

Historic District Commission  
December 16, 2021  
Final Minutes

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

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

New Business: Public Hearings: The application of Phillips Exeter Academy for the proposed demolition of the existing building located at 8 Gilman Lane. Case #21-11. Also, the application of Phillips Exeter Academy for the proposed construction of two (2) new residential buildings on the property located at 8 Gilman Lane. Case #21-12. At this time, Patrick asked the commission for a motion to tie application Case #21-11 to Case #21-12. Julie said so moved and Gwen seconded. All were in favor and motion approved.

Patrick then asked for a motion for the proposed demolition of 8 Gilman Lane tied to the application for the proposed construction of the triplex at 8 Gilman Lane as one application. As a separate application, the proposed construction of the duplex at the front. After discussion between commission members, Julie withdrew her first motion and Gwen seconded this. All were in favor and motion withdrawn. Pam then made a motion to tie Case #21-11 to Case #21-12 making them one. Gwen seconded. All were in favor and motion favored.

Mark Leighton, Head of Facilities for PEA asked if they could start with the duplex and Patrick then opened the public hearing for the application, Case 21-12 for the proposed construction of a duplex on the property of 8 Gilman Lane.

Next to speak was Rob Harberson of Market Street Architects and he also brought Christina O'Brien from the office to help with the slides. He said what they are trying to do is gain the continuity of the streetscape. He said it is part of the missing tooth. He showed slides of what is there and what is being proposed.

There was a slide that showed two elevations. The difference between the two elevations are chimneys. Rob said there is not a way to bring up true masonry chimneys and so what would be proposed here is something constructed out of a plywood box. He said the challenge we have with it and why we are proposing to not have the chimneys is because it is going to be next to the real chimneys we are keeping at 35 High Street.

Next on the slide are the entries which show them with and without chimneys. This would mask from the street that this is a two unit building.

Rob said at the last meeting they also talked about windows and the proportion and alignment of them have been adjusted to make it look more regular across the front of the building. These are the primary changes from what the commission had seen previously.

Patrick then asked if there was anyone for the frontage from the public who would like to speak and there were none. He then asked if there was anyone against this project who would like to speak.

Nicholas Tolentino spoke and said he had a question regarding the chimneys. Is the actual proposal with or without the chimney.

Mark Leighton spoke and said that we have that question too and that is why we are presenting options to the commission to help us with that.

Rob Harbinson said he would prefer the option without.

Nicholas said his only comment would be that given every other house on that street in close proximity have significant chimneys present that are part of the historic nature of the house. He then said his personal preference would be to include the chimney.

Next from the public to speak was Anthony Zwaan of 7 Marlboro Street. He said this is not entirely for or against, but he chose to speak. He thanked the board for serving. Sticking to the case in hand which is the duplex facing High Street, he wanted to say he is not against placing the duplex on High Street. With Nick, I would like to see a nice rendition of chimneys. He would love to see a great attempt to do that. He likes the proposal to make it a single entrance. He said he has a question about the presentation of the returns on one of the slides, which he pointed out on the slide. He said it looks like a modern looking return which is something you would see on new modern construction rather than the classic New England return.

Patrick then opened it up to the commission members for any questions or comments for the applicant. Pam said she likes the idea of a chimney, but has seen some really terrible ones.

Gwen said she wanted to express her gratitude for the work that has been done to bring this plan in front of us. She really likes the new design. She likes the entryway, the single door. She also likes having the six windows at the top.

Julie said she appreciates the changes to the bay windows but is struggling with the chimneys because what was presented and what was talked about, especially changes in the entrance, are bringing in more of a period of time that would have chimneys. Patrick said he agreed.

Anthony spoke again and said he did not see the first proposal but is hearing that this one is a tremendous improvement. He hopes that you all are taking very close notes about the very excellent suggestions that have been made by the board. Anthony said the academy will do a great job and he is sure the academy realizes how crucial this location is. Every person entering town will see this building.

Patrick then said that he thinks the commission has enough information to accept the application and called for a motion to accept. Gwen said, so moved and Julie seconded. All were in favor and application was accepted.

Patrick said the commission now has enough information to make a decision and he closed the public hearing and there were some great public comments. The approval of the application will have some conditions.

Patrick said there were eight conditions.

1. Front entry door system has side lights and remove the side elevation windows.
2. Raise the entry roof system and trim the front door.
3. Increase the beam depth at the hip roof entries and at the front door roof.
4. Create depth for the eave return at the left garage.
5. Use metal return material at the eaves and rail details.
6. Concrete foundation to be a parched finish with smooth trowel.
7. No vinyl railings or Trek material treads.
8. To include the construction of the chimneys.

Patrick asked for a motion with these conditions and Pam said so moved. Julie seconded. All were in favor and the application approved with conditions.

Mark Leighton said he thinks it was a great discussion last time and this time and he thanked the commission.

Next application and public hearing is Case #21=11 for Phillips Exeter Academy for the proposed demolition of the existing building located at 8 Gilman Lane.

Mark Leighton spoke and said he thought it would be helpful to do a quick recap of what they are doing. He showed slides again to the commission and public. Mark said the

reason they are asking to demolish is that this is a very large single family and it is not in great shape and needs a lot of work. It has over 3,000 square feet of finished area and with our program, our single family homes are below 2,000 square feet. This building has six bedrooms and we only want three to four bedrooms. Mark said one of the primary objectives is relocating Gilman Lane to the intersection. He said this is important to us because it could be an unsafe condition trying to get in and out of there. He then gave a summary of who owned the house and when the academy purchased it. He said through all of their research, they feel between 1880 and 1930, a significant amount of work has happened to this property.

Rob Harberson spoke again and said this property is historic. He thinks most properties in downtown Exeter would have similar historic value relative to the history of the property. He thinks what is different is the scope of architecture. When you go through this building, you see many different eras both in the exterior detailing, as well as the interior features. He said they do not believe there is a lot left at all of the original structure.

The nature of the proposed work is to develop a High Street neighborhood. They will restore the exterior of 35 High Street. They would then replace 8 Gilman Lane with new construction. Rob said another item they wanted to note as well is we are willing to work with the Heritage Commission to develop a plan for mitigation.

Julie asked Rob if he had found anything out about the brick fireplaces. Rob said they have a report that just came back but it is not in the commission's packet. He said Scott Whitticer was hired as a Masonry Consultant and he thinks in general that his findings support a lot of the work in the basement between 1830 and 1890, but certainly not original. There was other work produced between the 1880s and 1930s.

Gwen asked if the gentleman they have has provided this information and is his speciality the materials or is he just a historian. Mark said his expertise is a Masonry Consultant.

Nicholas Tolentino spoke and said he wanted it on record that Scott Whitticer is not a Historic Masonry Specialist. Mark said he does not even know if that exists but all he can say is that what they hired him to do is an assessment of the existing masonry in that building.

Rob Harberson said he would not describe him as a mason. His title is Mason Reconsultant and said in his opinion, he is a masonry expert.

Gwen said the reason she asked the question is that she thinks the most striking feature in the basement was the fireplace. She said it troubles her that nobody is able to tell what the origin is.

Patrick said this chimney is an important feature of the home and thinks it should be preserved. Mark Leighton said they could move it and even put it into 35 High Street.

Patrick said let's say this building was built in 1830. It is 191 years old as we sit here today.. As an architect, I would love to have a building standing 191 years later that someone was trying to save. He does not see the value of replacing this building and losing a structure that has a lot of life left.

Mark Leighton said he respects Patrick's opinion but in order for them to convert it into a use that is feasible for them, it would mean significant changes, cost aside. He said details on the inside would be gone. They would be making changes on the outside. By forcing us to keep it in that spot, you are unnecessarily making us rechange the program which was the primary objective for 8 Gilman Lane. He also thinks this is unnecessary. He said a 3,000 foot single family home is not practical for the academy anymore.

Pam said we are not against what you are trying to do. We just want to save that big old house. She said she thinks the new duplex looks great. Mark said he understands but feels the commission is forcing them into redesigning this.

Patrick said this is exactly why Historic Districts are here. If it was zoning only, the commission would have never met with the academy.

Rob Harberson spoke and said he understands what Patrick and the other members are saying. He said they completely agree with the commission that it is a historical property but professionally, he does not agree at all that it is a historical structure. There is little if anything left from the original house. He said this is something we clearly disagree on and he understands the commission's role.

Nicholas Tolentino spoke again and asked to go to the conclusion slides again. He said one of the things that really stands out to him is the difference in value. The academy values one way and the HDC values the other way and they are not matching. He said the existing structure, the conclusion is that it is not from the 1790s. Based on this conclusion, it was based on the nails and everything else that was taken from the site. Rob Harberson agreed that it was.

Anthony Zwaan spoke again and said he came to this meeting unprepared. He is an abutter of the building but has never been in it. He wanted to comment on the missing tooth comment made by Rob Harbison and he disagrees with it. The front of this building is very attractive in terms of entering town. There is a beauty to the front of this building. He gets that it is impractical for today's purposes but there are some solid bones there and something could be done with this building. He then said that he does not think the triplex is a very good solution.

Mark Leighton asked Patrick if he had received any other letters from abutters and Patrick said he had and he read it.

Patrick then asked if there were any more comments or questions from the commission.

Julie said she knew some people who she would like to take a look at the building but they are not professionals. Mark said they are open to that and asked Julie to have them send their credentials.

Anthony Zwaan spoke and said it sounds like the academy thinks everyone wants them to save this as a single family home and he said no one is saying that. You could save the front of it, the basement and do whatever on the back, even turn it into a duplex and he thinks they would answer many of the concerns raised here today.

Patrick then asked for a motion to table this application. Mark Leighton then asked what information the commission was asking for. Patrick said they would want to have more information about the brick structure in the basement and about the other constructions that have gone on.

Gwen made a motion to table application #21-11 until January 20th. Pam seconded. All were in favor and the application was tabled.

Next on the agenda is the application of Exonian Properties LLC for change in appearance, including and window replacement and partial demolition to the roof of the existing structure located at 43 Front Street in order to facilitate dormer windows and balconies Case #21-13. Patrick asked the applicants if they still wanted to meet because it was late due to the first application taking longer than expected.

Sharon Somers from Donanhue, Tucker & Ciandella, PLLC spoke and she said they would like to continue with their application. She said she is here representing the Exonian Properties. Also with her tonight is Tony Chow from Finegold Alexander Architects and also David Cowie and Florence Ruffner. She said that Tony will give an overview of the presentation. Tony showed slides of churches his company refurbished and slides of what the property will look like. Tony showed a slide showing the church

on the north east corner and what they are proposing to do in transforming this for residential use. They will be adding dormers onto the existing church. They are proposing to basically replace, restore and replace the existing slate because a lot of the slate is not in good shape and is really at the end of its life. With the dormers, they are also proposing windows and balconies. After showing the slides, Tony said he tried to be as efficient as he could.

Patrick then asked if there was anyone from the public who wanted to speak for or against the application and there were none. Patrick then asked the commission members if they had any questions or comments.

Julie said last night at the Heritage Commission Meeting, we did find that the treatment was appropriate for the historic neighborhood given that just about the whole exterior is staying the same and identifiable as a church. We will be missing the glass stained windows but understand why they need to be changed and we found that it was well done. Julie said they did disagree on the roofing material using simulated slate instead. Clearly, the slate is in worse condition than I thought when you see the flyover and the couple of photos that they showed.

Gwen said talking about the roof she does not think she ever noticed it before and it has a lovely pattern on it and with the dormers it does not even make sense to duplicate that.

Tony said they looked closely at this and Gwen is right. There is a lovely pattern here and they would have to remove the entire roof in order to do that and by the time you do that and put back the new dormer situation and what is left Tony thinks might feel like a camel because it is almost like you have a versace of something there but it does not really work. What they felt was important if they are able to achieve as high a quality within the man made products and do a color wave that tries to blend in and match this as much as we are able to. Tony said their intent in kind is to restore the tower with slate which he thinks is highly visible.

Gwen then stated that she is unsure about the doors because she doesn't know what they will look like.

Tony said in this instance, in order to blend the fabric there, they will paint the doors. As far as the unit development goes, he thinks what is really important here is that we wanted to retain the doors and we did it in such a way that it allowed it to be retained. We also had to do something to allow the units to work. Tony said the doors are actually allowing light in.

Julie then asked Tony if they would be needing an elevator in this building and Tony said yes, they do. Julie then asked how this is going to work. Tony said the elevator will be placed facing the center block so the elevator head house does not pop through the roof. Tony said they went through many versions of where and how to put the elevator in.

Doug said the grand stairs are problematic and he thinks it would be interesting to look at an alternative and move the stairs and do something different. Doug said it says come in here everyone.

Tony said they have had a lot of discussions about this as well. Tony said in the interest of trying to be more sensitive to the image of the building, can we work with these stairs and at the top put planters but they pulled back from that idea. Tony showed a slide of a church where they removed the stairs and lowered the arch down to grade to make an accessible entrance.

Doug said that it is a thought and it looks like it is sending the wrong message for the building. Julie said it depends on the configuration of how to get in there.

Tony said it is interesting that people select to live in these buildings and they chose to live there for a reason because it is a kind of different living experience from within.

Patrick asked how many units would be going in and Tony said at the moment there would be eleven. Patrick then asked where they were going to have the parking because it is currently zoned as single family and Tony said yes.

Pam then asked about the side door being a garage. Tony said it is not a garage and it will actually lead to a unit. Tony said they know that parking is an issue and they have looked at a lot of things including putting parking underneath the building but the structure complexity alone made it too difficult.

Pam then mentioned the roofing tiles and said in the design they are a very busy design. Tony said he would ignore what was shown as a picture because they are investigating other options and there are many choices they are looking at. The intent is to be very sympathetic in color and do high quality within the synthetic man made product as they can. He said he knew that tile was very busy and that is not what they are proposing.

Patrick said that he does not think this project fits at all. The proposal of a glass and metal box popping up through the roof of a historic church from 1876. Most of the



examples shown are from Boston and Toronto and all of those have that style of architecture that supports that type. It was completed in 1876 and started in 1875.

Julie said the Heritage Commission disagreed because it is not being preserved in a glass case. The history that Patrick found, is still the history he found. The recognition of the church aspect of it, that it was a church, will lead somebody to that research if they so choose. As far as this not being appropriate for Exeter, Julie said we are hurting for housing units and it would be nice if these housing units would be less expensive as proposed. Julie said we do not dictate uses of buildings and she appreciates the suggestions of what this could be.

Pam said she does hate to see the stained glass go, but she does like seeing the building stay. She does not want the building to be torn down and she wants it to be used.

Tony said these clients are trying to work within what is there. Most of the other clients they did, gutted the interior of the building. These clients are actually trying to work with some of the wood beam structures as part of the residential development and this is highly unusual and not the least expensive way to go. They are trying to be very respectful, even on the inside.

Pam said that they cannot throw out the Paul Revere bell. Tony said absolutely not and if there is a place they could find a home for it, that would be great.

Anthony Zwaan from the public spoke. He again thanked the board for all the research that was done to prepare for this case. Anthony said he looked at the exterior of this building and thought, how is anybody going to do anything with this building. Hats off to any developer who is brave enough to take this on and hats off to the architect for some really creative designs. Anthony said it is tempting to say that this is not what we are used to in Exeter. Having served on the Budget Committee lately, you are converting a church, a non tax revenue generating thing into a residential thing which is going to generate substantial revenue for the town.

David Cowie said the congregation of this church back in the 90s, struggled to keep this church going for as long as they did.

Patrick said in 1876 it was completed for \$37,000 including all of the furnishings.

Patrick said he sees some value in some of the hand sketches Tony has and just walking in the space to see what the ideas of preserving it and not being a full gut, he is interested in that.

Julie said as Patrick mentioned the wall penetrations if there are any or the other roof penetrations you need for services because that will affect what we are seeing here. Patrick said that and some thought on parking.

David Cowie asked if they could be clear that the HDC has purview on the outside and how far do they have to go when the commission starts talking about the inside.

Patrick said he would like to see what the idea was for preserving the interior beams. David asked what the purview for this and Patrick said the purview is what is listed in Article 8 Zoning Ordinance.

Sharon Somers spoke and said what she is understanding is that the commission is interested in what they are doing to the interior as it relates to what might happen on the exterior and she can understand and appreciate it and they do not have a problem proving that information.. She said in terms of the interior layout, how the units might be laid out internally, she thinks that at most, would go towards the Heritage Commission purview rather than this boards purview, which deals with the exterior of the building. Sharon said her understanding is that the Demolition Committee and the Heritage Commission under that umbrella has viewed this as an appropriate project. She said if her understanding is correct, what they would do is come back to you with additional information on the interior of the building only as it pertains to how the various holes are punched in the roof type of thing.

Patrick then read the letter from Jay Myers, Chairman of the Heritage Commission dated 11/15/21. It stated that members of the Demolition Review Committee met at 43 Front Street to consider demolition of portions of the existing roof and suggested having public comments. Pam said there was no public meeting and we met last night and approved it.

Patrick said what they are requesting is penetrations to the exterior and he said he would like to do a site walk.

Patrick then asked for a motion to table the application until the next meeting. Julie said so moved. Pam seconded. All were in favor and the application tabled.

Other Business: Approval of minutes November 18, 2021.

Pam made a motion to table minutes until the next meeting. Gwen seconded. All were in favor and minutes tabled.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Herrick  
Recording Secretary