

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, August 21, 2024

4:30 PM

**Council Chamber,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Sophia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair
Anthony Ferrantello
Louise Zerba
Russ Fleming, Alternate (voting)

Staff Present:

Evan Clements, Planner

Members Not Present:

Hope Benik, Vice Chair
Councilor Catherine Workman
Peter Poanessa, Alternate
David Bergeron, Alternate

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos called the meeting to order at approximately 4:30 PM and asked Mr. Fleming to serve as a voting member in Councilor Workman's place. Therefore, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos declared a quorum present.

2) CLG 2024 Project Presentation – Presentation by Mae Williams on the draft inventory forms for the inventory of Historic District Expansion and other unranked properties [The Commission heard this agenda item 4th]

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos welcomed Mae Williams, **Unlocking History**, to discuss the draft inventory forms for the Historic District Expansion, specifically determining the baseline documentation of the current properties in 2024, considering whether they would be eligible for the national Register of Historic Places, and making recommendations for a local Historic District ranking system (i.e., Primary, Contributing, Non-contributing, or Incompatible). Results in Ms. Williams' opinion: Most are Non-contributing due to age, 5 Contributing, 0 Primary, and 0 Incompatible. Ms. Williams discussed the challenges of differentiating between these resources and different brackets of age classes she is used to considering from the National Park Service, for example.

Mr. Fleming was glad Ms. Williams recognized the value of the TD Bank building that is past 50 years old (1972), but he was concerned because the M&T Bank is shy of 50 years. Before long,

they would be classic bank buildings, and unfortunately, he knew M&T was considering selling their building. Ms. Williams agreed that they are iconic 1970s banking structures and she was unsure what was possible in Keene's regulations other than enhancing the survey documentation from an educational perspective before that 50-year maturity. Mr. Ferrantello wondered about a category for American banking style that aligns with the 50-year demarcation, similar to other categories that were included like the industrial/railroad building types. In terms of vocabulary, he questioned the differences between "character defining architectural features" and "character defining features and significance," for example. Discussion ensued about the detailed vocabulary choices. Ms. Williams agreed that a challenge for architectural historians is grappling with vocabulary to use for 1980s–2000s architecture because they are too new.

Ms. Zerba asked about the 5 Contributing buildings. Ms. Williams listed: TD Bank, the mall, the high school, 104 Emerald Street, 80 Emerald Street, and 43 Wilson Street. Most of the others she considered Non-contributing due to age other than Friendlies from a National Register standpoint and based on Keene's HDC guidelines.

Evan Clements, Planner, said that when he envisioned the recommended local Historic District ranking field for this, he did not realize that—from the National Registry guidelines—the time a building sits before it enters that period of significance is more impactful than just the building's form. He had not considered that buildings constructed 35–40 years ago had not existed within the culture of the community long enough to actually contribute to the historic culture of the community. So, initially, he was going to ask Ms. Williams to reevaluate everything she listed as Non-contributing because the buildings were not old enough yet. Instead, he wondered about leaving those categories blank and keeping the rest of the information on character defining features and form. This would allow the City to properly evaluate them when they enter their period of significance. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos was not sure it mattered either way. Ms. Zerba supported including the statements for the reader 10 years from now to know why the property was designated as Non-contributing. Mr. Ferrantello said the more information the better instead of leaving it blank. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos said that in the next 50 years these buildings could lose their character—anything could happen to them if the HDC does not influence that. Mr. Fleming suggested listing, "Not ranked due to insufficient age." Mr. Clements said he considered the worst-case scenario of a building entering its period of significance and the property owner not supporting it being in the Historic District; so, he does not want a simple listing as Non-contributing to be used against the Commission in the future. He recommended making it very clear that that recommended ranking is purely due to the fact that it is not yet in its period of significance, or maybe some other terminology to articulate that. Ms. Williams said that she liked, "Not ranked due to insufficient age," for the local Historic District. The Commissioners present agreed.

The Commission discussed other aspects of the inventory. In particular, there were discrepancies in addresses to resolve. Additionally, Ms. Williams said she was willing to share the photos as standalone photos when the inventory is complete. It was clarified that the focus is on modification of the building form and there is less focus on building history, like famous people who visited. Mr. Ferrantello recommended emphasis on the unique art deco building type of the old Keene high

school; Mr. Fleming clarified that the high school is already protected, and Mr. Clements agreed, noting that the apartment building behind it is much newer, with 40–50 years until its period of significance.

Mr. Clements commended Ms. Williams on the excellent resource forms, including the great photos. He said they would make the HDC’s job evaluating applications for the properties much easier. He thanked her for her attention to detail. The Commission agreed.

The Commission asked about ranking the 5 Contributing resources. Mr. Clements said the unranked properties were subject to the most protection and strictest regulations, and he did not foresee any of them being ranked as Incompatible or Non-contributing. It would most likely be a decision between Contributing and Primary, so it would not change from the property owners’ perspectives. He suggested another joint meeting with the Heritage Commission to consider those. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos said they should have a joint meeting annually, so if the report would be complete by the end of the year, she suggested a joint meeting in January 2025 to rank the properties. Mr. Clements agreed, stating that he did not think it would be unjust to the property owners to wait until then because the regulations would not change for them.

Mr. Fleming said that he was concerned about 104 Emerald Street being designated as Contributing and thought it should be Primary. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos said there was still an opportunity for the Commission to change that. Mr. Clements agreed, explaining that Ms. Williams’ task for the Historic Trust was to determine whether the properties were historic resources, and he briefly explained the four categories to her. Ms. Zerba asked if Mr. Clements could prepare the list of categories. Mr. Clements stated that he was willing to create a primer on the differences and the threshold between each for the joint meeting.

Further discussion ensued briefly on the differences between the categories. It was clarified that the M&T Bank is under 50 years old so it is not subject to HDC regulations, though the public could speak before the Planning Board if it was there. The TD Bank is over 50 years old so it would have to appear before the HDC for its parking lot.

3) **Public Hearing** – **Proposed amendment to the HDC regulations to change the mailed abutter notice from certified mail to certificate of mailing** [The Commission heard this agenda item 3rd]

Mr. Clements explained a proposed amendment to the HDC regulations to change the mailed abutter notice for public hearings from Certified Mail to Certificate of Mailing. This is a different product the Post Office offers that would meet the definition of “verified mail,” would be cheaper for applicants, and no signature would be required on delivery. This would align with all the other land use boards.

No members of the public were present to comment.

Ms. Zerba asked if there were any downsides. Mr. Clements said the change had not been implemented yet. He explained that the primary difference for abutters would be not having to sign for the mailings, so they would not have to be home to receive them, and the Post Office would still verify that they are sent. So, Mr. Clements said there would be no downside.

Mr. Ferrantello said it made perfect sense to do this: less costly, less burdensome, less bureaucratic, and more of the same accountability.

A motion by Mr. Ferrantello to accept the change was duly seconded by Mr. Fleming. The motion carried unanimously.

4) **Staff Updates**
A) **Master Plan Update**

Mr. Clements announced the Master Plan Future Summit on Saturday, October 5 in Heberton Hall at the Keene Public Library from 9:00 AM–12:00 PM. All were welcome. Also, the Mayor and City Council chose not to change the membership levels for the HDC, so it would remain a 7-member Board with a City Councilor representative on paper. The Mayor was having difficulty finding a Councilor to meet this time slot.

5) **New Business**

None presented.

6) **Upcoming Dates of Interest:**
A) **Next HDC Meeting: September 18, 2024 – 4:30 PM, TBD**

There were no applications at this time.

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

7) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at approximately 5:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katrinya Kibler, Minute Taker
October 11, 2024

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