I. OLD BUSINESS

A) Approval of Minutes – August 26, 2008 - September 16, 2008

It was moved, seconded and passed by unanimous voice vote to accept the August 26, 2008 and the September 16, 2008 Minutes as presented.

B) Request for a One-Year Extension of Variance, granted November 27, 2007, for property located at 600 Lafayette Road.

Mr. Parrott made a motion to grant the One-Year Extension of Variance, which was seconded by Mr. Witham.

Mr. Parrott stated that this was the first request for an extension on a complicated project and he felt this could be granted. Mr. Witham stated that, with rising construction costs, additional time was needed to allow the applicants to work with the design within their budget.

The motion to grant a One-Year Extension of Variance through November 27, 2009 was approved by unanimous voice vote.

II. PUBLIC HEARINGS

1) Petition of Paul Nakrosis and Millie Nakrosis, owners, and Michael Brandzel, applicant, for property located at 39 Dearborn Street wherein the following were
requested to place a 7’10” x 13’9” one story shed: 1) a Variance from Article IV, Section 10-402(B) to allow said shed to have a 5’± front set back where 15’ is the minimum required, and 2) a Variance from Article III, Section 10-301(7)(b) to allow said shed to have a 65’± setback to salt water marsh or mean high water line where 100’ is the minimum required. Said property is shown on Assessor Plan 140 as Lot 3 and lies within the General Residence A district. This petition was postponed from the August 26, 2008 and September 16, 2008 meetings.

Chairman LeBlanc announced that the applicant had requested that this petition be postponed to the November 18, 2008 meeting.

Mr. Witham made a motion to postpone hearing the petition to the November 18, 2008 meeting, which was seconded by Mr. LeMay and approved by unanimous voice vote.

2) Petition of 150 Greenleaf Avenue Realty Trust, owner, James G. Boyle, Trustee, for property located at 150 Greenleaf Avenue wherein a Variance from Article IX, Section 10-901(E) was requested to allow three signs above the level of the roof. Said property is shown on Assessor Plan 243 as Lot 67 and lies within the General Business district.

Chairman LeBlanc announced that this petition had been withdrawn.

3) Petition of Christopher Bashaw and Moira Lumnah, owners, for property located at 109 Preble Way wherein Variances from Article III, Section 10-302(A) and Article IV, Section 10-401(A)(2)(c) were requested to allow a 12’ x 20’ open deck with: a) 2’5”± left side setback where 10’ is the minimum required, and b) 31%± building coverage where 30% is the maximum allowed. Said property is shown on Assessor Plan 212 as Lot 2-1 and lies within the General Residence B district.

SPEAKING IN FAVOR OF THE PETITION

Mr. Chris Bashaw stated that they needed a variance for an already constructed open air deck. The hardship was that this was a duplex on a small nonconforming lot where the property line bisected the structure. They needed a deck of this height as the lower area often became saturated and there was a hazard of water going into the basements. In deciding the location, they considered the existing driveway, the limited visibility from the street and the fact that they would not have to relocate air conditioning and plumbing. They had not been aware that a permit was needed until after the deck was constructed, but did have approval from the owner of the other unit in the duplex as well as the other abutting neighbor. To have to remove the deck would be a financial burden and would affect the value of the property which was currently for sale.

Mr. Durbin asked him how he became aware of the need for a building permit and Mr. Bashaw advised that a neighbor had inquired as to how the permitting process had gone and he had then approached the City.
Mr. Parrott asked him if he also owned 107 Preble Way and, if not, would he object if that owner did the same thing. Mr. Bashaw stated he did not own the other property and would not object.

**SPEAKING IN OPPOSITION TO THE PETITION, OR SPEAKING TO, FOR, OR AGAINST THE PETITION**

With no one rising, the public hearing was closed.

**DECISION OF THE BOARD**

Mr. Witham made a motion to grant the petition as presented and advertised, which was seconded by Mr. Parrott.

Mr. Witham stated that the decision was challenging as the Board was supposed to consider the deck as if it had never been built so the expense to tear it down was not pertinent. That being said, he felt that the request met the criteria for granting a variance. Atlantic Heights was a unique area with property lines bisecting buildings. Although the City has acknowledged the buildings as duplexes, the area was zoned General Residence B. This imposed a 10’ setback on these properties, which was contradictory. He felt that a variance with that type of property line should be looked at carefully as the owners were usually limited in what they could do. If the deck were under 18”, it would not require a variance, but he felt the impact on abutters would be the same whether the deck was 18” in height or 29”.

Mr. Witham stated that he didn’t see any public interest involved in a deck in the backyard area and the abutter most affected was in favor. He felt that the lot coverage increase of 1% was minimal on such a small lot. The special conditions were as he had stated – a duplex with a property line running through it subject to General Residence B setbacks. He felt the setback variance was there for light and air, but the unique situation in Atlantic Heights was that the buildings touch each other, which was just a part of living there. The only other method they could have considered was getting closer to the driveway, but with the garage in place, they needed that space in between. He stated that there would be no benefit to the public in denying the variance that would outweigh the hardship on the applicant. There was no evidence that property values would be diminished by a deck at this height.

Mr. Parrott stated that he agreed.

Ms. Rousseau cited a request several months ago where the property owner had indicated they were not aware that approval was needed. She stated that she had listened to the Board vote against that particular case because everyone said ‘You oughta know about it.’ There was now a similar situation before the Board and, while she would vote in favor of the motion as she definitely supported all the reasons why it should be passed, she hoped that the Board would look evenly at the law when it came to these building
permit issues whether the property owner was wealthy or low to middle class. She hoped they could apply the law evenly and look at each case as a stand-alone case.

The motion to grant the petition as presented and advertised was passed by a unanimous vote of 6 to 0.

4) Petition of Avi Magidoff, owner, for property located at 133 Pearson Street wherein a Variance from Article II, Section 10-206(12) was requested to allow an acupuncture office (114 sf) as a Home Occupation II requiring one parking space on the lot where two parking spaces are provided for the residence and no additional parking is provided for the office. Said property is shown on Assessor Plan 232 as Lot 103 and lies within the Single Residence B district.

SPEAKING IN FAVOR OF THE PETITION

Mr. Avi Magidoff stated that he wanted to establish a treatment room in his home, which was marked on the plan he had submitted as Room 1. He reviewed the requirements for Home Occupation II, stating that there would be no additional employees, no deliveries and no additional signs. No additional construction would be required. The hours of operation would be 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. He passed out some photographs showing the driveway. While it was not the required 38’ in length, it was 33’ long and fit two cars. In addition, he had a garage and there was ample parking on the dead end street. One of the photographs showed how even a large van could be accommodated.

Mr. Magidoff stated that it was in the public interest to provide health care and it was typical of acupuncturists to work out of their homes. He had provided letters which indicated that there was a need for this service and that it would not impact the neighbors. With one client about every hour and a half, there would be probably 5 clients in a day, creating minimal traffic and need for parking. He felt that health, safety and quality of life were issues addressed by the ordinance and acupuncture would satisfy those areas. He noted that he was not opening a store. This would be a tranquil peaceful space and the dead end street was the perfect location. Regarding property values, he stated that there would be no new structure and no way to know there was a clinic inside.

SPEAKING IN OPPOSITION TO THE PETITION

Ms. Joanne Braun stated that she lived at 121 Pearson Street and one of the reasons they purchased their home was because of its location on a dead end street. She felt that this type of professional services business was not a typical home occupation use. Her concerns were that residents of the street know how to exit to avoid oncoming turning cars, but she’s avoided being hit several times by visitors traveling too fast. The street was ideal for families with young children and running a business from any structure on Pearson would increase the coming and going due to the nature of a dead end street. She stated that the street was barely large enough for two cars to pass at one time. Visitors
park in front of the residences, leaving one lane, which was worse in winter. Her final concern was a biohazard issue – how were the needles being used and disposed of and did that present any danger to residents or city workers. She didn’t feel an acupuncture practice belonged in a residential neighborhood.

Ms. Tiffany Forrest, of 55 Pearson Street reiterated some of Ms. Braun’s comments. She did not believe the street was zoned for such a business and there was retail space for that purpose.

Ms. Debbie Moore of 45 Pearson Street stated that the street was only 19’ wide and children were riding bikes and scooters. She was concerned for the welfare of the children with a business at the end of the street.

SPEAKING TO, FOR OR AGAINST THE PETITION

Mr. Magidoff stated, with respect to the needle issue, that they were mailed back to the supplier. There were no deliveries. He distributed photographs showing neighborhood children playing in the street, stating that was the safety issue, not the question of people driving too fast. He had asked the children not to play there because he felt it was dangerous. He reiterated that the traffic would only be 5 cars per day. He noted that there were no complaints about visitors when a resident had a party and cars were double parked.

Chairman LeBlanc asked for more information about the needle disposal and Mr. Magidoff reiterated that there was a very small amount of the tiny, hair-like needles which went out every six months in special packaging which was allowed in the regular mail. They do not go into the garbage.

DECISION OF THE BOARD

Mr. LeMay asked for clarification on the application for a Home Occupation II requiring a special exception in this district.

Ms. Tillman stated that the Home Occupation II was an allowed use provided that the property met all of the requirements for a Special Exception, which it did not. The property does not provide for a full size parking space for the business that does not back out onto the street. Since it did not meet the Special Exception requirements, a variance was needed.

There was a brief discussion among Mr. LeMay, Ms. Tillman, Ms. Rousseau and Mr. Witham about the criteria to be considered and whether this would be a use or area variance, with Mr. Witham concluding that the criteria for a use variance were appropriate.

Mr. Witham made a motion to deny the petition, which was seconded by Mr. Parrott.
Mr. Witham stated that he was initially comfortable with fitting two cars into the 33’ long driveway, and felt they had met most of the criteria for a Special Exception. On further consideration and hearing the testimony from both sides, he felt there was a safety hazard with the increased traffic although only 5 cars per day. He felt what differentiated this from other uses was that clients might be hurrying to make an appointment and driving faster on what was a narrow street. While he agreed that drivers have as much rights as children playing in the street, considering the nature of the street, he could see a potential for a safety hazard. He stated that his office was near a yoga studio and visitors came flying into the parking lot. He wouldn’t feel comfortable if this were approved and something happened because someone was driving too fast. While it might meet the other criteria, under the Simplex analysis it must be demonstrated that there was no relationship between the general purposes of the ordinance and the restriction on the property. The ordinance was trying to present safe roadways and allowing this variance would be violating that aim, so it would not meet that criteria.

Mr. Parrott stated that he agreed. It might be nice for clients to come down a dead end street but, on the other hand, it disadvantaged all the other people who live on the street and have a daily reason to drive there. He noted that there had been a contradiction in the materials, which indicated a maximum visitors of 15 or so per week, but the presentation had indicated 5 per day. With respect to the area variance, one requirement was that it be consistent with the spirit of the ordinance. Advantaging one property and disadvantaging others would not be in the spirit of the ordinance. The justice test would tilt toward the other residents of the street.

Ms. Rousseau stated that the master plan encouraged home office use and, in these tough financial times, this was a good alternative to renting commercial space. She didn’t feel that the traffic as the applicant had outlined would be any more invasive than mini vans with parents and children going up and down five times a day. They would probably create far more activity than his clients and she didn’t see how the residents were inconvenienced. Children need to understand how to be safe with cars on the street. She concluded that this property owner had a right to use his space to his advantage as long as he met the criteria.

Chairman LeBlanc stated that it had to be considered that this was an application for a variance which runs with the land. There was an issue of safety and substantial justice was lacking here because once a variance was granted, a similar office could go into the property but the next owner might not be as considerate as this applicant.

The motion to deny the variance was passed by a vote of 5 to 1, with Ms. Rousseau voting against the motion.

5) Petition of Heritage Storage Center, Inc., owner, for property located at 70 Heritage Avenue wherein a Variance from Article II, Section 10-209 was requested to convert a 7,200 sf portion of an existing building into two levels (14,400 sf total area) of
self storage in a district where such use is not allowed. Said property is shown on Assessor Plan 285 as Lot 11B and lies within the Industrial district.

**SPEAKING IN FAVOR OF THE PETITION**

Attorney Gerald Giles, referring to the aerial photograph, stated that the property was located in an industrial zone. He briefly outlined the history of the property which contained 3 one-story buildings when bought in 1993, with 100 feet added to each one in 1994 which did not need a variance. They had purchased a lot behind Building A for which they received a variance and on which they built several buildings. In 2001, they received a variance to convert Building B, a 15,000 s.f. industrial building, to two story self storage. In 2002, a variance was received to also convert the 18,000 s.f. in Building C. They were now looking to convert an additional 7200 s.f. to two-story mini storage in two steps, 3,600 s.f. this year and the remainder next year depending on the success of the first phase.

Attorney Giles stated that they didn’t believe the variance would be contrary to the public interest as the entire property was almost entirely self storage. He noted that self storage was not allowed anywhere in the city of Portsmouth, but if it were, it would be in an industrial district. He stated that the restriction on the property interferes with its best use and there was no fair and substantial relationship between the general purposes of the ordinance and the restriction. It seemed unreasonable to not allow self storage anywhere in the city. They would not be injuring the public or private rights of adjoining properties as they had been operating this way in the past with no problems with their neighbors. He felt that the variance would be consistent with the spirit of the ordinance as, if you were going to have self storage anywhere, this was the best place. Justice would be done and the value of surrounding properties would not be diminished.

Ms. Rousseau asked if they were a warehousing facility for commercial uses or businesses or raw materials; if there were restrictions on what could be stored; if someone was checking what was stored; and if they walked around the site.

Attorney Giles stated that some of the renters could be plumbers or insulation people. They obtain a declaration of what would be stored, which cannot include hazardous materials or foodstuffs. The renters put on their own locks so that, once the unit was rented, there was no way to check on the contents. There was someone who walks around the site a few times a week to make a visual inspection.

Mr. Witham noted that the Board had run into a similar situation with a daycare facility who needed a variance wherever they went. He asked Ms. Tillman if, considering that the ordinance does not mention self storage, the position was that none would be allowed without a variance. Ms. Tillman stated he was correct. When he asked if the new ordinance would address this, she stated she was not aware that it would.

When Ms. Rousseau asked what the thinking had been behind the ordinance, Ms. Tillman stated that one important item was that the city had limited industrial land and that self
storage did not create jobs. In response to an additional question, she confirmed that the position was for the City’s benefit as industrial land was needed for the creation of jobs and to contribute to a better place to live. Storage did not fulfill that need.

Chairman LeBlanc asked how many units would be converted and were there plans for elevators. Attorney Giles stated that, initially, units #4, #5 and #6 would be converted and, if successful, units #7, #8, and #9. One lift would be installed to transport materials only, not individuals.

Mr. Parrott stated that, in looking over the list of businesses in building A, most employ people, which was what the industrial zone was supposed to be about. He felt this was a low grade use of an attractive building. It seemed like the objective was to change the character and nature of the buildings so that businesses were almost forced out. He felt that the spread of self storage would be a step in the wrong direction in the use of valuable industrial land. He asked if Attorney Giles would comment on why it would be good for the city to convert to a passive, non-productive use.

Attorney Giles stated that they provided a useful service to the people of Portsmouth, as evidenced by the number of people who actually carry on trades out of the units, using them to store necessary materials. Of the 6 units they were discussing, only one was currently occupied. The owner had them for lease, with competitive rental rates, but no one had shown an interest. They would like to generate some revenue from the units.

SPEAKING IN OPPOSITION TO THE PETITION, OR SPEAKING TO, FOR, OR AGAINST THE PETITION

With no one rising, the public hearing was closed.

DECISION OF THE BOARD

Ms. Rousseau made a motion to grant the petition as presented and advertised. There was no initial second.

Chairman LeBlanc asked for a second for discussion so that the maker could speak to her motion. Mr. Witham seconded for discussion, but wanted to add a stipulation that any rental of the units be for commercial use only. When Ms. Tillman stated that the stipulation would be difficult to enforce, Mr. Witham stated he would then just second for discussion. Ms. Rousseau withdrew her motion.

Mr. Parrott made a motion to deny the petition, which was seconded by Mr. LeMay.

Referencing his previous remarks, Mr. Parrott stated that he was familiar with the property as he was often in the area.

Mr. Parrott stated that granting the variance would not be in the public interest as he felt that this would be the first step in forcing the existing businesses to move elsewhere as
the self storage aspect increased. This would be easy to justify each time because of previous actions granting self storage in a part of the building. He stated that he hadn’t heard of any hardship inherent in the land, only of present business conditions and the personal circumstance of the owners. Regarding the argument that the zoning restriction interferes with the reasonable use of the property in its unique setting, he stated that the vast majority of the site had already received variances for self storage. To him that meant that the City had already granted a great deal of relief and the owner already had a reasonable use of their property so the argument failed.

Mr. Parrott stated that there was a fair and substantial relationship between the general purposes of the ordinance and the specific restriction. The restriction applies to all the industrial zones in the city and the purpose of those areas was to encourage businesses that provide jobs. The public or private rights of others would eventually be impacted by the pressure on other businesses to relocate. He stated that it was in the spirit of the ordinance to make maximum use of the industrially zoned land in the city and the City Council and Planning Board had defined specific uses in the Industrial District which all refer to job creating entities. He felt that the weight, in the justice test, was clearly on the side of the ordinance as written and the right of the other people renting the buildings at present. Granting a variance would benefit a small group and disadvantage a larger group. It was his assessment that having a lot of these units in a mixed use building would set a bad tone and the value of other businesses would be diminished.

Mr. LeMay stated that he agreed. He felt that this was unique in that a petition usually passes at least one of the criteria. In this case, there was a reason why it would not pass any. There were already a lot of variances and special exceptions for this property. To lose the retail potential and make it storage goes against the direction in which the City has been driving. He agreed that there was no hardship in the land and felt that granting the variance would be inconsistent with the spirit of the ordinance.

Ms. Rousseau stated that it would be in the public interest to grant the variance because now they were losing out on additional tax dollars that could have been charged for additional space. Now, they weren’t going to have that money. She also took issue with denying the variance on the basis that the use would not provide jobs for the community. It was not the responsibility of any property owner, no matter how their property was characterized, to provide jobs to the community of Portsmouth. They have the right to use their property in the way they see fit if it fits within the criteria of the law. She kept hearing, “You’re not providing jobs. You’re not providing jobs.” That’s not the responsibility of a property owner. She felt that was a scary thought especially in the State of New Hampshire where they took property rights very seriously. To her this was the least invasive use of the space for an industrial site that could be. Most communities would welcome self storage in an industrial space. They would feel lucky to have self storage in an industrial space. Industrial uses could be environmentally invasive and to have somebody propose self storage space was a gift in an industrial zone area. She stated that she was actually quite shocked by the comments from the Board that evening.
Mr. Witham stated that he had previously referred to a day care center which had not made its way into the ordinance. Self storage also had not, but zoning had acknowledged that this use was not allowed and he didn’t see how the application could get over the relationship between the ordinance and the restriction on the property. Ms. Rousseau had stated that property owners could use their property as long as they met the letter of the law. He felt it was clear that this use did not meet the letter of the law. Zoning has to have balance and a purpose and current zoning dictates no self storage. While the application might meet some of the criteria, it would not pass the second hurdle of the Simplex analysis.

The motion to deny the petition was passed by a vote of 5 to 1, with Ms. Rousseau voting against the motion.

6) Petition of Benjamin J. Swainbank and Christine M. Bastianelli, owners, for property located at 230 Cass Street wherein Variances from Article III, Section 10-302(A) and Article IV, Section 10-401(A)(2)(c) were requested to allow an 10’ x 19’ one story addition with 3’+ right side setback where 10’ is the minimum required. Said property is shown on Assessor Plan 147 as Lot 28 and lies within the Mixed Residential Business district.

**SPEAKING IN FAVOR OF THE PETITION**

Mr. Ben Swainbank stated that he was one of the owners of the property. There was currently a three season porch off the back which they would like to renovate and turn into a year round structure. The porch was in poor shape and lacked a foundation and would be removed. They would keep the same footprint and usage and it would be, technically, a replacement.

Mr. Iain Moodie stated that he was the contractor on the project. He stated that they had no other recourse other than replacing the structure with a steeper roof pitch for better water drainage. It would be largely identical to what was there except they would be putting in a foundation and increasing the livable space in the house. There would be no additional ground cover except for a little for the bulkhead.

Mr. LeMay asked how old the existing porch was. Mr. Swainbank stated that the house was 100 years old, but the porch was not original. Mr. Moodie stated that things had been “piecemealed” over the years and it was probably added in the 40’s.

**SPEAKING IN OPPOSITION TO THE PETITION, OR SPEAKING TO, FOR, OR AGAINST THE PETITION**

With no one rising, the public hearing was closed.

**DECISION OF THE BOARD**
Mr. Durbin made a motion to grant the petition as presented and advertised, which was seconded by Mr. Witham.

Mr. Durbin stated that this was just an in-kind replacement, with an improved structure replacing a degraded one. There was no public interest involved. The special conditions creating a hardship were that the porch and home were currently nonconforming and this would just be replacing in kind. As had been stated, there was no other recourse to replacing a structure in disrepair. He stated that it would not be inconsistent with the spirit of the ordinance to build an in-kind replacement. Regarding the justice test, the detriment to the applicant would far outweigh any public benefit if the variance were denied. There had been no evidence to suggest that the value of surrounding properties would be diminished.

Mr. Witham agreed that they were looking at a replacement in kind. There would be no change in the essential character of the neighborhood. He had not seen any homes in the area meeting the side or front setbacks so there would be no change. In rebuilding, there was an opportunity to bring the structure into conformity, but he didn’t see the advantage in this situation.

The motion to grant the petition as presented and advertised was passed by a unanimous vote of 6 to 0.

7) Petition of Ryan A. Reed and Elizabeth M. Conley, owners, for property located at 9 Suzanne Drive wherein Variances from Article III, Section 10-302(A) and Article IV, Section 10-401(A)(2)(c) were requested to allow an 8' x 8' one story front portico addition with a 20'+ front setback where 30' is the minimum required. Said property is shown on Assessor Plan 292 as Lot 79 and lies within the Single Residence B district.

SPEAKING IN FAVOR OF THE PETITION

Mr. Ryan Reed stated that he was there with Ms. Elizabeth Conley. They had been given notice from their homeowners insurance company that their front stairs, which were deteriorating and crumbling, were no longer in compliance and would have to be replaced. He stated that the home was neglected when they bought it and they were trying to clean it up. Four of their six abutters had signed a petition, which they were passing out, indicating their approval of the new portico. Ms. Conley stated they were also passing out a picture of the old stairs. Mr. Ryan indicated that the existing stairs were 6’ x 6’ and the new portico would be 8’ x 8’, a 2’ difference. There would also be a roof over the stairs to protect them during the winter and increase safety.

SPEAKING IN OPPOSITION TO THE PETITION, OR SPEAKING TO, FOR, OR AGAINST THE PETITION

With no one rising, the public hearing was closed.
DECISION OF THE BOARD

Mr. Parrott made a motion to grant the petition as presented and advertised which was seconded by Mr. Witham.

Mr. Parrott stated that this was a modest proposal with the public interest virtually non involved. To the extent that there would be any, it would probably be the neighbors and and several had signed a petition in favor. The special conditions creating a hardship were that the lot size and house position on the lot were what they were and couldn’t be changed. This was a modest proposal, which resulted in a small amount of increase in area. There was no other feasible method to replace the front entrance to the house and they would be able to build better and more useful steps and get out of the weather. He stated that it would be in the spirit of the ordinance to enable people to have a reasonable use of their property and make improvements as long as no other rights were infringed upon. In the justice test, there was no benefit to the public to argue against granting. The value of surrounding properties would, if anything, improve somewhat by the replacement of deteriorating stairs.

Mr. Witham stated that he didn’t see any way in which a covered stairway would change the essential character of the neighborhood. This would be a nice addition, with the steps slightly enlarged and covered with a roof. This would have a different feel than an infill addition off the front of the house. It would still be open, allowing the light and air protected by the ordinance.

The motion to grant the petition as presented and advertised was passed by a unanimous vote of 6 to 0

III. ADJOURNMENT

It was moved, seconded and passed to adjourn the meeting at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary E. Koepenick, Secretary