see the panels at all, and on the opposite side are environmentalists who want to preserve the environment, and somehow these have to be balanced. The Chair said the board wants to have the conversations and have applicants come before the HDC. The key word is balance and the Chair believes the applicant has done everything possible to follow the guidelines. The panels are removable so they are not changing or harming the building. However, Rowland is worried about the streetscape, and as the board tries to strike this balance and moves down this road, wonders if we are taking a jump? The Chamberlain's installation of solar seemed easy as their house is not centered in the historic district. The Chair stated he will absolutely not vote for the panels on the garage roof because he doesn't believe it is in compliance with item 2. He added that the house installation is still a struggle for him but the cost question comes up and how much can the board ask an applicant to expend to bring technology in. Rowland wished the color of the roof shingles had been considered in terms of a possible photovoltaic installation when the new roof was done, and he will note that for future applicants when they are redesigning a house, and will suggest they think about the color if they are looking at possibly doing solar panels.

Maher motioned to approve the photovoltaic panel installation on the roof of the house but not on the garage and if there are any methods to mitigate the shingle color, that the applicant make every effort to minimize the color on the roof of the house. Jeff Hughes seconded. All approved except the Chair voted No.

Schwab thanked the committee for their flexibility and their time.

Mr. Strehl again asked the committee to put on record their definition of "least impact on public view". Tom Maher said he doesn't think there is an absolute definition as it is a judgment call on each application and board members have stated that and it will be in the records.

2. Public Hearing for Julia Tarbell and Andy Keturakis, 146 Portsmouth Ave, Map 16, Lot 11 for a new fence

Guests: Julia Tarbell

Chair Rowland advised that the application was publicized, all fees had been paid and all abutters had been notified.

Ms. Tarbell stated they would like to install a 6 foot fence from the porch which will run about 1/2 way down the property line; there is a decorative gate and it will be moved to the back of the house where they park on Riverview Road.

Chair Rowland stated that this was a work session last month and the application hasn't changed. Chair Rowland opened the hearing to the public but there were no questions.

Kate Murray asked about the historic gate. Jeff Hughes motioned to approve the project as defined in the application; Elaine Nollet seconded. All in favor.

3. Public Hearing Continuance for Marilyn Walker, 32 Walbach Street, Map 18, Lot 57 for changes to original approval.

Guests: Applicant, Marilyn Walker; Sandra Bissett, Andrew Moore

Chair Rowland advised that the application was publicized, all fees had been paid and all abutters had been notified.

Marilyn Walker said that when she was before the board two months prior for the initial application, she was asked to come back for approval of skirting around the deck and for the lighting plan. They have had to move the house three feet closer to the road as they ran into ledge, and the architect also realized she forgot to put a bulkhead for the cellar, so they have added a bulkhead on the back side of the house. Ms. Walker showed the plan where the bulkhead would go and it has very little visibility from Walbach Street. Even with moving the house closer to the road, it is still within the setbacks.

Ms. Walker had a picture of the proposed solid skirt which will be white with a little door to get under the deck. She noted that the plans are in a different color but stated that the skirt and fencing will be white, and the deck will be gray.

Lastly, she presented a lighting plan, adding that they were open to suggestions from the board. They are aiming for dark sky compliant lights so they don't send light up, but there is limited availability in colonial styles. She asked the board that if there are some lights they didn't particularly like, to please advise. In addition, Ms. Walker would also like to install two post lights along the driveway, two lights at the front door, a light at the French door on the deck, and a flood light facing down at the garage area. Most board members liked the onion light, however the HDC doesn't have a purview over lighting so it will consider only the relocation of the house 3' closer to the road, the bulkhead, and the skirting on the deck.

Peter Reed stated that it looks like the front of house had opened up and commented on the walkway. However, the applicant represented that it was just a quick rendering done of the stairs but they are not changing and neither is the stone wall and although they will remove some trees and put new shrubs in, the wall and stairs will remain the same.

Sandra Bissett asked about the height of the house and Marilyn Walker stated it is about 5' higher than the present house. The Chair advised Bissett that height had been discussed at the previous hearing.

Ms. Bissett then asked if the Walkers were taking out the very high tree but the Chair advised that the HDC is not in charge of trees. However Andrew Moore did ask the applicant that if there is any consideration about taking trees down, to please engage in a friendly conversation (with neighbors).

Chair Rowland closed the public hearing at 7:45 pm and asked the board for comments.

Hughes motioned to approve the application as presented including moving the house 3 feet, the proposed skirt, and the bulkhead. Kate Murray seconded. All in favor including Chair.

Ms. Walker said that the Conservation Commission asked them to use a pervious surface on the driveway and asked if the board had any say in this matter to which the Chair indicated the HDC does not.

#### Approval of Minutes of April 5, 2018

Jeff Hughes motioned to approve the minutes of April 5<sup>th</sup> as amended; Kate Murray seconded. All approved.

There was some discussion amongst board members as to solar panels and all thought this was a good compromise, and a balance had been made. Chair Rowland said that staff at Strawberry Banke are at both ends of the spectrum on photovoltaic panels, and that it is a very difficult issue as there are other items that come to mind as not being historically accurate, such as generators and air conditioners. However, it's the future and is sometimes a difficult compromise, however, this house is not on Main Street.

#### New Business

Chair Rowland advised that he has received five letters from Reverend Jordan's descendants begging the board to not allow the Russell Cox house be torn down. The Chair wanted to note in the records that the letters were received. Jim Cerny has declared he is working with the owner of the house and it is going to be saved; the owner will be working with an architect. Elaine Nollet indicated the owner wants to be on the Historic Society board. Tom Maher said that towns people anticipated the worst when heavy equipment showed up but the equipment was to repair the sewer line. There was a lot of attention on whether the Cox house was going to be torn down.

Chair Rowland stated that town meeting is next week and in June the board has to look at appointments, so term expirations will have to be reviewed.

Tom Maher motioned to adjourn the meeting; Jeff Hughes seconded. All approved.

Meeting adjourned at 8 pm

Respectfully submitted,  
Diane L. Cooley, Recording Secretary