

**ADOPTED**

**City of Keene**  
**New Hampshire**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Wednesday, July 19, 2017**

**4:30 PM**

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

**Members Present:**

Hanspeter Weber, Chair  
Hans Porschitz  
Peter Poanessa  
Nancy Proctor  
Councilor Thomas Powers  
Andrew Weglinski (Arrived Late)

**Staff Present:**

Tara Kessler, Planner

**Members Not Present:**

Joslin Kimball Frank

**1) Call to order and Roll Call**

Chair Weber called the meeting to order at 4:31 PM and Ms. Kessler conducted roll call.

**2) Minutes of Previous Meeting – June 21, 2017**

Ms. Proctor made a motion to approve the minutes of June 21, 2017, which was seconded by Mr. Poanessa.

Mr. Porschitz noted he had mentioned the curling of composite slate, not Chair Weber.

The motion to approve the minutes of June 21, 2017 as amended carried unanimously.

**3) Public Hearings**

- a. **COA-2017-05 – 100 Main St. TD Bank** - Applicant, Mark Fraser of Eversource, on behalf of owner, TD Bank, N.A. Bank of New Hampshire, requests the installation of a 500kVa pad mounted transformer at 100 Main St. The property is Tax Map Parcel #023-02-005. This property is ranked as a **Non-Contributing Resource**.

Ms. Kessler recommended this application be accepted as complete. Councilor Powers made a motion to accept application COA-2017-05 as complete, which was seconded by Mr. Poanessa, and carried unanimously.

Chair Weber welcomed Mark Fraser and Laurel Boivin of Eversource. Ms. Boivin explained the Eversource engineering staff has been designing this system in preparation for this application. This is part of a multi-year \$4 Million effort to improve distribution to the Central Business District, which includes the Historic District, in an effort to improve reliability and safety. The main goal of the project is to replace obsolete equipment under the sidewalks of Main Street with new aboveground equipment behind Main Street. This work will help maintain the quality and aesthetics of Main Street, while accommodating the high water table in Keene. The transformer in

question will serve the following customers: TD Bank, Clark Mortensen, In the Company of Flowers, Amici's, and Kings Garden. This transformer installation will bring the project to 80% completion.

Mr. Fraser indicated this transformer is proposed in the grass island behind TD Bank. This proposed location is close enough to successfully deliver service, while not interfering with Bank parking. The transformer is 76" tall and 70"X70" wide and is similar to a previously approved transformer on Commercial Street. As much vegetation as possible will be retained on the island and holly-type screening will added. The holly bushes will be tiered to fully screen the transformer, and this type of shrub will withstand most seasons of the year. Vegetation in this location must be different than in some other areas in order to withstand the salt, sand, plowing, and traffic in the area.

Mr. Poanessa asked about the color of the transformer. Mr. Fraser replied it will be dark green, like others in the City. Mr. Weglinski asked who maintains the shrubbery. Mr. Fraser replied Eversource maintains for the first year, after which TD Bank will be responsible. He noted that they currently maintain their landscaping very well. Mr. Fraser continued, stating that there were many identification numbers on transformers in the past, but with feedback from this Commission, his staff has been painting over any unnecessary markings on them.

Mr. Porschitz asked if each of the 25 underground pieces of equipment will be replaced aboveground. Mr. Fraser replied no, only a total of 11-12 aboveground transformers will be needed to replace the underground equipment. Ms. Boivin added that some development has increased Downtown since the project began, requiring additional equipment in some locations, such as near the Middle School. Eversource has also tried to look at future growth projections of the City and work closely with City Departments to predict where future development will need to be served.

Chair Weber asked if growth needs will be as high with increased energy efficient sources in the future. Ms. Boivin replied there are ebbs and flows in energy use, so more efficient improvements will help, but some businesses will always use more electricity than others. There is not a lot of manufacturing in the Central Business District but other businesses, like those with a lot of computer equipment, still require a lot of electricity. Mr. Fraser added on the macro level, efficiency efforts could make a difference, but there will still be pockets of the City that have to meet peak loads.

Chair Weber asked if anything can be done to ensure maintenance of screening around transformers. He noted that in most locations the screening looks great, but some are not well-maintained after several years. Ms. Boivin said there has been discussion of finding volunteers to maintain areas around old transformers than have no screening or, potentially, an organization Eversource can partner with in the Community Grant Contribution Program. Eversource is aware of some older transformer locations the community would like cleaned-up. Mr. Fraser added that if the property owner does not maintain their property it is outside Eversource's responsibility, as transformers are leased to property owners who are responsible for maintaining their property. Chair Weber expressed satisfaction with the proposal and thanked the representatives for the screening efforts on new transformers.

Mr. Porschitz asked as technology evolves with renewables and microgrids, if this infrastructure will still be usable. Specifically, can these transformers accommodate such development or will another reset of equipment be required. Mr. Fraser replied that renewable energy sources, such as solar, can be accommodated unless they are very large. As far as microgrids, Eversource and the

City have not gone that far yet. The system has been upgraded from 4kv low voltage to 12kv, so there is already more capacity, power, and flexibility. As long as there is not an overflow of power in or out, these transformers will work.

Mr. Weglinski asked if property owners are leasing transformers and making income off them being there, and if an agreement that they will maintain them is possible. Mr. Poanessa said he thinks as long as the bank is in business, this transformer will be well-maintained. Mr. Weglinski asked about the life of these transformers. Mr. Fraser replied the lifespan is typically more than 20 years. Ms. Boivin indicated that conversations take place with each property owner to ensure they are aware of the expectation that they will maintain the area around the transformer after the first growing season. She clarified that this application is from TD Bank, not Eversource, and they know the screening requirements in advance. Ms. Kessler added that these are plans the Planning Board and HDC hold applicants/owners accountable for, but enforcement can be challenging. Ms. Boivin noted the easement language with property owners can include anything with regard to responsibility of the landowner for maintenance; however, trust is placed in property owners that they understand requirements and will comply. Mr. Fraser said he and his team make a serious effort to ensure these agreements are well-established. Eversource has invested a lot in this effort and they want the City to be happy so that a good relationship is maintained and both benefit.

Ms. Kessler noted the HDC regulations relevant to this application:

1. *New buildings or structures shall be sited so that the existing pattern of the historic streetscape – setbacks, spacing, massing, height, orientation – in which they are located is not disrupted.*
  - a. This location is adjacent to Cypress Street, not Main Street, and most of this area is composed of the rear of buildings that front Main Street or of non-contributing buildings. Staff does not believe this proposal will disrupt the pattern of the historic streetscape.
2. *Every effort shall be made to position [equipment] as low to the ground as possible, and where they are not readily visible from the public right-of-way.*
  - a. Ms. Kessler noted that it can be difficult in area such as the one proposed to fully screen the equipment; especially, as the rear of the bank building is exposed to Cypress Street and a parking area. She noted that the existing landscaped island and plans for screening should limit visibility from the right-of-way.

With no comments, Chair Weber closed the public hearing.

Mr. Weglinski made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Powers and carried unanimously.

The Historic District Commission approves COA-2017-05 for the installation of a pad-mounted transformer and concrete pad at the rear parking lot (east side) of TD Bank located at 100 Main Street (TMP #046-01-004) as described in the project narrative and as shown on the drawings, “TD Bank, Section D&E, Existing Conditions & Proposed Site Conditions” dated March 28, 2017 and prepared by Mark Fraser, with the following condition: Submit details of the proposed landscaping type, size, and location to the Planning Department for review and approval.

- b. Historic District Commission Fee Schedule – the City of Keene Planning Department is proposing to amend the Keene Historic District Commission Fees, which have not been revised since the Downtown Historic District was established in 2004. The proposed revisions include changes to the application**

**fee and legal notice fee. This revised fee schedule, dated July 10, 2017, is available for review in the Planning Department on the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor of City Hall.**

Ms. Kessler indicated the City Manager has asked all relevant City Departments and/or Boards to review their fee schedules for necessary changes or updates. There is currently no fee for HDC applications, whether minor (staff review only) or major (review before the full Board). The only fees paid by applicants are abutter's notice fees – notice to all direct abutters, based on USPS certified mail rates and a flat fee of \$9 for a legal ad to be posted in the paper. The actual cost for the legal notice is based on the number of words or space in the newspaper. The City is losing money because the legal notice fee is usually much more than \$9. The Planning Department proposes the following updates to the HDC Fees:

- Major Project Application
  - Formal Review: \$50
  - Request for modifications to an approved Certificate of Appropriateness: \$50
  - Request to extend expiration of conditionally approved Certificates of Appropriateness: \$25 for each request Certificate
  - Abutter Notice Fee: Current USPS certified mail rate
  - Legal Notice Fee: \$25
- Minor Project Application (Administrative Review)
  - Application review: \$25

These proposed fees came from research on the fees for other NH Historic District Commissions. Some cities have no fees, such as Rochester, Bedford, and Somersworth. Some Cities have no Minor Project Application Fee but do charge a fee for Major Project Applications: Sanbornton (\$30), Nashua (\$30), Bristol (\$50), Claremont (\$50), and Amherst (\$60). Portsmouth is the only city to charge a Minor Project Fee (\$100) in addition to a much higher Major Project Fees based on size of the residence and type of construction, which can reach up to \$5,000. However, Portsmouth is a much larger municipality and is not comparable to Keene. The Planning Department based their proposed fees on similarly sized cities such as Claremont.

Ms. Kessler continued, stating that while the Planning Department feels these proposed fees are fair when compared to other cities, they have tried to keep the fees reasonable so as to not discourage applicants from coming before the Board. While these fees will not recuperate the full cost of review by staff, it is a step forward. In the last year, the HDC saw 14 Major Projects and 8 Minor Projects, which equated to 290 staff hours or approximately \$10,000 per year cost for the City.

Mr. Poanessa questioned the idea of charging a minimum fee plus a dollar amount per cost of the project (for example, \$6 per every \$1,000 of project cost); he suggested that fees should be different for large versus small projects. Ms. Kessler replied that HDC applications occur prior to the permit phase and applicants usually do not have a sound cost estimate of a project at this time. Also, very little new development comes before the HDC. It is more often projects that involve redevelopment, minor modifications, and repairs.

Ms. Proctor asked where the fees will go. Ms. Kessler replied to the Planning Department budget to recover cost where possible. Ms. Proctor, Councilor Powers, and Mr. Poanessa expressed support for the proposed fees. Mr. Weglinski asked for an example of a Minor Project. Ms. Kessler replied any project for less than two windows or one door, tree removal, fence installation, etc. On most Minor Project applications, she still consults with Chair Weber to confirm the application does not need to come before the full Board for review.

Councilor Powers made a motion to adopt the proposed fee schedule for the Historic District Commission dated July 10, 2017, which was seconded by Mr. Poanessa, and carried unanimously.

**4) Election of Vice Chair**

With her support, Chair Weber nominated Ms. Kimball Frank as Vice Chair. She is in her second term on the Commission and has a great deal of experience. Councilor Powers seconded the nomination, which carried unanimously.

**5) Staff Updates**

The Heritage Commission is holding workshops beginning in the fall.

- September 14 at 7:00 PM – How to Research Your Old Home
  - At the Cheshire County Historical Society
  - A collaboration between Historic New England and the Horatio Colony House Museum
- March 2018 – Old House Do's and Don'ts
  - If members have contacts of any vendors who can be present for homeowners to learn about different restoration techniques, they can send those contacts to Ms. Kessler.

**6) Next Meeting – August 16, 2017**

**7) Adjourn**

Hearing no further business, Chair Weber adjourned the meeting at 5:28 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,  
Tara Kessler, Planner