

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, November 20, 2024

4:30 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Hope Benik, Vice Chair
Anthony Ferrantello
Louise Zerba
Russ Fleming, Alternate
David Bergeron, Alternate
Peter Poanessa, Alternate

Staff Present:

Evan Clements, Planner

Members Not Present:

Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair
Councilor Catherine Workman

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Vice Chair Benik called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM. Roll call was conducted. Vice Chair Benik stated that today, Mr. Fleming, Mr. Bergeron, and Mr. Poanessa are voting members.

2) Minutes of August 21, 2024 and October 16, 2024

Mr. Fleming made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of August 21, 2024. Mr. Ferrantello seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Mr. Ferrantello made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of October 16, 2024. Mr. Fleming seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Continued Public Hearing

- A) COA-2024-04 – New Entry Addition, 33 Center St - Applicant Dan Bartlett, on behalf of owner William Brown, proposes to construct an ~60-sf addition to the existing ~1,156-sf building located at 33 Center St (TMP #568-015-000). The parcel is 0.10-ac in size and is ranked as a Contributing Resource in the Downtown Transition District.**

Vice Chair Benik introduced COA-2024-04 and asked to hear from staff.

Evan Clements, Planner, stated that this application came before the Board in October, at which time the Board deliberated extensively on the application and gave the applicant recommendations on how to move this application forward. He continued that some HDC members present today were not present at that meeting. He asks that they be considerate to the applicant and respectful of what was conveyed to them at the October meeting, and to try to keep the deliberation relevant to those previous comments.

Vice Chair Benik asked to hear from the applicant.

Dan Bartlett, Architect, and William Brown, owner, introduced themselves. Mr. Bartlett stated that he presumes the Board has received the updated plans. He continued that he and Mr. Brown sat down and reevaluated the project comprehensively. They also had the advantage of some insight as to the costs of what they had originally proposed. The cost was more excessive than they had expected. Thus, for many reasons, they elected to eliminate the addition altogether, and reconfigure the interior accordingly. With this change, the big change they are proposing is to move the front door (which is currently) six feet above grade in the front with a wooden stairway up to it, (by) getting rid of that and reorienting the main entry to the east side of the building. That is a significant shift. Traditionally, this building had a front door facing Center St. That is not possible, due to setbacks and other reasons, not least of which is the big addition that was added years ago. He and Mr. Brown had no control over that and do not particularly like it, but it is there.

Mr. Bartlett continued that this attempt (with the updated plans) takes into account the HDC's comments from the previous hearing. They were trying to emphasize the difference between the existing and the brick and the new with a bold use of glass, metal, and Corten siding in order to clearly differentiate it. It is a technique used in historical preservation, where you are clearly not trying to pretend that you are old and are presenting something new. However, that whole discussion is off the table now, because they are not doing the addition. Therefore, they are not using Corten steel or any other steel siding, nor are they doing a glass storefront.

Mr. Bartlett continued that they are using a more traditional main entry, which is now on the side of the house instead of the street-facing side. They are emphasizing that corner with a contrasting color. Looking around the immediate neighborhood, they found that this color was a fairly common value – a dark value. They picked a shade of green that they felt was traditional and compatible with the brick. It goes with the existing color. Regarding the fenestration part, they used the existing double-hung window. They are just recreating that. They are creating a glass wall of a sort, using the existing double-hung style and size. They felt strongly about trying to catch a glimpse of the original brick building, which everyone loves and wants to see. Maybe only Mr. Williams will be able to appreciate that south façade when he comes home at night. He does not expect the public to be writing letters to the editor about how great it is that they can now see this little sliver of the building, but the point is to attempt to do the right thing, and to create a nice contemporary feeling inside the space. Again, not on the street-facing side, but the side face. As you can see from the drawing, they have made it into the corner of the building. The idea is for the corner element to be like a bookend or acknowledgement of the

entry. They are leaving the rest as it is, which gives a symmetry (in certain places) and a balance of the glass and darker green, in the smaller element, with the larger element that is less ornate.

Ms. Zerba stated that the drawings all say “south elevation.” She asked for clarification. Mr. Bartlett replied that that is a typo. Mr. Ferrantello replied that “one” is south, “two” is east, “three” is north, and “four” is west.

Mr. Brown stated that he does not know if the agenda packet has the photos he distributed last time. He continued that he wants to explain the reason for putting the windows where they are. The house was built in 1820 and the kitchen was on the ground floor, where it has been ever since. The old entrance is way up on the first floor. The ground floor is barely a basement, only about a foot or two below the ground. The basement room where the kitchen is has big windows just like upstairs. The utility room side has just a small basement window. The windows are now closed up, but the frames and glass are there. He intends to open those up again and create a little sitting area just outside the kitchen, in the new addition.

Mr. Brown continued that there has always been a door, as you can see in a photo taken in the 1960s when they tore down the old porch, for access to the kitchen. He wants to restore that door; there is a big metal one there now. When you come in the front door, the windows are there to add light and make that a pleasant sitting area. You have a choice of walking upstairs straight ahead, or going to the right and walking downstairs. It would be more accessible for people this way, as he is getting older and has friends who would prefer to not go up the stairs. Having the glass there makes it a more pleasant sitting area and allows you to see out, at least partly, from the kitchen.

Vice Chair Benik asked if the HDC members had further questions for the applicant. Mr. Fleming stated that he is curious about the windows. He continued that Mr. Brown said he was getting larger windows. He asked if those are the ones shown on the east elevation. He asked where the kitchen is.

Mr. Bartlett replied that it is in the old part of the house, to the north of the addition. He continued that the kitchen is in the area that is supposed to be colored as brick. It is on the east side, but not in the part they are adding. Mr. Brown will look out the brick openings where there used to be windows, and through that, see the windows that you see on the east elevation.

Mr. Ferrantello stated that he wants to applaud the applicant. He continued that he thinks he dominated the corner. There is no way you could miss the corner’s new entrance in the east. Not doing the addition butting out accomplishes what the applicant had wanted to accomplish and yet gives a clear view of the old brick. He applauds all of that, and how the applicant did everything within the box instead of jutting out. It is remarkable.

Vice Chair Benik asked if the HDC had further comments. Hearing none, she asked for staff comments.

Mr. Clements stated that he does not have anything else to add. He continued that he knows that originally, this project was about utility of the space, and with the change of removing the addition, he just wants to confirm with the applicant that this plan will work for him. The applicant had wanted the addition to help with the interior layout, and for cost reasons, he had to reorganize. It sounds like he will still be getting that hoped-for utility out of the interior space.

Mr. Brown replied that he thinks so. He continued that it is a little tighter than before, as the previous plan had an extra four feet that would be part of an open atrium. Now, that will be smaller, but given the cost, he will deal with it and it will be fine. He thinks it will still be functional as a pleasant sitting place.

Mr. Bartlett replied that he is sure it will be. He continued that the addition was originally required because they did not want to disturb any of the second floor of the space. If he left that floor in place, the floor would be about head height upon entering. It physically would not work. You cannot get into the building with a normal, code-compliant door. They pulled the whole thing out for other reasons, but it helped solve that and helped maintain the entire floor area, except where the stairs were. In the process of looking at it and going through these designs, they decided to go ahead and remove a portion of the existing second floor, thus creating the required headroom. The headroom will now be available within the footprint. The addition, from a headroom perspective, was superfluous. By that point, they had gotten to like it, and found other reasons to want to do that, which is why they pursued it. They even pursued it with the builder a little bit. They were headed down that direction, but after hearing the comments (from the HDC), they took another hard look at it and concluded there was no physical, compelling, absolute reason, now that they have agreed to open up the floor anyway. Mr. Brown loses second floor space, but that is a small compromise, which is why they are comfortable with the revisions that meet the program.

Vice Chair Benik asked if there was any public comment. Hearing none, she closed the public hearing and asked the HDC to deliberate.

Mr. Ferrantello stated that if the HDC approves this, the name of the project will change from “addition” to “improvements,” and the plan set title “2nd floor addition” has to change to “Brown residence.” Mr. Clements replied yes, that is a clean-up of the language in the suggested motion, to reflect the revisions.

Mr. Fleming stated that this (plan) is much more to the HDC’s liking. He continued that they had some issues last month, as the plan seemed too modern in some aspects. He thinks the architect here has done a great job making this work and making it fit into the Historic District a lot better.

Mr. Ferrantello made a motion for the Historic District Commission to approve COA-2024-04 to allow for the improvements on the property located at 33 Center Street, as presented in the plan set titled “Brown Addition, 33 Center Street,” prepared by DB Architects LLC, received 9/13/2024, revised 10/22/2024, at a scale of ¼” = 1’ and in the application and supporting

materials dated 9/13/2024 and 9/26/2024 with no conditions. Mr. Fleming seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

4) **Staff Updates**

A) **Joint Heritage Commission and Historic District Commission Meeting – January 2025**

Mr. Clements stated that the HDC and the HC had a joint meeting earlier this year that was very successful. He continued that it is a great way to reconnect the two bodies. They will have a joint meeting again in January 2025. The HDC chair and HC chair will talk offline to figure out the date. The two bodies will have a joint project – the HDC did a Certified Local Government (CLG) grant to do a property inventory of the 2011-2012 district extension, as well as looking at some properties that are in the district but not yet ranked. The grant funds were used to hire an architectural consultant, who did a great job. Now, they need to actually apply a local ranking to the properties, of “incompatible,” “non-contributing,” “contributing,” or “primary resource.” That is what they will be doing at the joint meeting in January. He will distribute the ranking forms in December.

5) **New Business**

Vice Chair Benik asked if there was any new business. (No).

6) **Upcoming Dates of Interest**

A) **Next HDC Meeting: December 18, 2024 – 4:30 PM, TBD**

B) **HDC Site Visit: December 18, 2024 – 3:30 PM (To be confirmed)**

Vice Chair Benik asked if it is correct that they do not have anything up for review. Mr. Clements replied that is correct; they do not have any applications and the deadline has passed for that meeting. He continued that they most likely will not meet in December.

7) **Adjourn**

There being no further business, Vice Chair Benik adjourned the meeting at 4:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Evan J. Clements, AICP
Planner