

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, February 15, 2017

4:30 PM

**2nd Floor Committee Room,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Hanspeter Weber, Chair
Dan Bartlett, Vice Chair
Anita Carroll-Weldon
Joslin Kimball Frank
Nancy Proctor

Staff Present:

Tara Kessler, Planner

Members Not Present:

Thomas Powers, Councilor

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Weber called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM and Ms. Kessler conducted roll call.

2) Minutes of Previous Meeting – January 18, 2017

Mr. Bartlett made a motion to approve the minutes of January 18, 2017, which was seconded by Ms. Kimball Frank.

Ms. Carroll-Weldon noted a correction to the minutes on page one in paragraph one under item three: the word “need” in the last sentence should be changed to “needed”. Additionally, in the second paragraph on page two, “In one example, Ms. Kessler noted that the applicant was proposing to use Azek, a plastic composite material, instead of wood, as a replacement material for bell tower louvers,” an addition should be made to reference St. Bernard Church. Finally, in the first paragraph under item eight on page four, a comma should be added after “KSC”.

Ms. Kimball Frank noted a correction to the minutes on page three under item C where the following statement should be removed, “1. After discussion, Ms. Kessler suggested a comma be added after the word metal in the standard, ‘Acceptable materials include brick, stone, terra cotta, wood, metal and cement clapboard.’” Additionally in the Staff Updates, CLG should be expanded to read Certified Local Government.

The minutes of January 18, 2017 were approved unanimously as amended.

3) Continued Review of and Discussion on the Downtown Historic District Regulations

Ms. Kessler shared a handout with Historic District standards related to renewable energy systems. It is a newer section of the Regulations written in 2014 and has already applied to many projects in the Historic District. These standards have mostly been tested with regard to solar installments. This section of the Regulations has some of the most detailed and numerous standards. She indicated the nine design standards that are applied to renewable energy systems. Ms. Kessler asked the Commission to use this time to discuss their thoughts on whether the

standards are working to meet the goals of the Regulations, which include promoting renewable energy downtown while not detracting from the historical significance of buildings. The Commission members took time to review the design standards.

Ms. Kessler noted that staff reports on renewable energy projects can be lengthy because there are so many standards to review. Chair Weber said he would be interested to hear if or what people notice about the various solar arrays that have been installed downtown. Ms. Proctor asked if any have come before the HDC before. Mr. Bartlett replied yes, there have been four or five that were perfectly good installations that met the criteria. These include the solar array on the Monadnock Food Coop, the solar array on the Unitarian Universalist Church on Washington Street, and the City Hall solar array. Some are less successful because of geometry and some throughout town are more visible than others. Ms. Proctor noted that solar technology has evolved a lot and hopefully that will begin to work in favor of reducing impact to historic character. The Commission agreed that it is better to integrate the panels are into the roof.

Mr. Bartlett said that while this is case by case, he thinks it would be shame to cover a historic slate roof covered by solar panels; however, he is unsure of how to regulate that. Ms. Proctor noted it may depend on the orientation of the home and whether the roof faces south. Ms. Kessler said there is not a lot of space for ground mounting in many of the yards in the Historic District. Ms. Kimball Frank agreed that there are very few yards in Historic Downtown and does not think a large structure in a yard would be more appealing, especially where yards are abutted by roads and public areas. Chair Weber noted the City Hall solar array works well because it is a flat roof so it is hardly visible.

Ms. Kimball Frank said her overall comment about the design standards is that they are a mix of prohibitions and guidelines. It might be easier for applicants to first see what the Commission is looking for followed by what is prohibited – right now, it goes back and forth. Ms. Kessler noted there are design guidelines not included on the handout before the Commission. She said it can be reoriented. Ms. Kimball Frank agreed and added the prohibitions still need to be clear. She said the technology not being visible from the public way is a primary goal.

Ms. Kessler asked if the standards address a diverse enough range of renewable energy options; they are very focused on solar. She said perhaps there was a different intent at the time the regulations were written but there are other technologies such as outdoor wood burners, and wind (if it came to Keene). Her research shows that other communities have categorized their regulations by roof, ground, and façade mounted systems. Most of those are also solar focused but have standards specific to the location of the system on the site.

Ms. Kimball Frank said when she reads this, she only thinks of solar. Sections XV.B.1.a-c address the “proposed system” and focus on reducing visibility based on location, but do not specify solar. She expects to only see solar in the near future. Mr. Bartlett added the principal standards are that the unit is behind the building, set back from the roof, not visible, etc.

Ms. Kessler clarified that these standards only apply to renewable energy systems, not utility systems (e.g. HVAC).

Chair Weber said he can envision separating it more between roof and ground mounted systems. He does not envision wind energy coming to Keene because it is a valley but outdoor furnaces are a possibility; they are used elsewhere in the Monadnock region.

Ms. Kimball Frank said the Board wants people to adhere to these standards, so they should be as succinct as possible. Ms. Proctor said standard number four summarizes the goals: “Character-defining features of a historic resource shall be retained and not obstructed from view by the installation of a renewable energy system.” She suggested that should be the beginning statement. Mr. Bartlett agreed and added the standards can be edited to be more user-friendly.

Ms. Carroll-Weldon noted the first paragraph under standard one is difficult to understand. While she already understands the point of the section, it would be difficult for a lay person to follow. Ms. Kessler agreed, noting that due to the length of standards applied in this section of the Regulations, applicants can have the impression there will be many obstacles to obtaining approval.

The Board discussed the following challenges and opportunities regarding the renewable energy system standards of the Regulations:

- Too dense and does not read easily, make more succinct;
- Possible priority ordering of standard one, sections a through f;
- The overall goal is to make clear that the installation should be as minimally visible as possible and not detract from historic character;
- Standards do not adequately address that ground-mounted should also not be visible;
- Possibly list the options briefly: flat roof out of sight, slant roof as invisible as possible, etc.

Ms. Kessler asked if this section is another area of the regulations where graphics could be helpful to the applicants. Mr. Bartlett replied he thinks it is clear enough and does not think graphics would enhance the delivery.

Ms. Carroll-Weldon added the standards address that installations should be done in a way that is easily reversible; she thinks that needs to remain a key point. Chair Weber said that speaks to the slate roof issue. Ms. Kessler agreed perhaps that can be more clearly addressed.

4) Opportunities for Education and Training of Historic District Commission Members

Ms. Kessler noted this conversation started at the last meeting. The NH Preservation Alliance is holding its annual conference on April 21. This is the primary training opportunity offered to Historic District Commissions and Heritage Commission in the state. If Board members would like to attend, they will need to let staff know before March 1st. The Board has a small budget for registration fees and there may be a discount for being members. The focus is on high level preservation planning tools and the organizers think it could be useful for a community like Keene. There will be networking/workshop sessions with other communities in the state to pose questions and gain insight. The organizers had minimal experience with the issue of transformer equipment in historic districts, but are looking for resources to send to Ms. Kessler. Ms. Kessler will share a link with the Board with further information. Ms. Kimball Frank noted she will not be able to attend. She said she has attended several of these conferences and she thinks it would be better to have someone come to Keene to lead a specific training with the Board. She recently found guidelines of how to operate as a member of an HDC, questions you should ask, etc. She thinks that this is the type of training needed by the Commission. Ms. Kessler added the Alliance is also open to organizing a specific training. The Board agreed to move forward pursuing a specified training.

Ms. Kessler noted she and Chair Weber met and discussed inviting someone to come speak to the Board on windows and window technology. David Wright, who was on the HDC in its infancy

and works with Millwork Masters in Swanzey, will be coming to present on historic windows at the March meeting. Ms. Kessler shared Keene's standards with Mr. Wright and informed him of the many requests the City gets for vinyl windows. It would be good for the Board to understand other options available for maintaining design standards.

Ms. Kimball Frank agreed and added another useful speaker topic would be on the architectural features of various types of buildings – what defines the placement doors, windows, etc. on different types of buildings. She has a piece of literature by the late Rick Monohan on the downtown cityscape of Keene and the types of windows, doors, etc. during certain time periods. She will try to locate her copy. Chair Weber noted Jim Garvin, the former State Historic Officer, has published a lot on the building history of NH and could be a great resource. Ms. Kessler will look into opportunities.

The Heritage Commission received a grant from the Certified Local Government Program to implement a three part series on 1) researching the history of your home, 2) history of Keene architectural development, and 3) tools for rehabilitating historic homes. They are working with the Division of Historic Resources to find speakers and confirm a budget, but the Heritage Commission is interested in connecting these workshops to more creative and innovative ways to engage people in Keene. Ms. Carroll-Weldon will continue communication with the Chair, Rose Carey. The Horatio Colony Museum will also be offering a program on researching your home in summer 2017. She has been in contact with Sally Zimmerman from Historic New England to be the speaker, but has not contracted with her yet. Ms. Carroll-Weldon agreed it may be possible to change the date to fall or next spring to collaborate with this workshop series. Ms. Kessler noted diverse advertising and media will be used to promote these events. Ms. Kimball Frank asked if Liz Durfee Hengen could be the speaker. Ms. Kessler replied that while she knows a great deal about these buildings, her fee may be too high.

5) Staff Updates

Ms. Kessler shared an email from the Portsmouth Historic District on how they deal with transformers in their downtown. Their standards are not very specific and they have general standards with regard to modern landscaping features, equipment, and small structures. It is similar to Keene's standards. They have some exemptions and if the project does not meet all exemptions, full Board approval is required. Ms. Kessler also learned that Manchester does not have a Historic District, but they do have a Heritage Commission. However, Ms. Kessler noted that they do have a transformer painted with birch trees in their downtown, which is another way some communities are mitigating the visual impacts of transformers. She has found a best management practices guidebook for the placement of above ground transformers, which she will distribute with Commission members. Most is what the Board has already seen (hedges, fences, ivy screen) for visual screening. Ms. Kimball Frank noted the problem with painted transformers is that they are not maintained. Ms. Kessler will also research if there are cities with such art that follows historical themes.

Ms. Carroll-Weldon suggested establishing an award or recognition program for outstanding examples of historic preservation taking place in Keene. A few examples included the Putnam Foundation building on Court Street and St. Bernard Church. She asked if that is in the purview of this Commission. Ms. Kessler replied it would be a better discussion for the Heritage Commission but the committees often work together, and the Heritage Commission has talked about something similar. The Board agreed it is a great idea and Ms. Kessler will include it on the March meeting agenda for the Heritage Commission.

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Ms. Kimball Frank noted the need for clear guidelines to approve demolishing historical buildings. She looked back in her notes and found demolition from neglect. She said Jaffrey, Hollis, and Amherst all have specific regulations. In their regulations, demolition should be avoided in all significant historical structures and all alternative solutions should be considered. If no solution is found, the applicant will get authorization only if it is documented as unstable by a licensed engineer, the EPA, etc. These cities are not letting people use neglect as a reason to tear down historic buildings.

6) Next Meeting – March 15, 2017

7) Adjourn

Hearing no further business, Chair Weber adjourned the meeting at 5:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Tara Kessler, Planner