

Historic District Commission
November 18, 2021
Final Minutes

Call Meeting To Order: Patrick Gordon, Chairman, called meeting to order at 7:15 pm in the Wheelwright Room of the Exeter Town Office Building.

Members Present: Patrick Gordon, Chairman, Julie Gilman, Select Board Rep., Pam Gjettum, Gwen English, Planning Board Rep., Curtis Boivin, Vice Chairman, Grayson Shephard, Doug McCallum

New Business; The application of Phillips Exeter Academy for the proposed demolition of the existing building located at 8 Gilman Lane, partial demolition, renovation and new construction of the existing building located at 35 High Street and proposed construction of two new residential buildings. Parcel #s 71-117, 71-118 and 71-119.

Curtis, as an employee of PEA, recused himself from this meeting.

Mark Leighton, head of facilities at the academy spoke and said he has a few colleagues with him who will have a little part in this as well. He then thanked the commission for this meeting tonight. He said there are three applications in front of the commission tonight. There were slides being shown on the TV showing 35 High Street and 8 Gilman Lane. He said the property is approximately two acres. They purchased the property, 35 High Street in the Spring of 2020. The structure has six apartments which was a bonus because they needed faculty housing. They actually started using it within six months. He then said that 8 Gilman Lane has been vacant for about four years. It is a very large house and it is too large for them and that is why it has been vacant. It has significant renewal needs which Heather will explain more when she gets into that and why. He then showed an aerial view of the site. He said with this property, they had a great opportunity to add housing. Mark said they developed this project to clean it up and he thinks they have a great approach to restore the building. 8 Gilman, because of the conditions and size, they want to build something new that would be better for them and more sustainable. He then showed a slide of the proposed development site.

Heather, the PEA Architect, spoke and said they do not take lightly to tearing anything down. She said they have done a lot of research and homework on this. She said one of the great things about 35 High Street is that it is right at the front door when coming off of Portsmouth Ave. When they first bought it there was mold growing on the aluminum siding and they power washed so it looks a little better. She is hoping when they are done with it, it will look alot better and be restored with the original front. The

building dates to after 1802 and certainly before 1845 where it shows up on a map. On a slide she was showing, the areas in red are what they are looking to take down. Heather said they had the opportunity to walk with the Heritage Commission through both buildings. She said for faculty housing, this works well to be renovated and Christine will show how they are looking to renovate it into two faculty units. Heather then went to slides of 8 Gilman. It is set back from the street and has an open area in front of it. She said they think the foundation of this building was built in 1799 and the house itself has been edited and altered. They have owned the building since 1910. They have drawings from the 1950s that show they were trying to split it in two and it did not work. After the residents who last lived in there moved out, is when we engaged Rob's firm to look at and see how we could divide the house into two and again make two faculty units. While possible to turn it into two units, they were not two units that allowed for the kind of program they need for our faculty. She showed more slides of the house and one showed that the foundation had been lifted and elevated. She said they talked with the Heritage Commission and they ultimately voted to support but not unanimously. We talked with them about how we could reuse some of the materials and she said they are willing to work with the town and kind of tell a story.

Next to speak was Rob Harbison of Market Square Architects. He showed slides that were focused on the top three buildings. He said 35 High Street is really in good shape, relative to its original character. Because of that, we are trying to honor that. As he goes through the site plan he will talk about the strategies. He said they want to bring back some of the original characters. To the left of this, the new duplex is being proposed on High Street. The next building in the back is the triflex. They want it to be similar in character to the things that are on High Street, but it clearly is a newer structure so we want it to be one step away towards a more modern building. We do have a full team including a structural engineer, civil engineer to meet the town's requirements. He said they also have a landscape architect and he is helping incorporate some of the field stone from the existing buildings and how we can tell the story of Gilman, but also to shape some of the landscaping to the street so we can maintain that in a nice way. He then showed a 3D aerial view to show what is there today and what they are proposing to go back.

Heather said the other factor is safety with the relocation of Gilman Lane. Rob said it is a great plan and it will improve the safety of that intersection. Next they showed slides of the proposed elevations of 35 High Street and the front elevation is largely unchanged from what is there. He explained what they are proposing to use for materials and windows.

Rob then showed slides for the proposed duplex and he paused for questions or comments. Doug asked about the front elevations for the windows. He said the proportions seemed a little wide and Rob said they are about as wide as he would go for a building like this.

Rob said this is a question for the whole board. He said the proportioned one is easy and they can be narrowed a little bit and Doug said he thinks they should do that. Rob said one of the things they were wrestling with and 35 is really a historical building and this is a new building trying to fit into a historical street. Rob asked if the commission would like to have shutters and they were not in agreement with that.

John Donnell was present and he lives at 25 High Street. He passed out copies of a letter he wrote to the commission members. The letter addresses Mr. Donnell's feelings about demolishing 8 Gilman Lane. He states that the new proposal by PEA is a big improvement over the former town parking lot proposal, if the design preserves historic values in the new structures.

Patrick thanked John and said he did bring up some good points.

Mark said they will go back and work on the plans and proposals and come back again to see the board. He also said this has been some really good feedback and asked about having a work session.

Pam said all of this would be lovely except it is on the site of a house from the 1700s, which is going to be gone. Rob said that is certainly something that is true and they wrestled a lot with conversations with PEA. He said there are not a lot of historical elements left of it.

Patrick asked Pam to enlighten them on her concerns. She said it is just dripping with history and she hates to see it gone. Yes, it has changed but we all have changed over the years. The house is still there and putting up a picture saying this house sat on this site for 200 years until we ripped it down, really does not do anything.

Patrick then read a letter sent to Doug Eastman, Building Inspector from Jay Myers, Chairman of the Heritage Commission. This letter stated the HC found consensus in the following ways:

35 High Street - accept the proposal as submitted. (motion favored unanimously)

8 Gilman Lane - accept the proposal with conditions: a) PEA is to salvage for reuse structural materials of value by way of history, craftsmanship, or substance.

b) PEA is to work with the HC to mitigate the displacement of history associated with the loss of this structure. (motion favored 5-to-1)

Patrick read another letter the commission received from abutters to the proposed development at 8 Gilman Lane and 35 High Street. They wanted to be on the record as opposed to the triplex as designed, as it is not compatible with the intent and not in keeping with the HDC.

Barbara Racoonus, a public attendee spoke and said she is a town resident and has lived here since 1995. She lives in an old historic house on Cass Street. It was built in 1775 and she knows the trouble you get into when you have an old house. She has no quarrel with 35 High Street and she applauds and that you are moving forward to remember Dr. Chesley who was the first female doctor to live in Exeter. She is bothered by the fact that you want to remove the building at 8 Gilman Lane. She knows it has been altered over time, but everything gets altered over time. Once you remove this house, it is gone and you cannot replace it with a house that looks like it. It will be gone and that is part of our landscape and part of our history will be gone. She then talked about a person of color who lived in this house who was a female. Taking this house down is more than just taking an old house that does not lend itself well to become a duplex for housing. You are also stealing away another piece of our town's history and she said, I would be very cautious about something like that. She would have to stand and say I would prefer it if you had a different set of plans. She said it is in poor condition and that is because it has been kept in poor condition.

Patrick then asked the commission members if they had any questions or comments specifically on the triplex that is being proposed.

Gwen would like to have a site walk and Grayson would also because he said it would be beneficial. Doug also would like to participate and Patrick too.

Mark said this is something they can do and would like to have this happen as soon as they can. Patrick said they will talk to Barbara and she will set up the date and time.

Patrick said they do have three separate applications. One is for 35 High Street which the HC was unanimously on their allowance on the partial demolition on that property. Patrick said they got a good look on what was proposed there so he is recommending to the commission that we continue with that application tonight and table the other parts.

Patrick then asked on 35 High Street if the commission members had any additional questions or comments before he called for a motion to accept the application as complete.

Julie made a motion to accept the application as complete. Doug seconded. All were in favor and application was accepted.

There were no more questions or comments from the commission members so Patrick called for a motion for approval of historical appropriateness or denial of historical appropriateness.

Julie made a motion to approve historical appropriateness with the conditions that all the windows be fiberglass and to match the original break. Gwen seconded. All were in favor and the application approved.

Patrick said there was requested work to be done on the elevations floor plan proposal at 8 Gilman Lane. He then called for a motion to table that application. Pam made a motion to table. Gwen seconded. All were in favor of tabling the duplex application.

Patrick then called for a motion for the triplex to table that so that we can do a site walk. Julie said so moved and Pam seconded. All were in favor and application was tabled.

Other Business: Approval of the October 21, 2021 minutes and November 2, 2021. After review and some changes, Julie made a motion to approve the October 21, 2021 minutes as amended. Grayson seconded. All were in favor and minutes approved. Next are the minutes for November 2, 2021. After review and some changes, Julie made a motion to approve the minutes as amended. Pam seconded. All were in favor and minutes approved.

With no other business, Julie made a motion to adjourn and Patrick said, so approved. Meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Elizabeth Herrick
Recording Secretary