

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, April 16, 2025

4:30 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Anthony Ferrantello
Louise Zerba
Russ Fleming, Alternate
David Bergeron, Alternate
Peter Poanessa, Alternate

Staff Present:

Evan Clements, Planner

Members Not Present:

Hope Benik, Vice Chair
Councilor Catherine Workman
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Russ Fleming called the meeting to order at 4:37. Mr. Ferrantello made a motion to nominate Mr. Fleming as Chair pro-tem. Ms. Zerba seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Chair Fleming designated Mr. Bergeron and Mr. Poanessa as voting members for this meeting.

Roll call was conducted.

2) Minutes

A) February 19, 2025 Regular Meeting

Mr. Ferrantello made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of February 19, 2025. Mr. Bergeron seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

B) March 19, 2025 Joint Historic District & Heritage Commission Meeting

Correction to Line 178: the statement that the building “looks like a Friendly’s that used to be an eye doctor” should be the other way around – a building that “looks like an eye doctor that used to be a Friendly’s.”

Mr. Bergeron made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of March 19, 2025 as amended. Ms. Zerba seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) **Public Hearing**

A) **COA-2009-24, Modification #3 – 24 Vernon St – 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), primary entrance, and the replacement of all existing windows. The property is 0.28 ac and is ranked as a Primary Resource in the Downtown Core District.

Mr. Ferrantello stated that he needs to recuse himself because he participated in the project.

Mr. Clements introduced COA-2009-24, Modification #3.

Chair Fleming stated that the first question is whether the application is complete. Mr. Clements replied that staff recommends that this application be considered complete. He continued that the applicant did not request any exemptions from the submittal requirements, so a complete application was submitted.

Mr. Bergeron made a motion to accept the application as complete. Ms. Zerba seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Chair Fleming stated that this is something the HDC dealt with two years ago. He continued that his understanding is that there were certain things the HDC did then that they need to reaffirm now. Mr. Clements replied that the applicant is here because their original approval expired, and they have also since made some changes to the overall scope of work.

Chair Fleming invited the applicant to speak.

Tim Sampson of Sampson Architects stated that he is here representing Monadnock Peer Support. He continued that they went through this process about two years ago about approvals. Materialistically, he thinks this is the same project. Some things have been removed due to either financial or structural reasons. This proposal is, in essence, to provide a new accessible egress or ingress at grade, and remove the vinyl siding, and repair or replace brick as needed. On the plans, he showed the alleyway that faces Washington St. He showed the location of the vinyl that will come off. He continued that there is a small piece of metal roof there and a little bit of brick. In the original proposal that was approved two years ago, he thinks that on top of this, they had a 24-inch or 30-inch brick parapet wall. Due to structural reasons/snow loads, that was taken out of the scope.

Mr. Sampson indicated the Vernon St. elevations. He continued that the CMU on the bottom will remain, repaired and repainted as necessary. All the vinyl siding above that will get torn off,

replaced, with brick repaired and replaced as necessary. That is also where the new entry to the building is. That will serve the level that is below grade as well as the above-grade level, with new stairs and an elevator.

Mr. Sampson continued that since he submitted these a few weeks ago, he feels that he needs to bring to the HDC's attention that there is an existing entrance "here" for a separate tenant space. Due to budget reasons, that scope of the work has been eliminated, he is about 99% sure. This entry, shown in some of the photos he provided, is actually going to stay. Thus, there is a little less brickwork needed to be done, but the scope is essentially to tear all that vinyl off and hopefully bring the brick back to how it should be. They did some exploration under the vinyl and they think it will be limited to repairing some brick and repointing.

Chair Fleming asked, for clarification, if he is saying that the double door on the right side of the drawing was originally, two years ago, proposed to be eliminated. Mr. Sampson replied no, that was always part of it. He continued that there is an existing entry "here," and he cannot remember if the last proposal had that going away. Chair Fleming replied that he thought it (did). He asked if Mr. Sampson is saying that it is staying now. Mr. Sampson replied yes. He continued that there is not a lot to be gained there, because that is a separate tenant space on that lower level and it is required as a second means of egress from that tenant space. There are some stairs, and a ramp inside the building, although it is not accessible. It is steep and parallels the stairs in that entry area.

Mr. Poanessa asked about the CMU he mentioned. Mr. Sampson replied that they think there is block underneath, painted grey. He continued that the building construction is a little strange; he thinks there is a lot of clay, brick, and block in there. Chair Fleming stated that Mr. Sampson says it is painted. He asked if it is correct that he is saying he cannot tell if it is concrete block. Mr. Sampson replied that he cannot tell whether it is concrete block or something else. He continued that it does not have any particular pattern that would lead you to believe it is brick. The original proposal from a couple of years ago was to brick the entire thing right down to the ground. Again, due to budget problems, that (was changed).

Chair Fleming stated that he remembers they mentioned budget problems two years ago. He continued that at that time, a big, statewide grant program was going on. The property owner seemed pretty sure he would (get grant money). Mr. Sampson replied that this is paid for with a lot of grant money. He continued that they had a budget they worked through when they started to design this, and that was a couple of years ago, and things have increased in price significantly.

Mr. Bergeron stated that from reading this, his understanding is that the current outside steel stair system is all going away. Mr. Sampson replied yes, that is correct.

Mr. Clements stated that in his staff comments, he will talk about some of the decisions that were made the last time this project came before the HDC and give a couple of deliberative points to

discuss. He continued that then, they will open it to a public hearing. After public comment, they will close it, and the HDC will deliberate and decide how to proceed with the application.

Mr. Clements stated that this is a two-story building located at 24 Vernon St. He continued that it is currently vinyl-sided with a flat roof that is connected to and behind 32-34 Washington St. Since this building was basically all considered one building, it is all ranked as Primary Resource, even though it is currently vinyl. When this application came before the HDC previously, it was assumed that it was just vinyl onto sub wall or something like that, and the proposal was to resurface the entire façade with brick. Then as that application progressed, it was discovered that the vinyl had just been put on top of existing brick. The applicant is proposing to restore the historic brick as part of this application, as opposed to replacing all of it with brick.

Mr. Clements continued that the proposal includes the removal of the non-ADA-compliant pyramid stair structure with columns, which is the primary entrance to the building currently from Vernon St. One of the deliberative questions was whether the HDC felt this entryway was of historic quality. The HDC determined that it was not of historic quality at that time. As the applicant stated, the scope of the project has changed slightly from when this application was submitted. The current plan set includes the removal of the existing ground floor entryway to the right of the façade. That is now proposed to stay and will probably be tuned up a little bit but not replaced, budget dependent.

Mr. Clements continued that staff recommends the condition of approval include a condition subsequent to final approval that would say, *“Before the issuance of a building permit, a revised elevation showing the existing ground floor entryway to remain shall be submitted.”* That can be submitted in tandem with a building permit application. He discussed this with the applicant, and they seem to be comfortable with it. The only deliberative suggestion that came out of this application previously was determining if this existing pyramid stairwell entryway with Greek-like columns is of historic nature worth preserving.

Chair Fleming stated that he has a question regarding page 28 of the agenda packet. He asked if the descriptive narrative is provided by the applicant, Mr. Sampson, or if staff put that together. Mr. Clements replied that the narrative is submitted by the applicant.

Chair Fleming stated that he is confused by the terminology. He continued that the end of the first paragraph that talks about the two entries, one located on Washington St. and the other on Vernon St., says, *“Neither of these entries provide interior access to the two floors.”* He asked if that means neither one provides access to both floors. Mr. Sampson replied yes, that is correct. He continued that the one entry that they were going to remove but will now be leaving accesses the lower level. The entry up those pyramid stairs accesses the second level. There is no interior access between those two floors. It is almost as if they were separate buildings, but horizontally.

Chair Fleming asked if it is correct that to get into the lower floor, you either go in from the Washington St. entrance (or somewhere else). Mr. Sampson replied that it is the same situation there. He continued that there are two entries, one going up, one going down. There are no interior stairs. Mr. Bergeron stated that that is what the exterior pyramid stair does. He continued that the only way you could get physically from one level of the building to another is to physically walk outside and downstairs. Chair Fleming asked if that is because there is a doorway underneath those Greek columns, which is hard to see in the photo.

Chair Fleming opened the public hearing and asked if there were members of the public who wished to comment on the project. Hearing none, he closed the public hearing and asked the HDC to deliberate.

Chair Fleming asked if any HDC members feel that the existing pyramid stairway has historic value, and if they would like to advocate for retaining it. Mr. Bergeron and Ms. Zerba replied no. Mr. Bergeron stated that he will say that he is on the board of Monadnock Family Services (MFS), which used to own that building, and MFS struggled mightily on the condition of those stairs. They were in very poor condition when MFS owned it, and they are probably not much better now. They were difficult to use, as they do not meet any of today's requirements for access.

Chair Fleming asked if the operation uses both floors right now. He continued that it is not the most convenient setup to have to go outside to go from one floor to the other. Steve Tavella, Director of Monadnock Peer Support stated that the operation does not use both units and that they are separate, which is why they need two entrances. He asked Mr. Clements if the HDC needs to separately deal with that entryway, or if they can just deal with the entire application. Mr. Clements replied that it is not a waiver, it is just a discussion point to be determined by the HDC. He continued that staff cannot weigh in to say if that standard has been met or not. It sounds like the HDC has agreed that the pyramid entryway does not have historic value.

Chair Fleming asked for a motion to approve this with the condition of approval that a revised elevation be submitted that shows the façade with the double doors retained on the west side of the building.

Mr. Bergeron made a motion for the Historic District Commission to approve COA-2009-24, Modification #3, exterior renovations including changes to the exterior façade, the creation of a new primary entrance and the replacement of all existing windows on the property located at 24 Vernon St. as presented on the plan set entitled Facility Improvements, prepared by Sampson Architects with a scale of a quarter inch equals one foot, dated March 25, 2025, and application and supporting materials received March 27, 2025, with one condition subsequent, that being that before the issuance of a building permit, a revised elevation showing the existing ground floor entryway be submitted as part of the building permit application process. Ms. Zerba seconded the motion, which passed by a unanimous vote of 4-0.

4) Discussion – Project and Goalsetting

Chair Fleming noted that Mr. Ferrantello is back at the table. He continued that he does not think it is appropriate for the HDC to discuss projects and goalsetting in the absence of the chair and vice chair, so he suggests they postpone it until the next meeting. Mr. Clements agreed.

5) Staff Updates

A) Report to City Council

Mr. Clements stated that the City Council has requested each City board, commission, and committee give a brief annual report. He continued that each body can choose whether to give an in-person presentation or a (written) update on projects and things the body has been doing. It is voluntary, but it would be very helpful to have even a rudimentary update of what is going on. The Council would really appreciate it. For regulatory bodies such as the HDC, it would be appropriate to have information related to the cases the HDC has heard over the course of the year, as well as any outreach efforts, and things like that. For example, a brief discussion on the inventory project they recently completed. The HDC can discuss this more at the next meeting. The Council hopes to have something from each body by July.

Chair Fleming stated that this was mentioned before, and he thought Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos was very positive about the idea. He continued that he suspects Mr. Clements and Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos will mostly be the ones working on this. Mr. Clements replied that he agrees, but they also welcome HDC members' ideas on what to include. Assuming there is enough time, the HDC could review a draft before it gets sent to Council.

Mr. Ferrantello stated that he would like to amplify the previous conversation they had about making the public aware of the historic nature of various buildings and getting architectural students involved, with their creativity and ingenuity. Maybe one or more of the students could take it as a thesis or something. Mr. Clements replied that he thinks the Council would be excited to hear that the HDC is looking to have that kind of greater engagement with the community.

B) Master Plan

Mr. Clements stated that the Master Plan Update is quickly coming to an end. He continued that he encourages people to check out one more survey on keenemasterplan.com. The Future Summit meeting on June 3 will be the last public engagement session, at which they will unveil the complete draft document to the community. He highly encourages people to attend.

6) New Business

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

7) **Upcoming Dates of Interest**

A) **Next HDC Meeting: May 21, 2025–4:30 PM, TBD**

B) **HDC Site Visit: May 21, 2025–3:30 PM (To be confirmed)**

Chair Fleming stated that he will be out of the country on May 21 and thus will not be at the next meeting.

There being no further business, Chair Fleming adjourned the meeting at 5:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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