

**MINUTES of the
THE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
PORTSMOUTH, NH**

Remote Meeting Via Zoom Conference Call

Per NH RSA 91-A:2, III (b) the Chair has declared the COVID-19 outbreak an emergency and has waived the requirement that a quorum be physically present at the meeting pursuant to the Governor's Executive Order 2020-04, Section 8, as extended by Executive Order 2021-06, and Emergency Order #12, Section 3. Members will be participating remotely and will identify their location and any person present with them at that location. All votes will be by roll call.

6:30 p.m.

May 12, 2021

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Vincent Lombardi; Vice-Chairman Jon Wyckoff; Members Reagan Ruedig, Margot Doering, Martin Ryan, and David Adams; City Council Representative Paige Trace; Alternates Heinz Sauk-Schubert and Karen Bouffard

MEMBERS EXCUSED: None

ALSO PRESENT: Nick Cracknell, Principal Planner, Planning Department

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Chairman Lombardi stated that it was his last meeting as Chairman, and the Commissioners thanked him for his service and wished him well.

I. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. April 07, 2021

The April 7, 2021 minutes were **approved** as amended by unanimous vote, 7-0.

II. ADMINISTRATIVE APPROVALS

1. **33 Johnson Court**

Mr. Cracknell stated that the applicant still needed to submit window specifications. The applicant wasn't present to answer questions.

*The item was **postponed** to the June 2 meeting.*

2. **381 Middle Street**

Mr. Cracknell said the request was to replace two windows. The applicant Jim Mulhern was present and described the project in more detail. Vice-Chair Wyckoff noted that the window

specifications showed a full screen. Ms. Ruedig said the window frame and trim should match existing. Mr. Ryan said some existing windows had storms, and it was further discussed.

Stipulation:

1. Both windows shall have half-screens, and
2. The frames, sills, trim, and mullions shall match the existing windows using the Andersen A series windows.

3. 44 Gardner Street

The request was to use PVC for the deck railing and column repairs. The applicant Jay (no last name given) was present and explained that the railing would be wood but the areas that came into contact with the deck or the ground had to be PVC because wood wouldn't hold paint well. Vice-Chair Wyckoff said he would support the project as long that everything looked like it did 20 years ago. Ms. Ruedig said the PVC would look too plastic but that she had no problems with the base underneath the flooring and the lattice work being done in PVC because they were flat and even. The applicant said the project was called Kleer and worked just like wood. He said the PVC would be used under the column and on anything that went down, and everything else would be wood. He said the PVC would be painted. Chairman Lombardi said he had a problem with PVC on that house because it separated and moved differently than wood. City Council Representative Trace said the house was in the heart of the historic south end and that the use of PVC could set a precedent in the neighborhood, and others agreed. Mr. Ryan said there could be a compromise because the house had already been modified and he thought an occasional piece of PVC in an area susceptible to rot would be okay. It was further discussed and agreed that PVC would be fine under the ground the flooring.

Stipulations:

1. The PVC material shall be permitted only for the skirt boards and lattice below the deck and all other components shall be replaced in-kind if necessary; and
2. The kickboards on the steps may be made out of the PVC material.

*Vice-Chair Wyckoff moved to **approve** Administrative Approval Item 2, 381 Middle Street, and Item 3, 44 Gardner Street, with their respective stipulations. Mr. Ryan seconded.*

There was further discussion about the lattice being PVC on Item 3. Chairman Lombardi said it would look terrible, and Mr. Ryan agreed.

*Ms. Ruedig moved to **amend** the stipulation on Item 3 so that the lattice would remain wood but any framing around the lattice could be PVC. The amended stipulations were as follows:*

Amended stipulations:

1. The PVC shall be permitted only for the skirt boards and the lattice shall remain wood but any framing around the lattice could be PVC;
2. everything else shall be replaced in kind if necessary; and
3. The kickboards on the steps shall be made out of the PVC material because they would rot out eventually.

*Mr. Ryan seconded. The motion was **approved** by unanimous vote, 7-0.*

III. WORK SESSIONS (OLD BUSINESS)

A. Work Session requested by **Stone Creek Realty, LLC, owner**, for property located at **53 Green Street**, wherein permission is requested to allow the demolition of the existing structure and the new construction of a 3-5 story mixed-use building as per plans on file in the Planning Department. Said property is shown on Assessor Map 119 as Lot 2 and lies within the Character District 5 (CD5) and Historic Districts.

WORK SESSION

Project architect Carla Goodnight was present, along with Jeff Johnston and Ron Simmons of Cathartes. Ms. Goodnight reviewed the design elements that incorporated the Commission's comments from the previous work session.

Vice-Chair Wyckoff said he was happy with the improvements and thought the building would sit very proud to someone coming in from the Market Street extension. He asked whether a series of small shops should replace the 4,000-square foot commercial unit that might be vacant for five years. He said Portsmouth needed small spaces and more doors. He said the revised Green Street façade took away from the building's mass and wouldn't be as noticeable. Ms. Ruedig said she was still fine with the massing and the building's general shape and layout but thought the building's design was generic and could be found anywhere in suburbia. She said the white top and the balconies looked like they could be in Miami and that there was nothing about the design that said 'Portsmouth'. She said she didn't see how the white tops and the fenestration spoke to all the brick beneath it and that it was like trying to fit two different building parts together. She said the windows didn't look like they belonged in a Portsmouth residential building. She said some elements, like the white banding and vertical elements, were fine but weren't something she saw working well in the District or downtown. She said the prominent building demanded a really good design.

Mr. Ryan said it was a wonderful building and design. He said the massing was handled very well, noting that it cascaded and had railings everywhere and that people would be on all its different levels, which would make the building more humane. He said the landscaping was a beautiful design and incredibly lush but that he'd like to see some of the paths have more niches and places for people to gather. He said he was surprised that the Green Street façade didn't have a curved top to sort of bookend and carry the forms through the whole complex and was disappointed to see asphalt where there was previously a more pedestrian-friendly concrete paving material. He said it was a very successful building for the north end. Mr. Adams said the lack of unity between the Green Street façade and the other sides of the building was a problem. He said he knew that the part of the building that faced the community would be different but

thought it was too much of a departure from the rest of the building and too stark. He said buildings lost integrity when corners were cut out of them and that he disliked the corner balconies. Mr. Sauk-Schubert said the building would be one of the better ones built in the area. He said he was comfortable with the massing but was concerned about some exterior walls and thought the arch was a drawback.

City Council Representative Trace said she had a problem with the Green Street side being five stories up and not having the same rhythm and language as the other sides, making it look like two different buildings. She thought some of the elements from the North Mill Pond side should be used and also felt that carrying more of the light-colored sense on the fifth floor might help. Ms. Goodnight said some Commissioners had been in favor of Option 2 that had the vertical masonry elements, and others had liked the horizontal lightness with the setbacks, so the design tried to balance that. She said the vertical elements on the Green Street side might be too strong and that she would balance it more. Ms. Doering said two-thirds of the greenery on the balconies would die because the condo owners would do their own thing and that it was hard to imagine how successful or lush the pond façade would turn out. She said she still had concerns about the corporate look of the building and thought it resembled a hospital. She said she echoed some of Ms. Ruedig's concerns and agreed that the Green Street façade was not as well planned out and as aesthetically appealing as the other sides.

Ms. Ruedig clarified her earlier comment about the building not looking like 'Portsmouth'. She said the building was new but its design looked very foreign. She agreed that it did look like a hospital and more like a professional building than a residential one. She said the choice of the white or light-colored walls on top of the brick was a mistake because that was what made the building look so institutional. She said there weren't any other new buildings in Portsmouth that looked like it because they were structured to look like the older buildings in terms of traditional colors. She said the light color wouldn't wear well and would get dirty. Ms. Goodnight said she would consider other color options. Ms. Ruedig said the windows were also a big part of the design and asked if they were operable. Ms. Goodnight said the awnings were. Ms. Ruedig said the windows should be able to open up more to enjoy the fresh air and the views.

Ms. Bouffard said she agreed that the building didn't speak to Portsmouth but she thought it spoke to the north end. She said she liked the addition of the curves but wasn't sure why the building should emulate a cruise ship in that location. She agreed that the plantings on the balconies wouldn't continue to look like they did in the rendering and that the windows gave the building a commercial feeling. Vice-Chair Wyckoff said the windows reminded him of a German-style window and thought they didn't need the little awnings at the bottom and should be able to fully open. He said the Green Street façade had a square shoebox look. He asked why the other sections of the buildings were brick, noting that they could be divided by spandrel panels. He asked why the windows were divided like they were and thought they should all be functioning windows. He said the way the openings were punched it was too regular. He said the rectangle was too regular and that it would be nice to see what the rest of the building behind it looked like without all the arborvitae on the balconies. Mr. Ryan said the light top on the building decreased the massing and that the condominium association would have a covenant to maintain the landscaping. City Council Representative Trace asked if there was a window next to the mural on the garden side. Ms. Goodnight said it was a panel detail but could be a recessed

brick panel as well. Ms. Trace suggested that it could be darker or more artwork. She said a front full view of that side of the building would be helpful and thought the lighter color could be carried all the way around the building or at least a bit more on the front.

Chairman Lombardi said he still thought the Green Street side was too monolithic and that it appeared to be a different building. He agreed that the holes in the corner made the building look weak and that the building could have a curve in that area instead. He said the sharp corners jutting out and going up five stores were jarring to him. He said the white top helped differentiate the floor but would get dirty. He said the windows should look more like residential ones. Mr. Ryan said the building was a mixed multi-story residential and commercial one and not double-hung territory. The white banding at the top of the building was further discussed and several Commissioners agreed that it should be a darker color.

Public Comment

Sue Polidura said there was nothing in the building that stood out to indicate that it was a beautiful one and that she'd like to see something other than a mountain of brick in that area of town. She said she'd also want to be able to open the windows to get the fresh air.

Mr. Cracknell acknowledged a comment letter from a citizen.

DECISION OF THE COMMISSION

*Ms. Ruedig moved to **continue** the work session to the June 2 meeting, and Mr. Ryan seconded. The motion **passed** by unanimous vote, 7-0.*

IV. WORK SESSIONS

1. Work Session requested by **Gregory J. Morneault and Amanda B. Morneault, owners**, for property located at **137 Northwest Street**, wherein permission is requested to allow the construction of a new structure (single family home) as per plans on file in the Planning Department. Said property is shown on Assessor Map 122 as Lot 2 and lies within the General Residence A (GRA) and Historic Districts.

WORK SESSION

Reggie Moreau representing the applicant was present. He reviewed the petition and pointed out that the windows and siding would be vinyl.

Mr. Ryan said he could not support the project because the design was more of a prototype house and didn't have the appropriate materials. He said vinyl siding wasn't approved in the District. He said the street was very historic and thought the house's design should take more cues from the neighborhood instead of having rambling forms and bump-outs. Ms. Ruedig agreed. She said the design should be simplified and that the materials should be wood. Vice-Chair Wyckoff said he wasn't that disappointed with the house's style because it looked like a cottage that had been added onto. He noted that it was on the same street as the historic Jackson House but that it also

backed up against the Route One Bypass, so he understood the desire for vinyl siding. City Council Representative Trace said it looked like there was something mid-18th century hiding in all the added bits and pieces of the house. She said vinyl siding and windows didn't belong in the District. The applicant asked if cement board was okay. Ms. Ruedig said the Commission discouraged the use of cement board on the facades but sometimes allowed it due to fire code ratings. She said it would be fine on the rear of the building but preferred wood on the rest of the house. Vice-Chair Wyckoff suggested cedar or pine with a course reveal of four inches. The use of materials was further discussed. Ms. Doering suggested that the applicant consider a few other buildings on the street that all fit on narrow lots. Mr. Sauk-Schubert said the original structure should still be evident.

There was no public comment.

DECISION OF THE COMMISSION

*Vice-Chair Wyckoff moved to **continue** the work session to the June 2 meeting, and Ms. Ruedig seconded. The motion **passed** by unanimous vote, 7-0.*

2. Work Session requested by **Susan Alex Living Trust, Susan Alex Trustee, owner**, for property located at **50 Mt. Vernon Street**, wherein permission is requested to allow new construction to an existing structure (construct 2nd floor dormers) as per plans on file in the Planning Department. Said property is shown on Assessor Map as Lot and lies within the General Residence B (GRB) and Historic Districts.

Ms. Bouffard recused herself from the work session.

WORK SESSION

Contractor Matt Beebe was present on behalf of the applicant. He reviewed the petition and said the double dormer detail would increase headroom and make the garage's second floor more livable. He said the garage would have wood siding and SDL windows.

Mr. Adams said it was a common way of expanding to get the needed footage. He said he didn't think the garage would have a negative impact because it was backed up against a commercial property and at the end of a small street. He said the trim and siding were acceptable. Mr. Ryan agreed, noting that the structure was simple and not old. He suggested bring the shed roof of the dormer down a few feet. He said the roof pitches meeting at the ridge was unsuccessful and made it look like a heavy saddle on top of the garage. Mr. Adams said the structure could be lightened by pulling the ridges down. Ms. Ruedig said it was fine because it was hidden and very few people would see it. Mr. Sauk-Schubert said the dormer's eave line would disappear when someone approached the front of the garage. He said if the shed room were lowered, the exterior wall might have to be raised to keep the same square footage on the second floor.

Public Comment

Cyrus Beer of 64 Mt. Vernon Street said he was the next-door abutter and supported the project.

DECISION

The applicant said he would return for a public hearing at the June 2 meeting.

3. Work Session requested by **Dagny Taggart, LLC, owner**, for property located at **93 Pleasant Street**, wherein permission is requested to allow renovations to an existing structure (renovations of existing building) and new construction to an existing structure (construct 3-story addition) as per plans on file in the Planning Department. Said property is shown on Assessor Map 107 as Lot 47 and lies within the Character District 4 (CD4) and Historic Districts.

WORK SESSION

Project architect Chris Lizotte was present on behalf of the applicant. He reviewed the project and the site's history and said they wanted to modernize the existing building. He said the concrete block addition and stairway would be removed. He discussed the massing and said the glass entry location would bridge the old and new buildings.

Vice-Chair Wyckoff said the Commission's first priority on a project of that size was the massing and how it fit in the neighborhood. He said he was disappointed on how close the new building was to the stone wall and how the length of the massing overpowered the existing historic home. City Council Representative Trace asked if the stone wall would be removed and reincorporated into the foundation of the new building. Mr. Lizotte agreed and said they intended to use as much of it as they could. Ms. Ruedig said she commended the applicant for wanting to add affordable housing to Portsmouth but thought the massing was too big for the location and much too close to the street. She said the huge wall and building were out of place for the rest of the street because there were very historic 2-1/2 story buildings on either side. She said it was a key location in the District as well as one of the most beautiful streets in the District. She said the wall itself was from the late 1700s and shouldn't be removed.

Mr. Ryan said the new buildings were too massive and ornate and should step away from the street. He said the design was insensitive and that using the stone as a cladding was something that would be seen in the north end. He said the glass connector piece was an awful design. He said the architect should start the project over. Mr. Sauk-Schubert agreed that the design was insensitive to the neighborhood. Mr. Adams asked why Mr. Ryan thought the building was too ornate. Mr. Ryan said it made gestures that were inappropriate for being placed up against the existing historic and stately building. He said the new building's identity was too strong up against the context of the neighborhood and the historic building. Mr. Adams thought the problem with the windows on the new building might be the heaviness above the ornamental dormers, but he particularly had trouble with the wall tension. He said he could understand why the connection was like a hanging glass curtain and was set back but that he had never seen one like it be successful. Ms. Bouffard said the new building detracted from the main house and overshadowed the Leighton and Langdon houses and that the wall should not be dismantled.

City Council Representative Trace said she was surprised at the design because it was like a large lump wagging the dog. She said the Treadwell House was a beautiful structure and very

representative of the historic downtown, but the new building behind it had too much mass, was right up against the street, and had too many busy elements trying to make it something that it couldn't be. She said the new building was architecturally inappropriate for the location and thought that pretending to use the stone wall for the foundation was also inappropriate. Ms. Doering said she agreed with all the comments and thought that documentary proof of the wall's history would be helpful. She said one of the challenges of the new building was its insides, and in order to make the micro-units affordable, it forced an outside that was very uniform and long and didn't fit in with the character of Court Street. She said she liked the idea of having a linkage between the two buildings but didn't think it had to be glass, seeing that there were other interesting bridging materials to consider. She said people would own cars whether they had a parking space or not and thought the developer could figure out some kind of car share, otherwise the cars would end up on the street or nearby parking lots and cause tension.

Ms. Ruedig said whatever went in the lot behind the historic house had to be a lot smaller than the proposed massing, and the linking between the buildings had to refer to the historic house. She said the proposed design should be more contemporary yet still be referential to the historic house. Chairman Lombardi said he agreed with all the comments and was concerned for the wall, the street, and the historic mansion. Mr. Ryan said the project just needed to be more understated and more sensitive to the site, and he suggested some landscaping between the wall and the new building.

Public Comment

Sue Polidura said she found evidence that the wall was built around 1707. She said the stone wall was commissioned because the house was a place of refuge. She said restrictions should be placed on any digging in the garden area or parking lot that might reveal artifacts.

Richard Nylander said he was a preservationist. He said the new building overwhelmed the site and wasn't sympathetic to any of the buildings on Pleasant and Court Streets. He said the massing was a big problem, but what disturbed him the most was that the wall would be completely destroyed. He said he looked forward to seeing a different proposal.

Andrew Bagley of 40 Chauncey Street said he didn't like the connecting part or the enormous amount of glass on the three windows going from ground to ceiling. He said Portsmouth needed affordable housing and he didn't see how the project would work if the massing was reduced.

Terrence Parker said he was the seventh great-grandson of the original builder and was also the author of the site's history. He read a summary of it into the record, noting that the historic house was built in the late 1690s and was a prominent and historic meeting place for several years that also housed other prominent residents and guests. He said a detailed excavation should be overseen by a qualified independent observer to ensure that applicable laws were observed.

No one else was present to speak, and Chairman Lombardi closed the public hearing.

DECISION OF THE COMMISSION

*Mr. Ryan moved to **continue** the work session to the June 2 meeting, and Ms. Ruedig seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote, 7-0.*

4. Work Session requested by **Neal Pleasant Street Properties, owner**, for property located at **420 Pleasant Street**, wherein permission is requested to allow the removal of the rear entry of the structure and new construction to an existing structure (reconstruct rear addition with roof deck, add 3-story stair enclosure, and new rear entry porch) as per plans on file in the Planning Department. Said property is shown on Assessor Map 102 as Lot 56 and lies within the General Residence B (GRB) and Historic Districts.

WORK SESSION

Project architect Jeremiah Johnson and the owner Charles Neal were present. Mr. Johnson reviewed the petition, noting that some interior units would be removed and others renovated, and that the upgrades would be made for life safety improvements.

Ms. Ruedig said she had no problem with the massing but asked what areas of the existing house would be demolished for the addition and infill. Mr. Johnson said the rear entry to the first floor would be removed and the stairway would extend further out into the courtyard. In response to further questions, Mr. Johnson said the wing on the upper part of the floor plan wouldn't change and the rest of the existing footprint would remain. He said the rear on the ell side would slide to the right and would be rebuilt. Mr. Ryan said the massing looked fine and thought the back of the house was considerate. Mr. Adams said the current shed extension ell on the back was a 2-story hip roof structure that would be torn down and reconstructed, but the massing sketch didn't seem to have a roof. Mr. Johnson said it would be a roof deck. Mr. Adams said it appeared that the stairwell had a flat roof. Mr. Johnson agreed but said it was slightly pitched and explained that the top floor had a low ceiling height, so reconstructing a new space had to meet the ceiling height codes. He said breaking the eave line was an unfortunate result of adding the stairway. Mr. Adams said the desired height could be achieved by constructing the roof differently and that it would be a reasonable connection to the eave line of the existing building. City Council Representative Trace said she agreed with Mr. Adams. She asked how much of the rooftop deck intruded into the surrounding properties. Mr. Johnson said it wouldn't intrude because of the property buffer and that the deck would be occupied by only one tenant.

Vice-Chair Wyckoff said it was a good thing to reduce the number of units because it was a dangerous building for five units. He said the exterior staircase was way beyond its life, and he had no problem with the massing because it was all on the back of the structure and the original ell shape of the structure was still visible. He said he was happy with the project. Mr. Sauk-Schubert suggested reversing the stairway to lower the headroom at the rear of the structure.

DECISION OF THE COMMISSION

*City Council Representative Trace moved to **continue** the work session to the June 2 meeting, and Ms. Ruedig seconded. The motion **passed** by unanimous vote, 7-0.*

5. Work Session requested by **Strawbery Banke, Inc., owner**, for property located at **0 Washington Street (Strawbery Banke)**, wherein permission is requested to allow renovations to an existing structure (foundation, clapboards, window and door repairs) and new construction to an existing structure (create new front porch) as per plans on file in the Planning Department. Said property is shown on Assessor Map 108 as Lot 8 and lies within the Mixed Research Office (MRO) and Historic Districts.

City Council Representative Trace recused herself from the work session.

WORK SESSION

Rodney Rowland, Director of Facilities and Environmental Sustainability for Strawbery Banke Museum, was present. He reviewed the petition and gave a brief history of the site. He said the building would be newly interpreted and that there wouldn't be much change to it except for the back, where some missing elements would be restored.

Ms. Doering said the left-hand door in the historic photo looked like an old wooden storm door. Mr. Rowland said the original back doors had storms but that the new ones would not. Ms. Ruedig said the design worked for the time period that was trying to be interpreted. Mr. Ryan asked if the house originally had a wooden shake shingle roof. Mr. Rowland said it did but that it wouldn't be appropriate for the time period being interpreted. Vice-Chair Wyckoff asked if the Victorian posts on the back porch would be copied, and Mr. Rowland said they would.

There was no public comment.

DECISION

The applicant said he would return for a public hearing at the June 2 meeting.

V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 10:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joann Breault
HDC Recording Secretary