



Exeter, NH - Building Permit Application

Write a brief description of work to be done:

There are two proposed projects on High Street subject to review by the Heritage Commission: 35 High Street and 8 Gilman Lane (formerly 31 High Street). The two properties are owned by Phillips Exeter Academy (the Academy). The Academy is proposing to combine these properties with adjacent adjoining land to create a faculty housing neighborhood. The plan also includes re-routing Gilman Lane to improve safe access to and from the site.

35 High Street, was formerly known as 55 High Street and “the Josiah Gilman House”. Josiah Coffin Smith sold the land and home to Josiah Gilman Smith in 1823. Josiah Gilman Smith served in the War of 1812 as a captain in Nathaniel Gilman’s New Hampshire Militia. According to documents at the Exeter Historical Society, the original structure was built sometime between 1802 at 1822. It remained in the Gilman/Smith family until 1894. It was next owned by Dr. Alpheus Sawyer before Dr. Alice Murcell Chesley inherited it from her mother Hannah Chesley in 1916. Dr. Chesley became the first female physician in Exeter and was a very well-respected citizen in town. She helped unmarried expectant women find homes to live in while pregnant and then facilitated the adoptions once the babies were born. She married George Lamprey in 1933 and they lived at 35 High Street for several more years. The house was sold several times over the years and was purchased by the Academy in 2020.

The original early 1800’s structure remains largely in place and is a good example of the architecture of that time period. It is well sited on the property and is a good neighbor to the surrounding buildings, blending into the existing urban fabric. It generally aligns with the other buildings on High Street and provides continuity with being sited very close to the existing sidewalk. Although several additions have been added over the years, the original structure has had very few modifications and many of the exterior details appear to be original. The original pegged post and beam framing is visible in the attic and the basement.

Given the age of the structure, the foundation and frame of the building are in relatively good condition. The Academy wishes to remove the rear, east-side bay additions as well as the rear “L”, but retain the original 5-bay colonial-style structure. A new roof, windows, siding and trim are needed to restore the building. The Academy plans to repair the existing chimneys, and restore the envelope using historically appropriate materials and details. The original mid house structure will be replaced with a new code compliant enclosed stairway in a similar location. The finished house will have two 2-bedroom faculty residences, one per floor, with the bedrooms in the rear. Given the condition of the house, the siting of the home and the interesting history, it is the intent to keep the exterior of the original portion of the house intact and complete a full renovation of its interior.

See photos of the existing building below (*images 1-4*):





IMAGE 3 - EXISTING REAR PORTION OF 35 HIGH ST TO BE DEMOLISHED



IMAGE 4 - EXISTING SIDE BAY OF 35 HIGH ST TO BE DEMOLISHED

New energy efficient six-over-six double-hung windows with simulated divided lites will be installed. Wood-clapboard siding with similar exposure width will replace the existing rotted wood clapboards. Trim boards are to be replaced to match existing wood trim details at the windows, fascia and water table. Dark colored window shutters with shutter hardware will be installed to make windows period authentic. The proposed improvements are in keeping with the houses in the surrounding neighborhood and will preserve the historic nature of the home and be a welcoming view to Exeter to anyone coming from Portsmouth Avenue.

The drawings below show the proposed exterior elevations for this renovated building.
(Image 5):



35 HIGH ST. - PROPOSED ELEVATIONS

PHILLIPS EXETER ACADEMY
55 HIGH ST., EXETER, NH 03833

IMAGE 5 - PROPOSED EXTERIOR ELEVATIONS OF 35 HIGH STREET

8 Gilman Lane is rebuilt at some time in the 1800's on a stone foundation c. 1799. The Exeter Historical Society refers to this structure as the "Josiah Coffin Smith House". Josiah was engaged to the daughter of the land owner, Captain James Leavitt. Capt. Leavitt gave the land to the couple before their marriage in 1789. The house and property were a part of larger tract of land known as the Captain Nathaniel Gilman Farm. The Academy acquired the home in 1911 and for most of the last century the home has been used for faculty housing.

The original building has been significantly altered over the years, both inside and out. At some point the home was lifted as the foundation shows original fieldstone and then several feet of brick. The structural integrity of the foundation is questionable and shows signs of regularly occurring water infiltration. Evidence of the significant alteration include dimensional framing which became commonly used early to mid-1800's as opposed to post and beam structures that would have been built in the 1700's to early 1800's. Anne Schutte Johnson, the granddaughter of Josiah Coffin Smith, wrote in the Exeter News Letter in 1911 that she wasn't sure that this was the original house but was sure it was the original site. (See images 6-8 below).



IMAGE 6 - 8 GILMAN LANE BASEMENT. NOTE THE BRICK FOUNDATION, SHOWING THAT THE HOUSE WAS RAISED UP AT SOME POINT IN TIME.



IMAGE 7 - 8 GILMAN LANE BASEMENT



IMAGE 8 - 8 GILMAN LANE BASEMENT

The exterior elevations of the home, and most of the historical architectural features of the home, have all been modified and altered over time. None of the existing porches on the front or back of the house are original since the house was lifted many years ago. The front (north elevation) has been modified with new windows that appear to be from around 1910-1930's with six-over-six lites and weighted sashes. A triple hung window that mismatches the other windows may have been salvaged from the south elevation since an early undated blurry photo along Gilman Avenue show this style of window on the rear. The rear of the house (south elevation) has circa 1950's picture windows on both floors and roof dormers that are not seen on the 1900's photo. A 1950's existing condition floor plan shows window widths that are the similar to the front elevation windows. The porch/balcony was also an addition, along with the door leading out to the balcony. (See images 9-10 below).



IMAGE 9 - 8 GILMAN LANE, NORTH ELEVATION



IMAGE 10 - 8 GILMAN LANE, SOUTH ELEVATION



The house, whether considered original or severely altered, appears to have always been on this site. In addition to these major modifications and alterations to the exterior of the house, the location of the house on the site is also at odds with the rest of the neighborhood. The large front lawn disrupts the rhythm and flow of the homes on either side of High Street and breaks the existing urban edge. It is odd to have the building set back on the street as one approaches the downtown historic district. This “missing tooth” in the neighborhood was once occupied with different buildings over the years. And given the significant modifications and alterations to the exterior architectural features of the house, we feel that it is *not* a good example of architecture of the time period.

In terms of program, the house is larger than needed to accommodate faculty families at the Academy. In researching our documents, the Academy found a 1950’s plan to turn the structure into a duplex (front and back), evidence that even then, as is, the home was larger than needed for a single family. The plan was awkward and clearly not executed.

For all of these reasons, the Academy wishes to replace the existing home with a new two-family town-house, sited in line of adjacent properties (similar to 35 High Street), and designed in a manner that properly compliments the adjacent structures. This new structure offers the opportunity for an energy efficient envelope and an interior layout that optimizes the use of the site and fits the contemporary program needs for faculty housing on the Academy campus.

The location of Gilman Lane’s current access to High Street is a safety risk, especially when turning left out of the existing Gilman Lane onto High Street toward downtown. As a part of this proposed project, there is a utility easement that must remain open. The Academy proposes to re-route Gilman Lane to come to the east side of the existing 35 High Street and become part of the signal at High Street and Portsmouth Ave.

This existing property is a prime location and a front-door to Exeter from Portsmouth Avenue. This area will be much improved from its current condition with the restoration of 35 High Street and the construction of a new structure in line with the street edge, designed to sensitively fit into the historic context. The realignment of Gilman Lane will also improve access and safety to the site.



1 FRONT ELEVATION
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

PHILLIPS EXETER ACADEMY
HIGH ST, EXETER, NH 03833

PROPOSED DUPLEX ELEVATIONS

IMAGE 11 - PROPOSED HIGH STREET ELEVATION OF THE NEW DUPLEX ON HIGH STREET

