

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, October 18, 2023

4:30 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Russ Fleming, Chair
Sophia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Vice Chair
Councilor Catherine Workman
Anthony Ferrantello

Staff Present:

Evan Clements, Planner

Members Not Present:

Hope Benik
David Bergeron, Alternate
Peter Poanessa, Alternate

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Fleming called the meeting to order at 4:33 PM. Roll call was conducted.

Chair Fleming asked for confirmation that a quorum was present. Mr. Evans replied yes, four is a quorum. He continued that unfortunately, Gregory Kleiner has resigned from the HDC, effective earlier this week, due to his schedule. The HDC needs a new member and he welcomes suggestions. Discussion ensued about the membership list. Mr. Evans clarified that currently, the full members are Russ Fleming, Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Anthony Ferrantello, Hope Benik, and Catherine Workman; and David Bergeron and Peter Poanessa are Alternates. There are two regular member vacancies.

2) Minutes of July 19, 2023

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of July 19, 2023. Councilor Workman seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) 2024 Meeting Schedule

Chair Fleming stated that the 2024 meeting schedule is in the agenda packet. He continued that the HDC meets on the third Wednesday of each month. They usually meet in Council Chambers, but during budget season when the room is unavailable at that time, the HDC would meet at the Rec Center on Washington St. if needed.

Mr. Ferrantello made a motion to approve the meeting schedule of 2024. Councilor Workman seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

4) Staff Updates

A) Administrative Approvals

Mr. Clements stated that it has been a quiet year, with not a lot of projects in the Historic District. He continued that the owner of 28 Washington St. came in for minor project approval for the work they are doing, repairing the grout and mortar on the front façade. He himself climbed the scaffolding the other day to see the test patch. He compared an existing mortar sample with their proposed mortar. They are using sand aggregate for the color. It looks very close. The mortar was in rough shape and nearly all will be replaced on the façade, so it should be a uniform color. They are not touching the windows themselves, but the wooden window trim is rotting and will be replaced in kind and painted white. They will sand and paint the wooden trim around the storefront. It is all maintenance, a little overdue. Bergeron Construction is doing the woodwork and Mike Stone is the mason. Mr. Stone is motivated to do all the grout at once and get a nice, uniform color, maintaining the character of the façade. He will use hose water and a bristle brush for the stone dust. Mr. Clements stated that he is comfortable with the proposed work.

Mr. Clements continued that the owner of 31 Washington St. technically came in for minor project approval, but they were just installing some mini splits. They put it far back in an alleyway and thus did not really even need an application. It cannot be seen from the right-of-way.

Mr. Clements continued that the owner of a small commercial building at 17 Vernon St. came in. The sidewalk has a strange dip in front of their property. They are adding an ADA ramp but it is barely a grade change. It is a small ramp with a handrail. Although they are not modifying the opening of the door, they are changing the direction in which the door swings to accommodate the ramp. There is no change to the storefront otherwise.

Mr. Fleming asked if the old Colony Mill building is in the Historic District. Mr. Clements replied that he does not believe so. Chair Fleming stated that some work is being done with the smokestack. Mr. Clements replied that he thinks they got historic preservation money from a federal grant for that, but it is not in the Historic District. Brief discussion continued about the smokestack.

Mr. Clements stated that he had a conversation with someone from a local church, regarding their plans for maintenance on their slate roof. He continued that they might be coming in for a major project approval at some time, but the conversation was very preliminary. He also had a conversation with the owner of 104 Emerald St., who plans to turn the building into either condominiums, rentals, or first floor retail with apartments on the second and third floors. He

was originally contemplating changing the roofline to give more headroom on the third floor, but he thinks that is no longer the plan. He will probably come in for a major project approval, because he will have to add a lobby and possibly an elevator shaft. The work will be to increase the functionality of the building while still meeting the requirements of the District.

Chair Fleming stated that he imagines he would want the lobby out front, but there is limited space there. Mr. Clements replied that he might end up creating a secondary lobby. He continued that he had a productive conversation with him about additions being complementary but not matching. The building has vinyl on it now, which the owner wants to take out and then put Hardie Board in. The slate roof used to have skylights, probably to vent excess heat. They cannot be seen on the outside of the roof, but if you look from inside, all of the blocking is there. He might want to restore the skylights. He seems motivated to improve the property in a way that meets the regulations. That is preliminary. He will hopefully come in sometime next year.

Chair Fleming stated that he sees that the property across the street is working on their parking lot, which is a big project. Mr. Clements replied yes, 85 Emerald St. He continued that they will put Hardie Board over the cinder blocks. Part of that approval was resurfacing the parking area. The hope is to get food trucks in there. There is some opportunity in that neighborhood. It looks like the owners are willing to spend some money on it. It is encouraging.

B) CLG Grant Update

Mr. Clements stated that regarding the Certified Local Government (CLG) grant [from the NH Division of Historical Resources], (City staff) has done everything on their side, and the City Council officially accepted the \$12,000 grant [to inventory the properties on Gilbo Ave. in the Historic District]. He continued that the City Manager signed the agreement, and it is waiting to go to the Governor's desk for final approval to do their side of the grant agreement. Hopefully the (City) will get started on that early next year. He needs to get in touch with consultant that helped with the grant application and suggested the modified inventory form that will best serve their needs, to make sure she still has capacity for them next year. Then, they will figure out a kick-off and get that project started. It is exciting.

Mr. Evans stated that the Historic District mailer went out about two weeks ago. He continued that he wants to give a shout-out to Rebecca (Landry), Communications Director, and the new Communications Department. She did a great job tweaking the initial design to meet the City's new branding. Only a handful of the trifolds have been returned as 'undeliverable,' which is to be expected, and most of them arrived. They will need to decide if this is something they want to do annually, which he is not opposed to, or if they want to do a more targeted approach.

C) NH 101 Improvement Project

Mr. Clements stated that a consultant hired by the NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) sent a letter to every board and commission in the City, regarding the Rt. 101 Improvement

Project. Led by the City Engineer, the City has done a targeted response to that, as opposed to having the consultants come do public outreach to every board, commission, and committee. The City has (told NHDOT) it prefers the option farthest to the east [as shown on the map of proposed options, in the HDC's agenda packet], which is more in line with the existing Swanzey Factory Rd. straightening out and making the existing intersection better. Some of the other proposed options directly conflict with Stone Arch Bridge, so no one is interested in those. He is working with the Heritage Commission (HC) on that as well. This project is very preliminary and there should be more information and more opportunities for discussion down the road. It is rather out of the purview of the HDC, but since the HDC received a letter, he wanted to bring it up at this meeting.

Mr. Ferrantello asked clarifying questions about the options depicted on the map in the agenda packet, and asked for more information about the current conditions of/problems with this intersection. Discussion continued, and Councilor Workman stated that there was already a full presentation about this project at a recent Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure (MSFI) Committee meeting. She recommends that anyone wanting more information about the project watch that MSFI Committee meeting video.

5) New Business

Mr. Clements stated that he does not foresee any major projects coming in before the end of the year. He continued that that could change, but there is not a lot of the year left. Thus, he wanted to get next year's (meeting) schedule adopted, as opposed to this year when they did not get the schedule adopted until approximately April. The HDC might not need to meet again this year. Chair Fleming asked if anyone had any new business. He asked about the HDC having a joint meeting with the HC. Mr. Clements replied that the HC was supposed to meet last week but that meeting ended up being canceled. Chair Fleming asked what it says in the rules of procedure, and whether the HDC and HC are supposed to conduct any business together, or if it is just a matter of knowing what the other group does. Mr. Clements replied that it is more like an "annual report" on the heritage/historic preservation work that both groups have been doing. He continued that at this point, they could consider doing this in the New Year. If the HDC wants to try to meet with the HC in November or December, he would not say no to that.

Chair Fleming asked what the HC has been doing. Mr. Clements replied that they have two CLG grant projects happening now. They are wrapping up one, an oral history of the Italian neighborhood, which was combined with a story map website. It allows you to geo-locate points of interest and write narrative blurbs, creating a website that you can scroll through, with different maps that the written blurbs pop up on. It is about to go live. They are also working in tandem with the Cheshire County Historical Society and the Black Heritage Trail of NH on the Recovering Black Histories project. The HC's project has hired an associate professor to work on documents within the City of Keene. She has a couple graduate students working on taking primary and secondary sources and contextualizing them, writing narratives and stories about people who were members of the community in the 1800s. That has just started. The Historical

Society's project has been underway for about a year. The HC will work with the Historical Society and the consultant to pick through documents that might not be as easily available to outside volunteers. That is just kicking off and they are figuring out how to best use the HC's time with that.

6) **Upcoming Dates of Interest**

A) **Next HDC Meeting: November 15, 2023 – 4:30 PM, TBD**

B) **HDC Site Visit: November 15, 2023 – 3:30 PM (To be confirmed)**

7) **Adjourn**

There being no further business, Chair Fleming adjourned the meeting at 5:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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