

1 Exeter Heritage Commission Demolition Review Committee

2 August 21, 2019

3 Draft Minutes

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5 Members Present: John Merkle, Chairman, Pam Gjettum, Jay , Julie Gilman, Select Board, John
6 Grueter

7 Call Meeting To Order: John Merkle, Chairman, called meeting to order at 1:00 pm in the Novak Room
8 of the Exeter Town Office Building.

9 John Merkle stated that this is a public meeting of the Heritage Commission Demolition Review
10 Committee due to an application that was submitted to demolish a building on 110 High Street. He
11 stated that according to the Zoning Ordinance, they have to hold a public hearing to get input from the
12 public. John then stated that the Heritage Commission is an advisory commission. They do not have the
13 authority to do things that normally would be done by the Planning Board. This board is very similar to
14 the Conservation Commission. John stated that he would now like to give the applicant an opportunity
15 to present what they intend to do with the property at 110 High Street.

16 Colin Lavery introduced himself. He is the Construction Project Manager for Exeter Hospital. He also
17 had Caitlyn Porscha who is also a Construction Project Manager. Colin stated that they put an
18 application in to the Town of Exeter to raise the existing structure at 110 High Street, to remove the
19 foundation and to loom and seed the area. They are looking to retain the property. Its

20 future use, they are uncertain at this time. The hospital sees the property as a safety hazard,
21 particularly on the west side of the property, the barn and the garage. It would need significant dollars
22 to make it what they consider safe. They see this as a public safety issue. They would rather be pro-
23 active and remove the structure and landscape the area. They would try and make it appealing to the
24 neighborhood. Colin then stated that this is where they stand right now and opened it up for any
25 comments from the board and public. He would also like to find out how the process goes moving
26 forward. Pam stated that they basically just want to tear it down and have an empty lot. Colin stated
27 that this is correct. Pam then stated it was falling down because of lack of maintenance. Colin stated
28 they had originally obtained the property for future use, but there has not been any need for the use of
29 the property. They also do not have any intent to fix the property at this time. He stated they consider
30 it an asset owning the property and they plan to retain it.

31 John Merkle then stated that he would like to get the public's input. Bill Campbell who lives across the
32 street got up to speak. Bill stated that he and his wife have lived across the street at 111 High Street
33 since 1996. He stated that in 1973 he was invited to come up and interview at the academy for a job.
34 The person who invited him was the Chairman of the Math Department who lived at 111 High Street.
35 His name was Charlie Swift. Charlie said when you come up, because there was no GPS in those days,
36 come up 95, come in on 101, but get off on High Street. He said that High Street was the gateway into
37 the town. In 1996, they bought Charlie's house. Since living there, they have formed neighborhood
38 groups for the past ten years. They have parties every holiday season. They do some and other
39 neighbors do some. Everyone on the street goes. Even though it is a long street, it is a neighborhood.

40 Bill said they worked hard in 2006 to get it to be in the Historic District. The people on High Street are
41 very concerned about the appearance. They have done work on their homes and kept the appearance
42 of what it looked like when it was built many years ago. Bill stated that they lost one barn when it was
43 torn down in 2002 over the Fourth of July weekend when they were not around to see it. That was a
44 loss. The point is that we are a very strong community and value the look of the town. To be good
45 neighbors with the hospital, we hope they would look at this house, fix it up and keep it so that it would
46 remain part of the town in the neighbor. Bill stated that if he had a tooth out, he would still be able to
47 function but every time he smiled there would be a hole in his mouth. This is what will be here. There
48 will be a nicely kept lawn, but there is a hole. They really like the historic nature of the town and the
49 street and they hope the hospital will reconsider. The money spent to demolish it, probably would re-
50 roof it and paint it, at least on the outside. Bill said that the house next door to this is owned by the
51 hospital for a long time and has been used by staff that come to town and need a place for a few
52 months. The barn and the 1850s house, there are not many of these in Exeter anymore. They really are
53 a treasure. There will definitely be a hole on this street if this is taken out.

54 Next, Peter Wells got up to speak and he lives at 140 High Street. Peter stated he had the pleasure to
55 stand in front of the HDC not long ago for renovations on their 1835 farm house. They have done a lot
56 of work on this. Peter stated this is why he is here today. High Street has a look and character to it. He
57 stated that back in 2008, he tried to buy the house at 110 High Street several times and the seller just
58 would not come around. He ran the numbers and thought this would be a perfect rental for a family
59 that is trying to move into town. He stated that at the time, the bones of the house seemed pretty
60 good. He agrees with Bill that if you take it out, it just seems like a tooth missing. He thinks that there
61 should be a better approach and this is just his opinion.

62 Kathy Corson spoke next. She stated that she has been invited to the High Street parties. She stated
63 that she spends a lot of time walking down High Street. She is a realtor. She stated that the house is in
64 disrepair and that does bring the neighborhood down, but she thinks that it would be brought down
65 even more when there is that missing tooth. With the trees down, High Street has a commercial
66 building on it that is very large, the hospital. On High Street, what the people really enjoy, despite there
67 being a hospital there, is not to see it. With this property gone, it will not be hidden. Kathy said she was
68 on the Planning Board for many years. She is not sure of the date, but the hospital came to them about
69 2009, but not certain of the date. They were doing a lot of work and they brought in their master plan.
70 Like us, like our town, we have a master plan. That was ten years ago. She suspects this is one of the
71 steps in their master plan. It would be a shame if the hospital does not share this with the town,
72 especially when they merge with a large corporation. As this demolition occurs, we lose some of the
73 control as a town. She stated that she would encourage the hospital to share their master plan with the
74 Planning Board, hopefully the HDC and let us know what they are doing in our neighborhood. She thinks
75 it is good to be good neighbors.

76 Edmund Barnes who lives at 136 High Street spoke. Edmund lived in Portsmouth in the 1970s and lived
77 there for twenty-three years. They went through a phase where they were tearing down every historic
78 building they had. He stated that if he looked at this house, he would never have guessed it was from
79 the 1850s. Edmund stated he understands this property has been owned for at least ten years and
80 nothing was done to it. He believes there are options. There are hospitals across the country who have
81 buildings like this and using them for families who relatives need long term care and they cannot afford

82 to stay in a hotel. What makes him nervous about this situation is that they say they are going to tear it
83 down, mow and seed the lawn and then decide what to do with it.

84 Colin spoke again and thanked the members of the public for their comments and concerns. He stated
85 that they are sensitive to the neighborhood and the hospital wants to be a good neighbor. He wanted
86 to mention usage of the property for doctors, nurses, etc. They currently do have several properties
87 around that they use them for this and at this time, they do not see the need for this at this location.
88 Also, the house they currently own next to this property, they see no need to get rid of it at this time
89 because it is in good condition. This house really poses public safety and concern and it will take
90 significant dollars to get it where it needs to be. As he mentioned before, they are looking to remove
91 the house, mow the area and landscape it nicely. The hospital takes pride in how it landscapes its
92 grounds to make the neighborhood ecstatically pleasing. Colin stated that today he cannot speak about the
93 hospital master plan, but he can take it back to the senior director. He appreciated the time today and
94 looks forward to the next step in this process.

95 Bill Campbell asked if this has anything to do with the hospital merger with MGH. Colin stated this is
96 driven by planning measures as they are a standing alone organization today. They are in the process of
97 merging with MGH, but as of right now, day to day operations and planning, they are operating on the
98 basis they have had for a few years.

99 John Merkle stated the commission had received comments from other residents about the joining
100 merger. John then asked Doug Eastman if the building was a public safety issue right now. Doug stated
101 that it has not been evaluated so he would say no right now. John Merkle said that what they are
102 suppose to do is discuss alternatives. He then asked if the hospital felt the need to have a presence on
103 High Street. It is a large enough piece of property where the building can be saved. There still is land on
104 the lower end adjacent to the parking. Colin stated they could certainly look at it, but as of right now, an
105 option has not been looked at to retain the property as it stands.

106 Pam stated that Colin has already stated that the property is too expensive to maintain and they do not
107 want to use it, so why not sell it. Colin said as he stated earlier, the hospital is interested in retaining the
108 property for future use and as of today, there is no idea of what this will be. To let the property
109 continue to fall into disrepair is not what they pride themselves on. They do not find it necessary to
110 continue to let the building fall apart. Pam then stated that it is only falling into disrepair because they
111 have not fixed it. Colin again stated it is because there is no need or use for this building at this time.

112 Peter Wells spoke again stating that he just went through this with the HDC on his property at 140 High
113 Street. He stated that the demolition crews are currently ripping out the third floor. They made
114 commitments to the Town of Exeter and the HDC to keep their house architecturally as it was in 1835. It
115 is going to cost a lot more money to keep it exactly that way. He has a problem thinking that the
116 hospital can't kick up for it like he is doing for his home. He stated that he just can't figure that one out.

117 John Grueter asked how long ago the property was purchased. Colin stated he does not have the exact
118 date on that with him today, but thinks it has been about ten years. John asked why it was purchased.
119 Colin stated they bought it like they purchased other properties around the campus. John asked what
120 had been done to the property over the years and Colin did not know but could look into it. This
121 property was rented at one time over the years. Colin told the commission that they are welcome to

122 take a walk about the property and go inside and see what it looks like. If there are any historic items
123 that the town might be interested in, to be good neighbors, the town could take them.

124 Colin stated that if the building is removed, there are trees there and the hospital is protected by
125 vegetation into the parking lot, so it would not be seen clearly. Colin told the commission that in order
126 to bring the house up to a safe residential use, it would be a minimum of \$250,000.

127 Julie stated that she hates to use this phrase, but what she sees is demolition by neglect. She stated
128 that the HDC will ask the question as to what the plans for that piece of property is. She thinks that
129 some of the recommendations that were made should be considered. She also stated that they were
130 never allowed inside because they were waiting for the asbestos report. John said he was notified
131 about going inside but he just could not get everybody together and the invitation is still there. Julie
132 said this will help define the date of the property. She respects that the other properties that the
133 hospital owns are well maintained. She just cannot understand about this property. She states that
134 long term family care is a great idea. Pam stated that they want us to keep some historic pieces from
135 the property. Saving a mantle piece, is not saving the look of the street. We as the Heritage, say it is the
136 heritage. Colin stated again that they would more than welcome a site walk on the building. They want
137 to be good neighbors and they are more than willing to salvage any items.

138 John Merkle stated that they do not have to get inside. To the commission, this is much more important
139 to the neighborhood because it is a designated historic district and it has been a designated contributor
140 too. When we ask the question of each other and make a recommendation probably the HDC of how
141 they feel, it is about the outside, not the inside.

142 Kathy Corson spoke again. She stated when she was not on any board yet when the hospital put in their
143 parking garage. It is not good to get a neighborhood upset with you. The Planning Board spent a lot of
144 time in a meeting with the neighbors in attendance and the hospital had to change things. For instance,
145 way before her time, Helen Kurdits her neighborhood over on Highland and Prospect. They got the
146 hospital to move their parking garage all the way over on the other side. Being on board and having
147 neighbors come to boards, can greatly change plans. She thinks they should really think about \$250,000
148 investment and the hospital is going to be spending, as she heard at the special meeting on Monday,
149 100 million dollars to get their facility up and going.

150 Colin will take all these comments and suggestions back to the senior director to review.

151 John Grueter asked John about the comments he has from some other neighbors. John stated that he
152 had them but they are related to the merger of Mass General. John then said that if the hospital knows
153 what is going to be done with this property, they do not want to reveal it to them. He then stated that
154 question is really not relevant for what they have to deal with here. Pam stated that it does make a
155 difference to the extent that we do not want to tear it down if we do not know what is going in its place.

156 Edmund Barnes from 136 High Street spoke again. He apologized because he stated he does not know
157 the rules of the HDC. He does not think it is his obligation to give the hospital a list of suggestions because
158 it is their property. What concerns Edmund is what is going to be done once the building is destroyed.
159 After the building is demolished, can the hospital put another building back up. If they can put another
160 building up, do the rules in Exeter say that building has to have the characteristics of the 1820's and 1850's.
161 If a building goes up and used as a lab by the hospital is it clinical space, is it commercial in the historic

162 district. What is allowable and not allowable if the hospital rebuilds. Suppose they decide not to put a
163 building up. There is a lawn there and another building there that they are currently using and decide
164 they need some secondary parking. Can they convert this to a parking lot. He is not looking for an answer.
165 These are the things that would drive him crazy.

166 Julie stated that there is no requirement for someone to build a replica of something that even looks like
167 similar from a period of time.

168 Jay asked Colin if he could maybe address some of the deliberations that have taken you to the point that
169 a lot is better than selling it or refurbishing it. Colin stated that he cannot speak about the discussions
170 that have gone on because it is at a level above him at this time. He stated that he does know that the
171 discussions have no intension to use 110 High Street or bring it up to what the hospital considers safe
172 conditions. There is no need to allow the building to continue to go into disrepair. The hospital sees it
173 necessary to remove the structure for public safety. Colin stated that as far as a future plan, right now it
174 is to remove the structure, remove the foundations and seed and loom the area to make it attractive to
175 the neighborhood. He also stated other than this, he has no further information about what the future
176 will bring. John Merkle said that if the members want to go and tour the building, he will go to that. He
177 does not think with what they are tasked to do, he does not need to go inside it. It would be for
178 enrichment and education. He then asked if there was any more discussion amongst the commission and
179 there was not. He then stated that what they need to do make a recommendation on how this should be
180 treated. John thinks this should be going to the HDC. To the applicant, he is not sure if the Planning Board
181 would be interested in seeing this and also the Board of Adjustment might be interested.

182 John Merkle then asked for a motion for a recommendation. Julie made a motion to reject demolition of
183 110 High Street because it is historic and important to the town. Pam seconded. All were in favor and
184 motion approved.

185 Colin thanked the members of the commission and the public for their time. He then asked what the next
186 steps would be going forward. John Merkle said that the commission cannot stop them from demolishing
187 the building. He then stated they have thirty days total to document it, if they will let the commission do
188 that. Colin stated absolutely. John Merkle then stated after that, the approvals they need to demolish it,
189 have to go through the other boards because the Heritage Commission has no jurisdiction over that. One
190 of the others is the HDC.

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