

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, April 19, 2023

4:30 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Russ Fleming, Chair
Sophia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Vice Chair
Councilor Catherine Workman
Anthony Ferrantello, Alternate (Voting)

Staff Present:

Evan Clements, Planner

Members Not Present:

Hope Benik
Gregg Kleiner
David Bergeron, Alternate
Peter Poanessa, Alternate

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Fleming called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM. Mr. Clements called the roll. Chair Fleming asked Mr. Ferrantello, alternate, to serve as a voting member for this meeting. Mr. Ferrantello accepted.

2) Minutes of January 18, 2023

Councilor Workman made a motion to approve the minutes of the January 18, 2023 meeting. Vice Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

3) Adoption of 2023 Meeting Schedule

Chair Fleming confirmed the 2023 meeting schedule called for the Commission to meet at 4:30 PM on the third Wednesday of each month in Council Chambers.

Vice Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos made a motion to adopt the 2023 meeting schedule as presented. Councilor Workman seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4) Advice & Comment

A) Apartments – 104 Emerald Street

Mr. Clements advised that the applicant was not present. In response to a question from Chair Fleming, Mr. Clements stated that the application provided information about proposed changes to the interior of the building but little information on proposed changes to the exterior of the building. At Mr. Clements' recommendation, Chair Fleming declined to have the Commission discuss the application without the applicant present to provide more information. He did, however, ask Mr. Clements for clarification about whether the existing building is a two-story or three-story building. Mr. Clements speculated the roof would have to be raised to make the third floor usable as apartments.

5) **Public Hearing**

- A) **COA-2016-01, Modification #2 – 85 Emerald Street – Exterior Renovations: Applicant and owner 85 Emerald Street LLC, proposes exterior renovations to the building at 85 Emerald St (TMP #584-072-000), including residing the building, renovating the existing entrances, and replacing the existing windows with new larger windows. The property is ranked as a Non-Contributing Resource and is located in the Downtown Growth District.**

Chair Fleming read the above summary into the record and asked Mr. Clements if the application was complete. Mr. Clements responded that the applicant requested an exemption from submitting a proposed conditions plan. Staff concluded that exempting the plan has no bearing on the merits of the application and recommended the Commission grant the exemption and accept the application as complete.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos made a motion to grant the exemption and accept the application as complete. Mr. Ferrantello seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Chair Fleming commenced the public hearing and invited the applicant to introduce herself and discuss the project. Debra Rivest stated that she has owned the building for about six years.

It was originally used for coal storage, and before or during the 1950s, the building was expanded using cinder block construction. Over the years, upgrades have been made. It has been used for office space, including for doctors, lawyers, a plumbing and heating business, and a drug testing business. The building still has single pane windows from the 1970s. Not much has been done to the building since then, although she has replaced the roof and installed solar panels and a new heating system. The building needs more natural light, so she would like to replace the small windows with larger ones, especially on the southern and western sides of the building. This will help reduce electricity costs. She wants to replace the siding on the building. She wants to pave the hard pack parking lot to reduce ongoing maintenance costs. She wants to renovate the exterior so she can lease out units to different businesses.

Chair Fleming asked about the second floor with small windows. Ms. Rivest responded that it is office space. She has already replaced the fluorescent lights with LED lights to reduce energy

use. Chair Fleming noted how fortunate it is that the building has ample parking. He asked about the proposed garage door on the west side of the building. She responded that it is an existing garage door, noting there is not a lot of ceiling height, and she wants to keep a wide doorway as a selling point to potential tenants needing a wide doorway, like contractors, appliance stores, or furniture stores.

There being no questions for Ms. Rivest from the Commission, at Chair Fleming's invitation, Mr. Clements provided a staff report on the application. He noted that the building is currently utilized as a mixed-use tenant space. The applicant is proposing to upgrade the existing façade with cement clapboard, replace the windows with energy efficient options, and enlarge the window openings to allow more light into the spaces. The existing parking lot will be repaved in the same configuration. There are existing mechanical units located at the northwest corner of the building. The mechanicals will be moved to the eastern side of the building and screened from view using the same materials as the proposed facade.

Mr. Clements noted the building is a noncontributing resource, so the regulations are not as strict. He stated HDC Regulation 21.6.2.A, which provides, "Materials used for siding shall be those that are common in the district. Acceptable materials include brick, stone, terra cotta, wood, metal and cement clapboard," is relevant. Ms. Rivest is proposing to use cement clapboard siding and metal awnings. Mr. Clements concluded that it appears the project meets the standard.

He further reported that HDC Regulation 21.6.2.D, which provides, "Alterations shall not further disrupt or detract from the established historic architectural character of the surrounding area, nor to the relationship of any existing historical resources, including site features, on the site," is relevant. He noted the surrounding buildings include commercial strip malls and residential mixed-use buildings and use a variety of materials, including cinder block and brick construction. He noted the building across the street at 80 Emerald Street is currently an unranked brick construction apartment building with a notable façade with many large windows. He asked the Commission to deliberate and determine whether the proposed façade meets the standard.

Mr. Clements indicated it might be appropriate to condition approval on Ms. Rivest providing more information on the lighting fixtures she proposes to use. She responded that she could return when she is able to obtain the cut sheets for them but before she starts work on the project. He told her including the condition would mean she would not have to do so; she would just have to provide the cut sheets to him to make sure they meet the City's Site Development Standards. Ms. Rivest also noted that the metal beam across the second floor of the building has to stay for structural purposes, so she decided to include large windows above and below the beam.

Chair Fleming sought questions from the public. There were no questions. He therefore closed the public hearing, so the Commission could deliberate.

Mr. Ferrantello expressed his opinion that the proposed project does not fit into the neighborhood but that the regulations allow the use of cement clapboards and large windows because the building is noncontributing resource. He does not believe it detracts from the area, though. Chair Fleming commented on the wood brackets Ms. Rivest is proposing to add to the exterior of the building, which seem to correspond with the large wooden silos nearby.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos made a motion to approve COA-2016-01, Mod. 2, exterior renovations including residing the building, renovating the existing entrances, and replacing the existing windows with new larger windows on the property located at 85 Emerald Street, as presented in the plan set titled “Exterior Renovations for 85 Emerald St” prepared by kcs Architects, with a scale of ¼” = 1’, and application and supporting materials received February 10, 2023 with the following condition subsequent: Prior to the issuance of a building permit, a cutsheet of the proposed lighting fixture, that meets the City’s lighting site development standards, shall be submitted to the Community Development Department for review and approval. Councilor Workman seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Rivest thanked the Commission. She said she hopes to complete the project by fall, but the dearth of available contractors could delay completion. In response to Chair Fleming’s inquiry, Mr. Clements stated the approval is good for at least one year and can be easily extended, if necessary. He advised Ms. Rivest that he would send her more information with the Certificate of Appropriateness.

- A) COA-2009-24, Modification #2 – 24 Vernon Street – Monadnock Peer Support – Exterior Renovations: Applicant and owner Monadnock Area Peer Support Agency, proposes exterior renovations to the building at 24 Vernon St (TMP #568-058-000), including changes to the exterior siding, the creation of a new primary entrance, the replacement of all existing windows, the installation of a rooftop solar array, and a rooftop garden space. The property is 0.28 ac and is ranked as a Primary Resource in the Downtown Core District.**

Chair Fleming read the above summary into the record and asked Mr. Clements if the application was complete. Mr. Clements responded that the applicant requested an exemption from submitting product specification sheets. Staff concluded that exempting such sheets have no bearing on the merits of the application and recommended the Commission grant the exemption and accept the application as complete.

Councilor Workman made a motion to accept the application as complete with the requested exemption. Mr. Ferrantello seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Chair Fleming opened the public hearing and invited the applicant representatives to introduce themselves and discuss the project. Christine Allen, executive director of Monadnock Peer Support Agency (“the Agency”), and Timothy Samson, Samson Architects, introduced themselves. They distributed some handouts to the Commission.

Ms. Allen explained that the Agency's 13,000-square-foot building includes a peer support agency and crisis center. The Agency received a \$750,000 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to make improvements to the building to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Agency was invited to apply for a \$1,000,000 Community Development Finance Authority (CDFA) grant, as well. It plans to submit a CDFFA grant application the next day. Ms. Allen is confident the Agency will receive the grant.

Ms. Allen stated the building is a historic building. In meeting with Commission about three months prior, there was a recommendation for the Agency to bring the façade of the building back to its original appearance. The Agency was unable to find any photographs of the original building, though. The building is across from the Keene Fire Department. White vinyl clapboard covers the brick underneath. Keene Housing and 911 dispatch are adjacent to the building. The Agency wants to match those buildings' brick façades, so the three buildings look like one building again, as it was in the past.

Mr. Sampson stated the Agency initially planned to cover the building with a new brick façade and install new windows. The Agency submitted a sample brick that is a close match to the brick on the other buildings. At that time, the Agency did not know there was brick under the clapboards. He noted that the grey area below the clapboards appears to be constructed of 8-inch-by-16-inch concrete masonry units (CMUs). Per Ms. Allen, the Agency received a quote from Bergeron Construction to reface the entire building with brick, but doing so may not be necessary. She noted that the Agency plans to replace the door with a door similar to that of Keene Housing, so the three adjacent buildings look uniform. Mr. Sampson noted the Agency is hoping the original lintels and sill blocks are salvageable. In response to Chair Fleming's inquiry, Ms. Allen responded that the Agency wants to save as much brick as possible. She is not certain about the condition of the bricks underneath the clapboard, although they appear the same as the brick on the adjacent buildings and in good condition overall. She noted, however, that there might be damage from wood being nailed into some of the bricks. The Agency plans to preserve as much original brick as possible and make sure the building looks continuous with the adjacent buildings.

Chair Fleming asked if there were any questions for the Agency representatives. Mr. Ferrantello opined that the brick might be in decent condition, since it has been covered with clapboards, but noted it would take some discovery to determine the condition of the 100-year-old bricks. Ms. Allen noted that the quote the Agency received assumed that all the brick would be replaced, but the Agency now plans to keep as much of the original brick as possible and match any new brick to the old brick.

Chair Fleming asked about the CDBG the Agency received. Ms. Allen responded that the project is shovel ready. The Agency did a lot of work for the CDBG application, including an environmental assessment, energy audit, and traffic study. This will help with getting the CDFFA

grant. Indeed, the Agency is using the CDBG grant as the match for the CDFA grant. Ms. Allen expressed great confidence about the Agency receiving the CDFA grant.

Mr. Clements gave a staff report on the project. The Agency proposes to remove the vinyl siding and either repair the existing brick or veneer it with new brick, if necessary. It proposes to install a 3-foot-6-inch parapet wall with a grey concrete façade on the roof. The Agency proposes to remove and fill in the second-floor entrance on Vernon Street. It proposes to install a window in place of the door. It proposes to replace existing windows with energy-efficient windows that match the existing window style. The Agency proposes to build an elevator bulkhead and stair tower on the roof with a brick façade. It proposes to install a garden area and solar panels on the roof, which will be screened from view by the parapet wall.

Mr. Clements continued that HDC Regulation 21.6.3.A.3, which provides, “All architectural changes shall be appropriate either to the original style or appearance of the building or structure (if it has not been significantly altered) or to its altered style or appearance (if it has been altered within the Period of Significance and those alterations have attained significance),” is applicable. He stated that it appears the project meets the standard, as it would bring the building’s façade in line with the appearance of adjacent buildings.

Mr. Clements stated that HDC Regulation 21.6.2.A.4, which provides, “Alterations shall not disrupt or detract from the established historic architectural character of the surrounding area, nor to the relationship of any existing historical resources, including site features, on the site,” applies. He noted that it appears the project’s exterior changes would be consistent with surrounding buildings and that the proposed rooftop mechanicals and solar panels would be screened from view. He asked the Commission to deliberate and determine whether the project meets this standard.

He further stated that HDC Regulation 21.6.3.E.1, which provides, “Historic doors, entrances and porches, including their associated features, shall be retained or replaced in kind. If repair is necessary, only the deteriorated element shall be repaired, through patching, splicing, consolidating, or otherwise reinforcing the deteriorated section. If replacement is necessary, the new feature shall match the original in size, design, texture, color, and, where possible, materials. The new feature shall maintain the same visual appearance as the historic feature,” applies. He noted that the main entryway and door the Agency proposes to remove is a covered stairwell with a vinyl-clad covering and faux Greek columns that does not match the surrounding buildings. He asked the Commission to deliberate and determine whether the entrance is historic in nature, provides value to the district, and is worth preserving.

Mr. Clements stated he does not believe any conditions need to be placed on approval. He had some concerns about the brick, but he is satisfied that the intent is to bring the façade back to its original character, consistent with the adjacent buildings.

Chair Fleming sought questions for staff and then from the public. There were none. He therefore closed the public hearing, so the Commission could deliberate.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the door and window changes appear consistent with the character of the surrounding neighborhood. Mr. Ferrantello expressed that he likes the efforts to make the building's facade match the adjacent buildings' brick facades, so they look consistent. He commended the proposed parapet wall to hide the roof from view. He stated he believes the project meets the HDC Regulation 21.6.3.A.3 standard. Chair Fleming noted the current building sticks out like a sore thumb.

Mr. Ferrantello asked dubiously whether there is any historicity to the main entry area and stairs, as he thinks it is high time to remove them. Ms. Allen responded that the building's entrances are not currently ADA compliant, although the back entrance is handicap accessible. She noted there is an external Limited Use/Limited Application (LULA) elevator/wheelchair lift, but accessing it is not user friendly. She noted the Agency has quadrupled its volume of visitors since it moved from Beaver Street, and it could serve more of the community if the building were more accessible. Ms. Allen indicated the internal elevator and stairs would be more accessible with the change.

Chair Fleming asked about the parking situation. Ms. Allen responded that it is not good. She noted, however, that most of the Agency's members do not have cars, but most of their staff do. Councilor Workman noted that eliminating the stairs could open up more parking. Ms. Allen noted the Agency had an accessibility audit performed, which recommended installing a not-too-steep 15-foot ramp matching the pavement.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos made a motion to approve COA-2009-24, Mod. 2, exterior renovations including changes to the exterior siding, the creation of a new primary entrance, the replacement of all existing windows, the installation of a rooftop solar array, and a rooftop garden space on the property located at 24 Vernon Street, as presented in the plan set titled "Facility Improvements" prepared by Sampson Architects, with a scale of 1/4" = 1', dated February 27, 2023 and application and supporting materials received February 27, 2023 with no conditions. Councilor Workman seconded the motion. The Commission briefly discussed whether to condition approval on the Agency providing brick samples and noted the Agency had already done so. The motion passed unanimously.

Responding to Ms. Allen's inquiry, Mr. Clements stated he would try to get her written confirmation of the approval the next day for purposes of the Agency's CDFR grant application.

6) **Staff Updates**

Mr. Clements reported that budget season is underway.

He further reported that the grant application for the Gilbo Avenue Inventory project is due in June. He has submitted a letter of intent for the grant. He has met with the New Hampshire Division of Historic Resources. He is working on getting bids for the project.

7) **New Business**

There was no new business.

8) **Upcoming Dates of Interest**

A) **Next HDC Meeting: May 17, 2023 – 4:30 PM, TBD**

Mr. Clements stated that he received no applications for the meeting, so it most likely will not take place. If it does, it will be at the Recreation Center, as the Budget Committee will be using Council Chambers then.

B) **HDC Site Visit: May 17, 2023 – 3:30 PM (To be confirmed)**

9) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Fleming adjourned the meeting at 5:33 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Wendy Chen, Minute Taker

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