

Exeter Historic District Commission
August 28, 2018
Draft Minutes

Call Meeting To Order: Patrick Gordon called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm in the Nowak Room of the Exeter Town Office Building.

Members Present: Patrick Gordon, Chair; Curtis Boivin, Vice Chair; Pam Gjettum, Clerk; Gregory Colling; Linda Allen; Nicholas Gray

New Business: Public Hearings:

Continued public hearing on the application of Excel Construction Management (on behalf of Freedman Realty Inc.) for change to the existing structure located at 173 Water Street. The Applicant is requesting review of modifications to the existing building to construct a covered parking lot, a second and third story addition to the structure and associated site improvements. The subject property is located in the WC-Waterfront Commercial zoning district. Tax Map Parcel #64-50. Case #18-01.

Michael Todd of Excel Construction Management presented elevations for the Smith building addition and renovation, as well as window samples and detail sheets addressing recommendations made by the HDC in a prior meeting. He said that the front facade remains the same. The trim work is on the upper elevation, which is 54 feet behind the facade, and will be flat panels made of HardiePlank or composites. On the right side elevation they will be cutting in new windows and adding open grilles for ventilation to the parking garage. The brickwork will be all new. The flat siding was shown as black in the elevation, but will be "Rich Espresso," a dark chocolate color, and will be smooth.

Mr. Gordon asked if there a change in the projection from front to back, and if the balconies and the gables are overhangs. Mr. Todd stated that there's nothing that protrudes outside of the existing footprint other than the gables, which protrude about 12 inches. Mr. Gordon asked how much the setbacks are recessed. Mr. Boivin pointed out that in the plan they're recessed four or five feet.

Mr. Colling observed that there is a post sitting on top of a masonry wall, and asked why it was not aligned with the piers below. Mr. Todd said that it is a planter to separate the private decks of the two apartments. Mr. Colling questioned why it was a planter rather than a partition, and Mr. Gordon suggested that it be moved behind the railing so that the railing is continuous. Mr. Todd said that they could change that detail.

Mr. Boivin raised the issue of the building's height relative to adjacent buildings. Per zoning ordinance, story height must be within 10% of the average of the buildings within 250 feet. Mr. Todd made the distinction between story height and building height, and stated that his building is within 10% of the average story height. Mr. Boivin stated that story height is not a defined term in the code, but zoning regulations also deal with building height. Mr. Todd stated that the

building next door is 66 feet, and the proposed building is only 50 feet high. Mr. Boivin calculated that the average height of the directly adjacent buildings, the Merrill block and the Willow, is 52 or 53 feet, which is in scale with the proposed building. Mr. Boivin stated that this height follows the letter of the ordinance, and the board agreed.

The board next discussed the details of the proposed building. Mr. Colling suggested that the turnbuckle rods of the canopies be anchored to the facade. Mr. Colling next advised against vertical brick sills, and said that he should add metal flashing for better building performance, as brick sills will fail in New England weather. Mr. Boivin stated that a stone sill would also be an appropriate solution. Mr. Collings asked about the gables projecting past the cornice. Mr. Todd stated that they go back about six or eight feet.

Mr. Boivin asked how the bathrooms and kitchens would be ventilated. Mr. Todd said that they had not yet done mechanical designs, but that there would definitely be systems on the roof, and the equipment will fit on the roof into the current footprint; there may also be some minimal sidewall ventilation. Mr. Boivin suggested that they run the ventilation through the main air handler so that there would be no sidewall ventilation. Mr. Gordon observed that between the units there are thickened walls that could be used to chase the bathrooms to the roof.

Ms. Gjettum stated that the line drawing looks lovely, but she is uncomfortable with the color Rich Espresso, which looks like a big black eye. Mr. Todd said that it's an accent, and not as black as it looks in the elevation. Mr. Colling and Mr. Boivin observed that the board does not have purview over color, only material. Mr. Gordon said that their statements about color are only a recommendation, not prescriptive, but that the recessed/shadow area is feeling dark and showing that the railing material has more contrast would look better. Mr. Colling also pointed out that color is not applied consistently. Mr. Todd said that the rendering was not doing the colors justice but that he would look at the color change.

Mr. Gordon observed that there is a single center post on the sliders, which is not likely to line up in the dead center, and that they should try using two posts instead. Mr. Todd stated that they have a better chance of lining it up in a framed opening. Mr. Colling disagreed with Mr. Gordon on the supporting column. Ms. Gjettum stated that if they thought they could line up the posts, to go ahead. Mr. Gordon established that the board members are comfortable with posts in the center.

Mr. Colling and Mr. Gordon then asked Mr. Todd to describe the materials he would be using. Mr. Todd said that there are two different types and shades of siding. There is no texture, they will be smooth. The brick will be as close to existing red brick as possible, and will be full width, not a brick veneer. Mr. Todd would like to use is a fiberglass Integrity window with a wood exterior and a simulated divided lite. Mr. Boivin stated that he is fine with the fiberglass window. The residents' doors will be of Marvin systems. Mr. Boivin asked whether the doors would be aluminum clad or fiberglass, and Mr. Todd stated that they could be either. Mr. Colling recommended that the proportions and size of the openings should be as shown and should use aluminum or fiberglass, not vinyl, and the board agreed with that statement. Mr. Gordon

stated that the first floor aluminum storefront windows should have no anodizing. Mr. Colling said that it would be better if they were anodized, but Mr. Gordon replied that black anodized finishes won't last around marine or brackish water.

Mr. Gordon opened the floor for general comment from the board.

Mr. Gray said that he likes the project and it will be a great addition to center of downtown. He understands the concern about height and size, but thinks this is a quality project. Mr. Colling stated that the project has come a long way. However, he is concerned that the openings of the first floor on the water side are all voids with a thin center span, only two soldier courses. Mr. Boivin said that landscaping would soften the impact of the columns and the edge of the void. Mr. Todd stated that he is working with the DPW on the sewer and electrical transformers, and after that they can "green it." Mr. Boivin stated that the proposal is in the spirit of what the town master plan calls for. Ms. Gjettum said that back in February her heart hit the ground, but now she felt they had done a good job of fixing it and it looks nice. Mrs. Allen stated that it's beautiful. Mr. Gordon thanked Mr. Todd for taking comments that the board made to heart. The change in the massing of the building had responded to public comment that it was out of scale.

Mr. Gordon opened the floor for public comment.

Hans Wrivet, a resident of the Merrill block, said that the height of the addition overwhelms the historic neighboring buildings. Walking along Swasey parkway, this building sticks out. When coming down the hill from the direction of the post office, you'll see the top of the building. He suggested that the proposal does not comply with the story height restrictions, and that they measured the adjacent buildings incorrectly. He also made further critical comments about the accuracy of the proposal.

The board responded to his concerns. Mr. Gordon stated that the measurements were done in coordination with the city, and are accurate, but agreed that story height was an undefined term and that the town attorney should look at the ordinance to clarify what story height means.

Wendell Ring, also a resident of the Merrill block, was concerned that the new building affects the light, air, and privacy of his unit. He asked, what will he see looking out his window, and where does trash go?

Mr. Gordon responded that protection of a view is not something included in Historic District deliberations. As for the facing wall, there will be sliding doors but not a projecting balcony, so no place for residents to sit. Trash is not an architectural feature, and would be addressed by the planning board. Mr. Colling stated that the proposed addition is 60 feet back from the front of the building, which is about the full depth of the Merrill building, so north views will not be affected, only river views.

The board asked whether they had enough information to accept the application.

MOTION: Ms. Gjettum moved to accept the application, Mr. Gray seconded. The members agreed unanimously and the application was accepted.

The board then made general comments. Mr. Gray stated that any project of this size will generate concerns from the abutters, but the applicants and the HDC have taken these comments into account and will ensure that the building will be in keeping with the character of the town. Mr. Colling suggested that there be contingencies to the approval, such as that the sliding doors should be fiberglass or aluminum. Mr. Boivin stated that there is a storage building on the back of this building, and if we're interested in improving the appearance along the river, we should support applications like this. Ms. Gjettum stated that she was desperately against the original because of the huge superstructure on the roof of the building, but they've done a great job of improving it. Ms. Allen understands what the abutters are talking about, but thinks it will enhance the downtown, especially along the waterfront. Mr. Gordon stated that Exeter needs economic development, and a project this significant creates that draw. It's abrasive to abutters and the neighborhood with a project of this scale, but he believes that the proposed structure does enhance the cityscape. Having a residential area and enjoying the waterfront is valuable. He said that it's hard to please everyone but for the majority of residents it will have a good impact.

Mr. Gordon made a list of the conditions the project needs to take into account:

1. The doors and windows must be fiberglass or aluminum clad
2. Chase the bathroom ventilation to roof penetrations, not sidewall
3. Stone sills in lieu of brick sills
4. Extend vertical fascia to receive the turnbuckles of the canopies

MOTION: Mr. Boivin moved to approve the application with the conditions above; seconded by Ms. Gjettum; approved unanimously.

The application of Bob Couture (w/ Home Depot) on behalf of Scott Cerrato for the installation of eight (8) replacement windows at 5 Chestnut Street. The subject property is located in the R3, Single Family Residential zoning district. Tax Map Parcel # 64-56. Case #18-06.

Barry Londoff, a customer service representative for Home Depot exteriors, presented a sample of the Simonton vinyl windows proposed for the project. He stated that they have a historical look and a lifetime replacement warranty, and would be a great improvement over the existing windows for the residents.

Mr. Gordon asked Mr. Londoff if he had read the HDC guidelines, as they strongly discourage vinyl windows. Vinyl is inherently a weaker material and must be built up to carry larger panes of glass. The commission wants simulated divided lites whenever possible and a mitred exterior. In the proposed window, the proportions are heavy, and there are grilles between the glass. Even if they are warranted, the homeowner has to choose to replace them. Mr. Londoff stated that

he has not read the guidelines, as he was not aware that it was a historic building until after the windows were purchased and made.

Ms. Gjettum said that the building used to be Miss Parson's school, a private school. Mr. Colling stated that the property is not well maintained and is in a state of deterioration. Mr. Gray agreed with Mr. Colling that property has not been maintained, but felt that this is not a gem that needs to be governed at the same level as others in the district; it's being run purely as a business concern and it's unfair to enforce not using vinyl windows. Mr. Colling responded that allowing vinyl windows would set a bad precedent. Also, the building has historical significance. It's prominent, and screened only by deciduous trees so there is visibility. It faces the library and has presence on Chestnut Street, so it's important. Mr. Gordon stated that condition makes no difference to the guidelines of proper replacement and repair of historic structures. The owner should not be given the leeway of not using historical materials.

Mr. Gordon asked if vinyl windows were the most cost-effective option. Mr. Londoff stated that the Simonton is the best-rated window and guaranteed; Home Depot, not the installer, is responsible for ensuring they are operating. They can't use Andersen windows because Andersen does not make the larger size. The only other option is a single pane window, which the owner will not do. Mr. Boivin said that it seems acceptable to use a vinyl window where it's an improvement in the condition.

Mr. Boivin asked whether only eight windows are being replaced. Mr. Londoff replied yes, that they are not doing the upper ones on the front, only those on the lower level. Mr. Gordon said that they did not have enough information to know which windows are being replaced.

Mr. Gordon said that he can't say that vinyl will preclude approval, but he asked that they take a look at other options. Ms. Gjettum said that the commission generally doesn't accept vinyl, but have occasionally.

Mr. Colling questioned how they would flash the trim without removing the siding, which looks like asbestos, although he's not an expert on asbestos and it would require testing.

MOTION: Ms. Gjettum motioned to table the application; Mr. Gray seconded. The vote was unanimous in favor of tabling the application. The commission asked that the applicant address these issues:

1. Get a copy of the Historic District Guidelines
2. Specify which windows will be replaced. Either label them on an elevation or floor plan, or mark them on photographs
3. Describe the exterior window trim wrap; they would prefer they didn't wrap it at all
4. Look at other window options that are non-vinyl and adhere more closely to guidelines

Other Business:

- a. Approval of the July 19, 2018 Minutes. After review and several changes, Ms. Gjettum motioned to approve and Mr. Boivin seconded. All were in favor and minutes were approved.
- b. Election of officers
Mr. Gordon opened the floor for nominations. Mr. Gordon accepted the nomination as chair. Mr. Boivin accepted the nomination for vice-chair. Ms. Gjettum accepted the nomination for clerk.

MOTION: Mr. Gray motioned to approve all nominations; Mr. Colling seconded. All were in favor and the nominations were approved.

With no further business, Mr. Gordon made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Gjettum seconded. All were in favor and the meeting adjourned at 9:56 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Joanna Bartell
Recording Secretary