

Heritage Commission/Demolition Review Committee

November 8, 2021

Final Minutes

Members Present: Jay Myers, Chairman, John Merkle, Vice Chair, John Grueter, Planning Board Rep., Bill Campbell, Pam Gjettum, Julie Gilman, Select Board Rep.

Call Meeting To Order: Jay Myers, Chairman, called meeting to order at 7:00 pm in the Nowak Room of the Exeter Town Office Building to discuss a proposal by Phillips Exeter Academy for the proposed demolition of the existing structures(s) located on the properties at 35 High Street and 8 Gilman Lane. Parcel #s 71-117 and #71-119.

The public is encouraged to attend and participate in this informal meeting to discuss concerns or alternatives to the proposed demolition of the property.

Jay thanked everyone for coming to this public hearing. He did not see anyone from the public joining at the moment. He then said he wanted to identify the plan of agenda. He said we are here tonight to talk about the property at 8 Gilman Lane and 35 High Street. There were slides for all to see. Jay then entertained a motion to open the meeting to the public and Julie said, so moved. John Grueter seconded. All were in favor and they moved forward with that motion.

Jay said the purpose of the Heritage Commission is to do for Historical Resources what the Conservation Commission does for Natural Resources. This committee, on these occasions provides advice, conducts inventories, educates the public and serves as a resource. This is one of fifty Heritage Commissions in the State of NH. Relative to our proceedings today, our presence and advice is triggered with applications for demolition on structures and buildings that are over fifty years old. At the site, members of the Heritage Commission visit with the property owners and the committee undergoes a process of deliberation, asking themselves, does the interest or quality of this property meet national, state or local criteria designated as historic culture or architectural landmarks.

There were slides showing the properties at 8 Gilman Lane and 35 High Street. Jay then wanted to identify the timeline with which this demo review takes place by the Zoning Board. It is when the property owner files their building permit and we have within a week to meet, seven days and we did do that on October 8th. Then, within a thirty day period, we are permitted the opportunity to have a public hearing and maintain a follow-up with the property owners relative to the decision of the demolition. Jay then invited Heather, Curtis and Mark to share with everyone the proposed demolition.

Heather thanked the committee for inviting them here to continue this dialog. The presentation this evening is really a continued discussion from the discussion we had on site on October 8th. She then introduced the team. She is Heather Taylor, Campus Planner and Architect, Mark Layton, Director of Facilities and Curtis Boivin, Tech Facilities, Technical Planner and is an architect as well. She said she wanted to recap what they are trying to do. This is a part of a proposed faculty neighborhood for the academy faculty. In April of 2020, we purchased 35 High Street. She showed slides of this property and just south of this is our observatory. One of the reasons we purchased the property is for program preservation. The other reason is that they do have a shortage of faculty housing. 35 High Street contains six apartment units right now of one and two bedroom small units and they are all filled now with faculty.

Also on this site is 8 Gilman Lane and Gilman now has access to our fields. One of the things we are looking at in this proposed development is actually reroute Gilman Lane to come out to the intersection at the light.

Heather said they are here today to seek approval for the partial demolition of 35 High Street and the demolition of 8 Gilman Lane. She said she would start with 35 High Street and the house dates to the early 1800s. Their goal is to remove the back portions of the site and restore the original colonial box. She said right now it is in excellent condition and their goal is to restore the exterior envelope.

Curtis then spoke and said 35 High Street was built by Josiah Gilman Smith, son of Joziah Evan Levitt and they lived there until 1897 and then Dr. Sawyer was the first of several doctors to have a home there.

35 High Street is constructed with a post and beam and pegged connection, so it is an old construction. It is something you would really see in the late 1700 to 1800s in construction.

Heather spoke again and showed images of 8 Gilman Lane, front and the back and the basement. She said the foundation dates to 1799 and the academy has owned the building since 1910 and they have had faculty in it since then. In 2016, the last of the faculty moved out. She said the challenges of the house is that it is very large, much larger than their typical faculty home. In 2016, after the faculty member who had lived there for a long time moved out, we engaged an architect to look at to see if they could divide it into two. It was very expensive and it didn't yield productive units for faculty. One of the things we require for the faculty is an office at home and it wasn't able to provide the right number of bedrooms and an office. It did not work very well so they just set it aside. She said everything they do is program driven and it didn't fit the need for the faculty housing so she showed the commission the proposed development that includes the restoration of 35 High Street. It included a new structure that would be designed to fit the criteria within the Historic District.

Curtis spoke and explained the history of 8 Gilman Lane. He said they know that a lot of things have been put on and taken off the house. The windows on the front of the house are from the 1900s and the windows on the back of the house are probably from the 1960s. There are a lot of things that have changed over the years. The only thing that we can say is original is the foundation of the house.

Heather said that giving that 35 High Street was in such good condition and looking at how we could reuse the existing front structure and the really nice efficient two bedroom units, we are proposing to demo part of the back end and restore the front. Unfortunately with many of the challenges of 8 Gilman Lane and because it has been edited, so our proposal is to demolish it and replace it with the buildings as shown on the plan. She said their overall goal is to create this welcoming neighborhood. She then said they would like to answer any questions and again thanked the committee for this opportunity.

Jay said he thanked them for all the details that were provided. He then said there was no one from the public present and there is no one on line so he turned it over to the commission to ask questions.

Bill asked if they could do one property at a time and start with 35 High Street. Jay agreed and said that would be a good idea.

Julie said that she did not go on the site walk, but the presentation they made on what they want to do seem appropriate. As much as you have researched it and know about the structure, she appreciates them wanting to keep it there for its original purpose. She then said she does not have any dilemmas for the proposal of this building.

Pam said she is fine with 35 High Street. It is 8 Gilman Lane that she has all kinds of issues with.

John Merle said he is delighted with the attention they are doing with 35 High Street. Bill said he is also fine with 35 also.

Pam made a motion to accept the proposal as submitted for 35 High Street. Parcel # 71-117. Bill seconded. All were in favor and motion passes.

Jay said they now will turn their discussion into the 8 Gilman Lane property and the proposed demolition of that structure.

Pam said they made a wonderful presentation and she went through the house, but she loves that house. She said this house was a wedding present. She then went on to say that there was an Indian burial in the basement. She said he had been buried there with six pewter spoons. Pam then said that you cannot let it go without a fight.

Heather said they did look at different roadway plans on how they could keep it but nothing gelled to make it work so that is why we are here with this proposal.

Bill asked about the replacement and Heather said the replacement is really going to be a new piece in the front lawn.

Julie said the commission has no purview on having any decision on what they are proposing.

Mark said that they have looked at everything the commission has asked and there is still significant altering of that structure and that's where we felt like we were still trying to make something work that in the end is not really going to work as far as program for them. They will start over and build something they

hope in five years will look like it has been here for 100 years except in better shape because it will be brand new.

Jay asked if the history can be memorialized in a way that is different than the house itself. When the house goes, the reminder of that history goes with it.

Mark said they talked about that internally and thinks it is a great idea to be even able to document the history even better than what they have done and you can do it several different ways. Whether it is on site to do something to memorialize it, or document it, or even work with a society.

Pam said they have tons of documentation of houses that do not exist anymore. You can document, but the house is still gone.

Heather said they would be happy to do something on site as the public do work to that area.

John Merkle said the story is very interesting, but looking at the building, he does not see it, especially from the rear.

Jay then asked the commission if there was any more discussion. John Grueter said that 8 Gilman Lane looked like it needed a lot of work.

Jay said seeing the inside, there seems to be some things that could be reused. The field stone on the foundation perhaps incorporated into another structure. Is this something that is in the purview of a redesign of that area?

Mark said the materials on the inside of the building, those are things they would definitely work on with the contractor.

Bill asked if there was a way to reuse some of the beams in the new structure and Curtis said yes because they are valuable. That kind of timber, you cannot get anymore.

Jay then asked for a motion on this property. Julie made a motion to approve the demolition of 8 Gilman Lane Parcel #71-119, with the following conditions, that the PEA work with HC for some kind of mitigating display and also the reuse of materials.

John Merkle asked if they could take the house apart carefully to maybe document where the changes had occurred so we would know a little bit more about it.

Mark said he thinks that is a great idea. John said when you take off a piece of the wall and you can see where the door originally was. They might even be able to get traces of moldings and things that would help tell a story that Pam alluded to.

Heather said they would be happy to work with the commission to come up with a plan to sort of take it apart a little bit to try and figure out some of the history and then document it.

Jay asked for a second on this motion. John Grueter seconded. All were in favor except for Pam and it was approved.

Jay then made a motion to adjourn at 8:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Herrick

Recording Secretary