

Exeter Heritage Commission

August 15, 2017

Draft Minutes

Members present: Julie Gilman, Pam Gjetum, John Merkle, Chairman, Maura Fay, Kelly Bergeron, Peter Smith

Call meeting to Order: John Merkle called meeting to order at 7:00 pm in the Exeter Town Hall Building at 12 Front Street.

This meeting was a public hearing where residents attended. The commission started by introducing themselves.

This public meeting is to discuss the requested demolition of the carriage house attached to the building at 12 Front Street, known locally as the Gardner House.

Residents who attended: Gregory Colling, John Lyons, Alyssa Murphy, Anne Bushnell, Eric Weinfieb, Ian Rawn, Barbara Rimbunas, Vicki Gies, Ed & Judy Rousin, Paul Vlasich, Ann Schieber

First to speak was Attorney John Lyons from Portsmouth and he represents the owner of the building. He also brought Allyssa Murphy who is the architect for the project. Allyssa spoke about how everyone has the same respect for the building. She stated that the carriage house is not part of the original building and the floor is raised about a foot above the rest of the building. This carriage house is in the back of the building.

Next to speak was the owner, Ann Bushnell. She stated that she has been living in this home for the past 19 years. She has tried for the past five years to sell, but have had no luck.

One of the engineers from Altus engineering, Inc. spoke. He passed out a blue print map to members of the commission. He stated they talked to the Town about the expanding the driveway and they came to the conclusion that the best location would be to move it over to the side. He stated that if they preserve the carriage house, it would prevent making more parking available.

Attorney John Lyons spoke again. He stated that on May 16, 2017, the plan that was in front of the commission was submitted to the Zoning Board. This plan was accepted by the Zoning Board. He stated that the goal is to keep the property as a single family residence. He stated that they met with the Town and came up with this plan. He stated that everyone knows what happens when you convert single family home into multiple units. You can see it up and down in Exeter and also in Portsmouth. There are four or five mailboxes out front. The front of the home has changed drastically. He stated that they do not want this to happen and they have a plan to address this to keep this building as a single family structure. He then stated that what they are asking of a 7,000 ft. square building is to take down 525 sq. feet. He stated that the new building they have on the property is tucked way in the back. They did this on purpose because the back takes a sloop. So, what is more important. Is it more important that the 525 sq. ft. in the back of the building be maintained or the beautiful home as a single family home be maintained. From their perspective, this is an easy question. He stated that the chairman talked about looking at this property and having some historic value. He stated that he is going to disagree with this conclusion. He stated that in 2012, Ann was given permission to take the garage down in the back of her home. It was taken down in August of 2014. Subsequently, a potential purchaser of the property

made an inquiry of the Historic District Commission as to whether or not it pertained to the carriage house. The Historic District Commission reached the conclusion that the carriage house “was a non-contributing” and it could be removed. He then stated that these statements have been verified on the record. He then stated that they inquired at the beginning of this year of the Historic District Commission about what people have been calling the carriage house. He then passed out copies of minutes from the January 19, 2017 Historic District Commission meeting. He highlighted what he wanted the commission to read and he read it. He stated that they know it is not a carriage house because the arches are plywood and it is a foot up off the ground. On closer inspection, the details is that someone was trying to match the details of the house. He then stated that the members of the HDC, independent of us and before we came to you, have verified everything we have talked about. He then stated that he reviewed the taping of this meeting. He made a transcript of the comments and read them to the committee. He stated that they are just asking to take down 525 sq. ft. behind the building so they can preserve the front building. He then stated that he would like the commission to notify the building inspector so the demolition can proceed.

Julie then made a motion to open the meeting to the public regarding 12 Front Street. Maura seconded. All were in favor and public hearing open.

First to speak was Greg Collins who is an architect. He stated that he just wanted to make some comments on his experience. He stated that the concept of putting nine units on this property seems outrageous. Four units would be more appropriate. He stated that to build another structure on a historic property would be problematic to this town. This structure is part of our community and part of downtown. He stated that he also spoke to the State Architectural Historian James Garvin. He stated that communities in new Hampshire are losing these types of out buildings. Greg then stated that he thinks something else can be done in preserving this house.

Next resident was Vicki Geis who had a question about whether this commission is authorized to approve. She then asked if it is just the tearing down of the building or does it include the nine units in the back. John Merkle, Chairman, stated that the Heritage Commission is an advisory commission. Attorney John Lyons stated that the nine units have been approved by the ZBA. Vicky then stated that if they sell nine condo units in the back, this changes the historical property in our community. Pam then spoke and stated that she was appalled at what they were doing. Attorney Lyons then asked the Chairman if Pam was a voting member on the board. He then asked for Pam to recuse herself. On the record, she just indicated that she was appalled at what they were doing and on the record indicated that she would not tell truth if she knew what they were doing. Attorney Lyons then stated that they were not here about the nine units, they are here about the carriage house. Pam did not leave. John Merkle, Chairman then stated that the commission is dealing with the demolition of the carriage house. They have no jurisdiction over the nine units. They are here about the carriage house.

Judy then spoke about the carriage house and with zoning there are only so many spaces for parking. Julie then stated that this is a zoning issue and not for the Heritage Commission. She then asked what other commissions or committees will be hearing this. She then stated that John Merkle stated that he does not think the HDC will be hearing this. Julie stated that they have had legal counsel on this in the past with other projects that have come before the HDC and got an opinion on one that said the building in whole or in part, is within the historic district. She then stated that according to their own plans, the 200 ft. is back past the carriage house, which we are talking about, is within the historic district. Judy then stated that this needs to go before the Selectmen, HDC and the Planning Board.

Julie stated that the different boards have different roles in this. The selectmen are only going to be talking about the easement from the parking lot into the property and how they want to solve that

situation. The Planning Board will deal with the whole project. The HDC is only going to talk about the demolition and what replaces it.

Next to speak was Ian Rawn. He stated that part of the heritage of Exeter is the place, the environment and the historic buildings. He mentioned the landscaping with trees and grass. He respects the rights of the owner, but he thinks that nine units and 12 parking spots is excessive. Something smaller would be better. He then stated that he just wanted to express his reservations about this.

John then asked if there was anyone else from the public who would like to speak. There was no one. Barbara from the Historical Society spoke. She stated that what they know about the Gardner House at 12 Front Street is that it was built over the period of 1826 – 1827. The house cost almost \$7,000 to build. It was built for John Gardner. She gave information about the home and who lived there.

Alyssa Murphy the architect spoke again. She stated the building is old and not sure what contributing value it has to the home and is hoping everyone is trying to accomplish the same thing.

Next to speak was Peter Smith. He stated that the federal construction build a water system in the carriage house. This is why the floor is not the same. He feel that this is an original part of the house. He feels that historic places are being chipped away piece by piece.

John Merkle, Chairman then asked if there was anymore public input. Attorney Lyons spoke to Peter to thank him for referencing the inside of the house. This is one of the biggest reasons Ann wants to keep it as a single family house. He then stated that they are all trying to get to the same place. He stated they are trying to preserve this building the best way they can. He stated that they have the right to put a building back there and put multiple units in it. The option is, do they then put units into the front building. Trees are going to come down, but the goal is to make this house a single family residence. He then stated that the only way to maintain this house is to defer the cost.

Judy then spoke again. She stated that as an owner of historic property and putting thousands of dollars into it, she can appreciate what they are saying. She is not in favor of the demolition.

The owner, Ann Bushnell spoke again. She showed several photos of her home and none showed the carriage house. She also brought a historical architectural book that does not mention carriage houses. Julie made a recommendation against demolition of the rear section of the house at 12 Front Street. Maura seconded. All were in favor and recommendation accepted.

John stated that he does not remember a Heritage Commission meeting in January. Maura stated that they did not meet in January and there was no reference made to the Heritage Commission being approached before. She stated that they were approached about this a couple of months ago as far as she is aware. Julie then stated going with the HDC request for an opinion, but again she knows it is in the minutes, but there was no vote taken on anything and it was an opinion or a discussion and not a decision. Julie then stated that one of the things they have heard is that people are looking at this building and you can see this from the street. Not having them mentioned in books, does not mean that they are not important. She had a map of 1884 and it shows the three sections. She is not sure if that is the original part they are looking at now.

There were no other public comments, so Julie made a motion to close the public hearing. Kelly seconded. All were in favor and public hearing closed.

The HDC discussed the Town Sign with the Town Engineer, Paul Vlasich. They looked at slides of signs with different colors. The options were blue, yellow and white. After picking the color, next is the

wording. Julie stated that whatever wording is decided upon, the DHR has to approve. The commission likes the blue with white wording. The Historic Society will check dates for the wording on the sign. Paul stated that he needs a decision before the HDC's next meeting. A few HDC members will meet on Thursday at 10:30 at the Historical Society to make the final selections.

Paul had brought a poster of what the etched glass would look like. He also passed out pictures of the library windows so the commission could see how it would look from different spots.

John asked about the Winter Street Cemetery. Julie stated that the condition survey was going to be done 8/21/17. John also asked about the Master Plan and Pam stated that they will be meeting tomorrow morning at 8 am.

With no further business, Julie made a motion to adjourn at 9:30 pm. Kelly seconded. All were in favor and meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Herrick
Recording Secretary