

Dear HDC chair and board members:

We are residents of the South End and wholeheartedly supportive of the HDC's mission and legislative charter to protect and preserve what makes our Historic District so very special. We are abutters to the property at 33 Johnson Court and live directly opposite the property in question, on the other side of the South Mill Pond. We are also passionate believers in the importance of renewable energy and consider the choice of individual homeowners to generate their own electricity through the installation of solar arrays. In the larger scheme of things, solar arrays are part of an expedient part of a raft of solutions to address a very serious problem that affects us all.

Every resident should be asking themselves: What can we do personally to make a difference, however small? As technology evolves to produce building materials with incorporated photovoltaics, solar arrays will be replaced with approaches that are more in keeping with traditional aesthetic approaches. In this light, they can and should be seen as a temporary solution, which will fade from our vision much sooner than overground utility infrastructure. We are glad to see the cooperative discussion between the HDC, Planning Board, and City on this topic and respect the differing views. However, we also believe that these are exceptional times that demand that we think outside of our traditional parameters. We urge you to approve this application.

Sincerely,
Gerald Duffy
Effie Malley

Mr. Gilbo,

We understand Al and Kristin Morales have an application before the HDC for a roof solar array at 33 Johnson Court. Our home at 37 South Street is adjacent to their property on South Mill Pond. We fully support the application. Their property is well suited to take advantage of a solar installation.

Sincerely,

Kevin and Lori Charette

To the Portsmouth Historic District Commissioners

We write in strong support of the application currently before you for solar panel installation at 33 Johnson Court.

We have resided in our 240-year-old colonial home at 57 South St since 1976, and for all of those years our rear-facing (North-facing) windows have had a clear view of the house at 33 Johnson Court. We are entirely in favor of this installation for three reasons:

1) The project preserves the architectural integrity of the house. No modifications will be made to the existing structure beyond attaching panels that can easily be removed by future owners.

2) The visual impact from both our home and the principal public view of the home from the Mill Pond Bridge is zero.

3) Our third point—although outside the scope of the HDC ordinance—is a matter of immediate public concern. According to the project design proposal, this installation will remove more than 8 kW of demand from our power grid. This will contribute in a meaningful way to reducing the need for carbon emissions from the peaking power plants that serve our State. Further, the West-facing placement of the proposed panels is ideally suited to offload the grid at the time of maximum power demand in New Hampshire, namely the summer time hours between 3:00pm and 8:00pm.

We urge the commission to approve this application as being both appropriate to the times and in keeping with the ever-evolving landscape of our historic district, while in no way impacting preservation of this 1920 building.

Lew and Cynthia Harriman

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Date: April 29, 2024

Re: Application to add solar panels at 33 Johnson Court

From: Albert & Kristin Morales, homeowners of 33 Johnson Court

Members of the HDC,

We are the homeowners at 33 Johnson, and we appreciate the opportunity to provide some thoughts in support of our application to install solar panels on our home. We'd like to first touch on why we believe the installation meets the criteria for approval; and then, for your consideration, also add some additional thoughts about how to frame the issue of solar energy.

First, given that the HDC's authority over, and the relevant criteria for approval of, solar panels is currently under discussion, we are not certain as to exactly what criteria apply. Nevertheless, we'd like to provide some information to help demonstrate that the solar panels meet any reasonable criteria for approval.

- **The panels will be (at most) only minimally visible.**

- Our home is located at the very end of Johnson Court, a short street that runs into South Mill Pond. The street has a total of 4 homes, and is traveled only by its residents and Amazon delivery trucks. There are no direct neighbors to the north (as in this direction there is first our yard, and then the pond); to the northwest (as the large yard that extends along the pond is ours, and so there is no public way there either). There will be no panels on the more visible side of the house (facing Sanders Fish Market).
- From Johnson Court itself (as well as from the top of the street, at South Street), the panels will be only very minimally visible, if at all. Please see Exhibit A for photos of the home. The panels atop the main roof will be completely invisible. Those on the garage roof may be slightly visible only at a very oblique angle.
- Immediate neighbors (including directly across the street) have written in support of our application.

- **The panels will not call attention to themselves.**

- The panels will be black, and the racking will be black ironridge aluminum
- The manner of placement will be regular, with no disjointed arrays. They will be symmetrically placed and/or evenly spaced.
- The panels will keep to themselves and have promised to cause no disturbances.

- **The panels will not cause damage to or alteration of character defining architectural features.** The home is circa 1920s. The panels will only obscure a view of asphalt roof shingles.
- **The panels will be mounted flush to the roof and remain in the plane of the roof.**

For these reasons, the solar panel application should be approved.

Second, we'd like to provide some broader thoughts about how to view the issue of solar panels in the Historic District. Although we believe the factors set forth above are sufficient to demonstrate that our application should be approved, nevertheless we ask that you please take these additional thoughts into account, to whatever extent you deem appropriate.

Almost all of the discussion regarding solar panels in the Historic District has been framed in terms of combatting climate change. However, we feel that climate change is an incorrect, or at least a substantially incomplete, lens through which to view this issue.

For us the key drivers of this decision are simply practical: (i) cost-effectiveness and home value; and (ii) reducing risk.

Some detail on these two items:

- **Solar energy is cost effective and adds value to homes**
 - About 6 years ago we looked into adding solar panels to our home, but decided not to move forward because it just didn't make economic sense. Recently, however, we looked into it again, and today, it does. Costs have come down, and panel efficiencies have improved.

We calculate that by adding solar, and hence by reducing purchases of electricity, the annual return from this investment will be between about 7-12% (depending on exactly what assumptions you make) --- that's every year, for 25 years. We can substantially lock in the cost of our power for the next 25 years.
 - Also, according to the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, every dollar that a solar panel saves you on your electrical bills increases the value of your home by \$20. And according to Zillow, homes with solar panels sell for four percent higher than those without them.
- **Residential solar reduces risks to the homeowner and the community.** Not only will installing solar allow us to avoid price volatility of the energy we buy, but also protects against power outages and other energy supply interruptions.

- The power grid is increasingly vulnerable to severe weather effects, with lasting power outages becoming more and more common.¹ New England is especially at risk.² In fact, Eversource CEO Joe Nolan was so concerned by this threat that he wrote to the President of the United States, stating that “New England will not have sufficient natural gas to meet power supply needs for the region in the event of a severe cold spell this winter. ***This represents a serious public health and safety threat.***” (emphasis added)
- Adding solar panels not only protects households against power outages when they do happen, they can also help address the growing supply/demand imbalance and help prevent outages from occurring in the first place. (And this is even before the explosion in residential development in the greater Portsmouth area).

Residential solar has evolved – it’s always been something good to do for the environment, but today it’s also just a common-sense, widely-adopted, modern day home system that adds value and increases quality of life. Also, adding solar panels is consistent with the balancing that already occurs between historical authenticity and the demands of modern-day life, such as allowing power lines to our homes, electrical lights, air conditioning units, backup generators and many more items, not to mention asphalt shingled roofs.

In sum: the proposed solar panel installation at our home meets current and proposed criteria for approval; adding solar is highly cost-effective and will add value to our home; it will help us protect against power outages and other energy supply interruptions; and will help improve other aspects of home health and safety. Therefore, we respectfully request that you approve our application to add solar panels at 33 Johnson Court.

Members of the HDC, thank you for your service. Your work is greatly appreciated, and thank you for listening.

Thank you,

Albert and Kristin Morales

¹ The U.S. EPA in its Fifth National Climate Assessment states that “Infrastructure and services are increasingly damaged and disrupted by extreme weather and sea level rise. Risks to energy ... will continue to rise with further climate change, with many infrastructure systems at risk of failing.”

² Just this past year, NERC -- the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (the organization tasked with assuring the reliability and security of the United States’ power supply) -- warned that there is not enough natural gas pipeline and infrastructure in New England to serve all the gas-powered electricity generation and home heating needs.

Exhibit A



From Johnson Court near South Street, looking towards 33 Johnson (on the right). Roofs where panels will be located are not visible.



On Johnson Court in front of 33 Johnson. Main roof remains invisible. Garage roof is at a highly oblique angle.



Directly in front of the garage. The roof here, from this angle, will be the most visible of any part of the installation, from any angle. Note that the small, more highly angled, roof portions on the sides will not have any panels.

Dear HDC members,

We are writing to express our support for the solar project proposed for 33 Johnson Court. We are located to their south and west along South Mill Pond and this is the side on which the panels are to be placed -- away from South and Pleasant Streets. For us, solar panels are a positive addition to the neighborhood combining forward thinking without detracting from the character of the South End.

Sincerely,

Jim Sparrell
Katie Towler
(Residents of the South End for 33 years)

Dear Mr Gilbo,

As the abutting neighbor most affected by the Morales' plan to attach solar panels, we have no issues with this plan. We are across the street and the panels will face our house. That's OK with us.

We hope the City grants approval, as this is a step in the right direction to save energy and money in this ever-increasing energy-cost environment.

Sincerely,

Sean & Lina Tracey, owners
24 Johnson Court

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Sean Tracey

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Dear Portsmouth Historic District Commissioners:

I am writing to express my strong support for Al and Kristin Morales' application to install rooftop solar panels on their home at 33 Johnson Court.

While I embrace the sound intent of the HDC to preserve the architecture of historic buildings, I also believe that in doing so, we should always consider preserving the culture, attitudes, and practical nature of the ancestors who first built and occupied these homes.

Life was very different Portsmouth when these homes were built, and with the exception of the most wealthy people in the community, homes were designed and built with the most practical intentions.

For this reason, I strongly believe that our forbears, if they had the renewable energy technology that we do today, would most certainly be installing them on every home, barn, church, place of business, and outhouse.

To prevent homeowners from installing renewable energy technology because of our current aesthetic belies our true heritage. Considering the tradeoffs, I believe we would be well served to encourage, incentivize, and subsidize installation of solar technologies wherever possible, including in historic districts.

Notwithstanding all of that, I anticipate your judgment about this application will be focused on the visual impact of these panels, so I will also attest that they will be nearly invisible to the neighbors, pedestrians, and vehicle traffic in the South End. There are only four homes with frontage on Johnson Court, with the Morales property being the farthest from South Street and on a dead end.

I am grateful for your being excellent stewards of the historic architecture in Portsmouth.

Thank you,

Craig Welch
77 South Street
Portsmouth