

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, February 19, 2025

4:30 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair
Hope Benik, Vice Chair
Anthony Ferrantello
Louise Zerba
Russ Fleming, Alternate

Staff Present:

Evan Clements, Planner

Members Not Present:

David Bergeron, Alternate
Peter Poanessa, Alternate
Councilor Catherine Workman

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos called the meeting to order at 4:38 PM. Roll call was conducted. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that for today's meeting, Mr. Fleming is a voting member, filling in for one of the vacant slots.

2) Election – Chair/Vice Chair

Mr. Fleming asked if the current chair and vice chair are willing to serve another term. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos and Vice Chair Benik replied yes.

Mr. Fleming nominated Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos as Chair. Ms. Zerba seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Mr. Ferrantello nominated Ms. Benik as Vice Chair. Mr. Fleming seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Minutes of November 20, 2024

Mr. Fleming made a motion to approve the minutes of November 20, 2024. Mr. Ferrantello seconded the motion.

Ms. Zerba noted a correction to Lines 12 and 13 of the meeting minutes. She continued that the minutes state, “Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that today...,” but Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos was not present.

Mr. Ferrantello made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of November 20, 2024, with the corrections. Mr. Fleming seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Mr. Fleming noted that the minutes incorrectly spell Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos’s first name as “Sophia” and should be corrected.

4) Discussion – Project and Goalsetting

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that there is a brief change to the agenda. She welcomed a guest from the Yankee Bottle Club and asked him to introduce himself.

Steve Seraichick stated that he is the President of the Yankee Bottle Club, which began in 1968. He continued that the Club’s mission is “*to appreciate, preserve, and promote the history of glassmaking and collecting in the state of NH, and to further the understanding and knowledge of the glass-making industry.*” He continued that it is the Club’s duty, also, to be well-versed in their own history to advance their mission in the future.

Mr. Seraichick shared the story of how he became interested in collecting glass when he was eight years old, and how he joined the Yankee Bottle Club about eight years ago. He continued that he walks on the bike path on Eastern Ave. that is parallel to the location where the Keene Glass company was from 1814 to 1842. There are three historical markers on that stretch of trail, and none of them mention Keene Glass. That is a huge oversight. He thinks that Keene Glass was the second most important industry in the city, with the Colony Mill being the first. He wants to know how to get a marker there to indicate that this existed. Many people would not otherwise know about it. He contacted (Councilor) Bobby Williams to ask about how to get markers put up, and he suggested the State. However, the State is involved with highway road markers and road markers on their roads, not on rail trails. The administrative director of the program that authorizes markers in the state, Amy Dickson, said the City is responsible for the markers he is talking about. Thus, he wants to know who to contact. He thought it was logical to come to the HDC.

Ms. Zerba recommended Mr. Seraichick speak with the Historical Society. Mr. Seraichick replied that Alan Rumrill (Director of the Historical Society) is a member of the Yankee Bottle Club, and he was not aware that there was no sign or marker for the Yankee Bottle Club on that stretch of bike path.

Ms. Zerba recommended Mr. Seraichick speak with the Heritage Commission, which (she is a member of), and which meets every other month. She continued that the Heritage Commission

is involved with research. If Mr. Seraichick speaks with (staff liaison) Evan Clements, maybe he could come speak at a meeting.

Mr. Fleming asked if Ms. Zerba was on the Heritage Commission when they put up those markers on the section of the rail trail that Mr. Seraichick is referring to. Ms. Zerba replied that the Heritage Commission was not involved in that. Discussion continued. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos agreed that the Heritage Commission would be a good group for Mr. Seraichick to speak with. Ms. Zerba stated that she will follow up with Mr. Seraichick about this. Mr. Seraichick thanked the HDC and stated that the Yankee Bottle Club welcomes new members, if anyone is interested.

Mr. Clements stated that he will follow up with Mr. Seraichick as well. He continued that he would be happy to put him in touch with Ms. Zerba and the Public Works Department. The portion of trail in question might be under the City's control, or it might be controlled by the State. It would be helpful to figure out who put those markers up. Staff will try and work on that.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that they will now move on to discuss Project and Goalsetting. She asked Mr. Clements for some background. Mr. Clements stated that this is the first official HDC meeting of the year, and the group does not meet often, except to hear cases, so it is up to the HDC to discuss whether there is anything else related to the Historic District that they would be interested in working on this year. He continued that they can generate ideas to be put on future agendas. Alternatively, if the HDC is just interested in its regulatory function, that is perfectly acceptable.

Mr. Ferrantello stated that he was thinking of an educational effort, such as a flyer, to educate the public about the importance of historic preservation and laws and the guidance the HDC can offer. He asked if there would be funds for this. Mr. Clements replied that they have a line item of about \$250. He continued that he is glad Mr. Ferrantello brought this up. When the Land Development Code (LDC) was adopted, the Historic District regulations were trimmed down to its core necessity, and they attempted to make it easier to understand. The old regulations had a lot of context and rationale for why the regulations were the way they were. All of that was taken out of the Code to streamline it, but all of that information still exists. A good project might be to reimagine all of that as information to add to the website or some kind of guidance documents/educational thing.

Discussion continued. Mr. Ferrantello stated that perhaps the educational thing could be picked up by or somehow supported or enhanced by the School of Architecture at Keene State College (KSC). He gave ideas for what students could do, such as graphics and information about local historical buildings. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos spoke of how she likes the notion but thinks this work might already be covered by other people and groups, such as the Heritage Commission and the Historical Society. Mr. Ferrantello spoke in favor of young people's energy and fresh perspective.

Ms. Benik asked who manages the City's social media. Mr. Clements replied that the City has a communications team, Asah Cramer and Rebecca Landry, Deputy City Manager. Ms. Benik spoke about the possibility of a "Did you know...?" campaign on social media, such as "Did you know Keene has a Historic District Commission?" and other occasional posts with little facts and photos. Ms. Zerba replied that the Heritage Commission created a flyer several years ago as well. Discussion continued, and Mr. Ferrantello spoke of how he would like the public to know that the HDC is here to help, "not to be the arbiters of the straight heavy law and the hammer hitting." He continued that the HDC is here to help applicants, and they are open to interpretations, and they are friendly. Ms. Benik spoke about how she works for a marketing agency, and her ideas for social media posts to educate and raise awareness about the HDC.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she likes the idea of helping the public understand the value of having a Historic District, and since the information (that Mr. Clements spoke about) was stripped from the regulations, she thinks there is value in finding a way to put that back in the public space. Ms. Zerba asked if the information is on the City's website. Mr. Clements replied that the current regulations are on the website. He continued that one of the first things he did when he started with the City was to update the HDC's FAQ. The old regulations still exist as word documents but need to be put in a format that is more easily approachable. He can send the old code to the HDC members so they can see what they are working with, and they can keep coming up with ideas.

Discussion continued, as HDC members talked about ideas. Mr. Clements spoke about maybe starting with a certain block or street to see how it goes, and then expanding. Mr. Ferrantello spoke about how the (Monadnock) Shopper had a "Can you name this building?" snippet, and how the HDC could do something similar on social media. Mr. Clements stated that the Heritage Commission also has been talking about creating content, similar to what the HDC is talking about, so he can talk with Ms. Cramer and Ms. Landry about content creation and its viable impact in the social media sphere. There might be some good opportunities. Mr. Ferrantello replied that it might have educational value, in the sense that people who have historic properties they are hesitant to renovate might be more likely to do so once they learn about the HDC. Mr. Clements replied yes, there is a general stigma about historic preservation being challenging and expensive and involving arguments with the Historic District, and Keene's HDC is not like that. It would be good to help people feel more comfortable about working on their buildings and helping preserve these resources. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos agreed. Ms. Zerba spoke about a Keene Sentinel article Phil Faulkner did years ago about the history of a particular home, and the idea of resurrecting that (sort of thing).

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that they should stay aware of costs. Others agreed. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos added that some of what they are talking about could be done on a volunteer basis. Discussion continued. Mr. Clements cautioned about the scope. He stated that he can help facilitate, but there would be a fair amount of work for the HDC members to do themselves, if they are choosing to do this work. The regulatory work takes priority, as they know, but

having a reason to meet more regularly is a good idea. Mr. Ferrantello spoke about how educating the public about historic preservation might revamp interest in it and thus increase applications to the HDC. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos spoke more about being cognizant of the organizations that are already doing the work to educate the public about historic preservation, such as the Historical Society and the Heritage Commission. She suggested the HDC try to collaborate with them and leverage some cooperative efforts. Mr. Ferrantello replied that he would volunteer to go do some research at the Historical Society.

Mr. Clements stated that a good place to start would be to look at the old Historic District regulations, which he will send to the HDC. He continued that the joint meeting with the Heritage Commission is in March. Maybe at the April HDC meeting they could further define the scope of the project the HDC wants to do. There is no harm in starting small, having some measured success, and continuing on. He does not want it to be too grandiose from the start and bog people down.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if HDC members have other ideas, other thoughts on needs in the Historic District. Ms. Zerba replied that the joint meeting with the Heritage Commission will be good, classifying and reviewing properties in the District. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that if anyone has more ideas about goals and projects, they can discuss them more at future meetings; this is just the first meeting of the year.

5) Staff Updates

A) Joint Heritage & Historic District Commission Meeting – March 2025

Mr. Clements stated that they just talked about the joint meeting. He encouraged attendance at the joint meeting, and encouraged people to come prepared, having done the reading, so they can spend the meeting time getting into it with the actual properties.

Mr. Clements spoke about the work that continues with the Master Plan Update, including the discussion boards for the strategic pillars. The task forces will meet this week to articulate goals for the Master Plan and strategies to achieve them, then meet again at the end of March to review the draft goals and strategies the consultants come up with. Staff will bring those recommendations to the Steering Committee. Then, they move into the Future Land Use Map, and the final project summit is in the beginning of June to present the entire draft document. The Future Land Use Map will be the vision for what they want for uses, how the land is used in the city, and what changes need to be made.

6) New Business

Mr. Ferrantello asked if the HDC should get involved in the density debate. He continued that if density has to deal with a historic building, they might get involved. Discussion ensued. Mr. Clements spoke about how if a person applies to add an addition to a historic building, they would be coming before the HDC for that particular matter, but the (ordinances related to)

density are not directly in the purview of the HDC. HDC members could weigh in on the matter as individual citizens if they want to. He gave information about density-related ordinances the City Council is looking at. Discussion continued. Mr. Ferrantello asked if it would be okay for the HDC to weigh in on the density issues of a site of a building and the relationship of a new building to a historic building. He continued that he thinks that is something they could discuss if it comes up in an application, but as Mr. Clements said, if it is outside of that, he or other HDC members could (give feedback as) citizens. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that her understanding of the HDC's regulations is that when they evaluate a project, density is not part of their criteria. Mr. Clements replied that is correct; the HDC is more focused on the built form itself. He continued that there is a relationship with that and how that affects density, but not in a literal way. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that density issues would be addressed when an applicant goes through the Planning Board process to get permission to build. Mr. Clements replied yes, density is ruled by the Zoning Ordinance. He briefly gave more information about the Planning Board process.

7) Upcoming Dates of Interest

- A) Next HDC Meeting: March 19, 2025 – 4:30 PM, TBD**
- B) HDC Site Visit: March 19, 2025 – 3:30 PM (to be confirmed)**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the joint meeting with the Heritage Commission will be March 19 at 4:30 PM, in this same room. She continued that the HDC does not have any applications for March.

8) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at 5:28 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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