City of Keene
New Hampshire

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, October 21, 2026 **4:30 PM** **2nd Floor Conference Room, City Hall**

Members Present:
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair
Hope Benik, Vice Chair
Louise Zerba
Peter Poanessa, Alternate (Voting)

Staff Present:
Evan Clements, Planner / Zoning Administrator

Members Not Present:
Anthony Ferrantello
Russell Fleming, Alternate
Councilor Edward Haas
David Bergeron, Alternate

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM.

2. Minutes: June 17, 2026

Ms. Zerba made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of June 17, 2026. Vice Chair Benik seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3. Advice & Comment

a. 102 Main St. - Property owner requests advice on proposed maintenance of brick veneer on the rear of 102 Main St. Property is ranked as non-contributing

Sara Norris stated that she is the owner of 102 Main St., which is now also 33 Cypress St. They have split two entrances. What she is bringing today involves the 33 Cypress St. side of the building rather than the Main St. frontage. It is the area today that faces the parking lot behind it. She had sent the HDC pictures of what the exterior currently looks like. It is cinder block with a brick veneer on top. The bottom picture shows the wall she is primarily concerned with right now. There are two colors of brick where some patchwork was done. She believes it is because the original veneer cannot be matched, so any patchwork done will be clear and obvious. The other pictures show the veneer is not in great shape. It is not really an asset to Cypress St. A business she owns will utilize that back entrance. She wants to find a way to make the space more hospitable and look less derelict. She wants it to look like a space that is intentional and

cared for. She wants it to be inviting, so people want to come to the business. The business is a thermal spa. It will have a group sauna for 48 people, red light therapy, a vitamin shower, and a private sauna. It is a place for the community and tourists to come and hang out in downtown Keene. The exterior of the building will be people's first impression, and she wants to get it right.

Ms. Norris continued that when she first met with Mr. Clements and Ms. Brunner about what they could look to do, since it is in the Historic District, there was the possibility of removing the brick veneer. With that, they could then paint the exterior. That is what is in the proposal. She welcomes thoughts from the HDC on what would be best to do and what would make the most sense for everyone. When she brought the idea to her contractor, he was concerned about what they might find under the brick veneer. That would be a quick, accessible option and she sees some benefit to it, regarding being able to paint the space, but she does not know if it is the best option.

Mr. Clements stated that one option is to remove the brick veneer, and hopefully they would find relatively well intact concrete block behind it. The Historic District Regulations do allow for concrete to be painted. The first question staff would like the HDC's advice on is whether brick veneer is siding or structural. He asks this because the regulations provide some flexibility for non-contributing structures, which 102 Main St. is, to allow for the replacement of existing siding without needing approval from the HDC. That could be handled administratively, and the concrete could be painted to achieve the Applicant's goal. If the HDC feels that the brick veneer is not siding, one option would be to do tuck pointing repair. That could be handled administratively. However, it would not necessarily resolve the patchwork aesthetic of the repairs that have already taken place, and would not necessarily lead to the clean, spruced up, inviting façade that the applicant is looking for. The applicant would need to apply to the HDC for a waiver to paint the brick. The advice and comment for that would be gauging the HDC's potential to grant the waiver. The prohibition on painting masonry besides concrete is more about historic brick that is very porous. Modern painting of historic bricks leads to the rapid deterioration of the brick and would lead to further damage to the resource.

Mr. Clements continued that staff are looking for guidance on what the HDC would like to see in this situation, such as whether leaving the brick and painting it could be an option, or if the HDC is comfortable saying the brick is siding and having it removed. The regulations allow for replacement of those concrete blocks as needed, under the category of "ordinary maintenance." A building permit would be needed, but no additional HDC review would be needed. Ms. Norris would then be able to paint it. She had been talking about white, which would be fine. He and Ms. Norris also discussed the possibility of a mural, which is something she would need to bring before the HDC when she is ready to do that. There might be some benefit there to removing the brick.

Mr. Clements stated that he cannot show a picture of Cypress St. and does not know if the HDC members are familiar with it. The businesses along there are all different colors. It is sort of a hip, funky corner of downtown that is not so "picturesque New England." That is some context within this part of the Historic District that might be worth considering.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked Ms. Norris if it is correct that if the brick is removed, she would be dealing with repairing any issues she sees with the cinder block underneath. Ms. Norris replied yes. If there were structural concerns, absolutely.

Mr. Poanessa stated that with a brick veneer over a cement block, many times there are steel ties in the grout lines of the cement block to hold the brick to the block. If Ms. Norris does remove the brick, she might find there is an issue there that has to be dealt with before she could paint anything. If there were galvanized ties in the wall like that, maybe the contractor could cut them out, but he would be skeptical of that, because then there would be little cutoffs of steel that might bleed rust in the future. He thinks it would make more sense to repair the brick and paint it, instead of pulling it off and possibly finding more trouble. He thinks of the brick in this case as siding. The cement block behind it is most likely the structural part of the wall.

Ms. Zerba stated that to her, brick veneer is aesthetic. She would probably consider it to be siding rather than structural. Her concern is what color might be replacing it.

Ms. Norris replied that she would not deviate from white. She continued that as Mr. Clements mentioned, she hopes to come before the HDC sometime soon with a fully developed mural concept. She already has an artist in mind, who has been to Keene a couple of times, working on this space. He will be doing the branding for her business as well. He requests that if they are really trying to make this building an asset, trying to do something special in this corridor with it, and putting so much into it, it seems like a small ask to get the wall white to begin the process. It is around the corner from where the mural would be placed; it is almost a continuation of that.

Vice Chair Benik stated that she was going to ask if it is just the back wall, or the back wall and the side. Ms. Norris replied that for right now, it is just the bottom picture, the lower wall. Anything more would be something they would attach to the mural. She would have a complete concept for the HDC for that.

Mr. Clements stated that the expectation would be that all of the veneer would come off, or both sides of this façade would be painted, as opposed to just a strip. Ms. Norris replied that she will do whatever the HDC needs her to do to get this done. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she thinks Mr. Clements is right. She thinks making the whole building look consistent is part of the expectation. Ms. Zerba asked if she means not including the Cypress St. side where the mural is. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that is an excellent question, because the building does continue. The brewery is there, which is a different façade. Ms. Zerba added there is a beautiful mural there.

Mr. Clements stated that this building is part of the row on Main St. He continued that it is two walls they are talking about, the rear wall that faces the parking lot and the food co op, and around the corner, that faces Cypress St. and looks at the outdoor seating area where Black Cloud Brewing is. It is just those two facades. He asked if Ms. Norris was thinking of painting both. Ms. Norris replied not at this time. Today she is just asking about the back wall facing the parking lot. Mr. Clements asked if that would mean leaving the Black Cloud side as brick as it exists. Ms. Norris replied yes.

Ms. Zerba stated that when she drove by, it looked like there was a covered-up window, which she thinks used to be the bank window. Ms. Norris replied that she does not have any covered-up windows. Discussion ensued, and after viewing area photos that Mr. Clements showed her, Ms. Zerba stated that she was mistaken; the covered-up window she saw was on a different building.

Mr. Clements asked if Ms. Norris was thinking of having the mural on the same wall, or the Cypress St. side. Ms. Norris replied the Cypress St. side. Mr. Clements stated that it would make sense to paint that wall white, too. Ms. Norris replied that they would paint it white as a primer, where the mural would be.

Mr. Clements stated that he is hearing that the HDC generally agrees that the brick veneer is siding, not structural. There are legitimate maintenance and work concerns with just whole scale removing it. He imagines that if the veneer were removed on one side, they would want it removed on the other side, too. It would probably look weird, otherwise. A waiver to paint the veneer would solve the patchwork of the existing repair that has been done with the brick.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she does not have a concern with either pulling the veneer and then using the cinder block underneath, or painting the veneer. That is almost a question left to a better understanding of what might be hiding under the brick. But she personally does not see a problem with either option.

Mr. Poanessa stated that he would choose to prepare the brick and paint it rather than open a can of worms. Ms. Norris replied that would be her preference, too.

Mr. Clements replied that unfortunately, there is no distinction. The regulations have some discussion of historic brick, but there is no real distinction of a brick veneer that was installed much later and is a different composition. The HDC would require a complete application, they would have to notice abutters, and Ms. Norris would have to come to next month's HDC meeting before she could do the work. However, if she wanted to just remove the veneer siding, she could go home today and submit a building permit application to do that work.

Ms. Norris replied that she is in this for the long haul, and to avoid the potential can of worms, she would be happy to go through the full waiver process and come back in November with that.

Vice Chair Benik stated that she knows why the bottom strip on the wall had to be replaced. There used to be a planter there. For many years, it was filled with damp soil.

Mr. Clements asked if Ms. Norris had any other questions. Ms. Norris replied no. She will get started on submitting a waiver application. She appreciates today's conversation.

4. Outreach Project Update

Mr. Clements stated that he heard back from the Library. They have space to do a display. Mr. Ferrantello got him some full-size, glossy posters of some of the drawings the students did. It is just a matter of the HDC coordinating with the Library to figure out what that will look like. The agenda packet includes a brief update from the professor about what is happening with the

course. The HDC will need to decide, not necessarily right now, when and how to do that display. Someone should write an explanation for why this is going on. He will email Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos and Vice Chair Benik, so they can start to organize the display.

Mr. Clements stated that Vice Chair Benik created a short video, which he sent to the HDC members a while ago. Vice Chair Benik stated that they can watch it and give her feedback, including any suggestions for changes. She does not know if it is something they could send to the City staff person who oversees social media and ask her to either post it or recreate something like it. Mr. Clements replied that he will send it to her and see what she says. It would be great to get some feedback and a little bit of direction from her.

5. 2027 Meeting Schedule

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if any of the 2027 meeting dates fall on holidays and would need to be changed. Discussion ensued.

Ms. Zerba made a motion to approve the 2027 Historic District Commission meeting schedule. Mr. Poanessa seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

6. Staff Updates

7. New Business

Vice Chair Benik stated that she wanted to remind the group that she is stepping down at the end of this year. The HDC will need someone to take her place. Mr. Clements replied that she would be welcome to continue on as an alternate member if she wants to.

Mr. Poanessa stated that he would be glad to become a regular member instead of an alternate member. Mr. Clements replied that he will let the Mayor know.

8. Upcoming Dates of Interest

a. Next HDC Meeting: November 18, 2026 – 4:30 PM

b. HDC Site Visit: November 18, 2026 – 3:30 PM (to be confirmed)

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that it sounds like the HDC will have an application for their November meeting. She asked when the deadline is for someone to submit an application in time for the November meeting. Mr. Clements replied that unfortunately, it was October 16. He continued that he will email Ms. Norris and let her know that December 16, 2026, would be the next time the HDC could hear her application.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if that October 16 date is a statutory requirement, or if it is something the HDC could waive. Mr. Clements replied that the notice has to go out November 10, and revision is due November 6. They might be able to make this work. It is not a very complicated application to put together. If Ms. Norris could get the application in Monday or Tuesday, he thinks it could work for a November hearing.

9. Adjourn

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

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Evan J. Clements, AICP
Planner / Zoning Administrator