

Historic District Commission

January 20, 2022

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, Pam Gjettum, Gwen English, Planning Board Rep., Grayson Shephard, Doug McCallum, Julie Gilman, Select Board Rep.

New Business: Public Hearing: The application of Phillips Exeter Academy for the proposed demolition of the existing building located at 8 Gilman Lane and for the proposed construction of a new multi-family (triplex) structure on the same property. Case #21-11.

Mark Leighton, Director of Facilities at Phillips Exeter Academy spoke. With him tonight is Heather Taylor, architect, Christine O'Brien from Market Square Architects and Rob Harberson, who will join via Zoom and David Adams, a Preservation Consultant and he will speak regarding his report. Mark told this commission that they got approved from the Heritage Commission on 35 High Street regarding the demolition. They also just got approval from the Zoning Board of Adjustments. Mark said they are back again tonight to talk more about the 8 Gilman Lane demolition and replacement, if we go that far. Mark said they have not really gotten into the details of what they would be replacing it with and they had been asking for a three family which is a large structure. He said they would like to propose an alternate to that. Instead of a three family is a single family with three bedrooms and then a two family that will have a two bedroom apartment and a three bedroom apartment. They will both have single garages. Mark said this is all we have for now, but have slides to talk through, the single family and the two family.

David Adams spoke and said he lives in Portsmouth, NH and is a Preservation Consultant and has been doing this for fifty something years. David said he was asked first and foremost to identify or anything that could be identified about the fireplaces in the basement of this building because it is a unique piece of architecture. David said he thinks it was built by someone trying to evoke some piece from another time. It is a firebox that has never been used. There is a set kettle in the arch that is set behind this and the set kettle has bricks around it that are cut so it can sit there. The point is that it was put there and then the rest of the chimney built up around it. It is not a piece of historic material. David said it may be an old kettle, but it did not become old there.

David said the faux fireplace in the basement supports the only other fireplace in the building on the first floor and this is a lovely piece of maybe 1915 marble fireplace. This has nothing to do with an 18th century building.

David said as far as the rest of the building, there is an old floor frame and it does not look like the floor frame of a house. This has three separate equal openings which is uncharacteristic of petitions in the 18th century houses. David said he went through the building, eyes only, and looked carefully for used pieces of material for reused petition locations, reused stairwell locations and saw none of that. He also looked for reused fireplaces or fireplace openings or stove chimneys and he saw none of that.

David said he has never been in an 18th century building that does not have a handmade nail stuck in something, somewhere. David also said that he could not find an interior piece of woodwork that related to an earlier house. He said there were three elements that date to another time that he found inside. There is a tiny little door to the cellar that has moldings on the edges of the panels that date from 1795 to 1815. The door is on modern hinges and it has been cut down. David said his guess is that this door was found somewhere else and made to fit into the small compromised cellar stairwell. There are also two six light sashes in the cellar serving as cellar windows. He dates the molding on them somewhere between 1795 and 1815. David said if everything has been reused, it has been reused in a way that makes it hard to believe they ever had it there before. There is no continuity to it. He said to the best of his ability, everything has been cleaned out and the building was built in 1830 or 1840.

Patrick asked if the granite just above the basement floor is original or added after 1830. David said it was added after. He said he has never seen anything that is so inconclusive. He really thought he would be able to find a thing and point to it and say, here it is and it can hang the whole story on this one thing, but he could not find it.

Patrick said we know the structure was gifted as a wedding gift. Patrick thanked David and then asked the commission members if they had any questions for comments for Mr. Adams.

Julie said that she has a letter from Steven C. Mallory, Architectural Conservator of Kensington, NH and read it. Mr. Mallory's findings were very similar to what David Adam's had found.

Patrick said there is corroborating information from both Mr. Adams and Mr. Mallory. Mr. Mallory did recommend full interior and exterior photo documentation of the building to be deposited in the most relevant and accessible place (the library, historical society, HDC files).

Mark stated that his guess is that there was a major replacement on the structure there at some point in the late 1800s. He said the map from the early 1805 show a structure there and he thinks it has been replaced with what is there now. The structure that is there now has been completely altered.

Julie said the majority of the Heritage Commission members came to the conclusion that the structure was not worth salvaging and were ok with the demolition.

Patrick said his speculation is that there was a structure there at some point in the late 1700s and that was the land that was gifted and he thinks that was the primary foundation

underneath there. Patrick said he thinks the rubble stone foundation that is there is the oldest portion of the structure.

Patrick then asked the commission members if they had any questions about the structure as it sits today at 8 Gilman Lane. Julie said she had no questions.

Pam said it is a little bit better if you keep the house separate.

Mark said he just wanted to mention what was said with the Heritage Commission. If this gets approved and goes through with the demolition, they will do a site demo and would maybe have David help them with this to tell a story.

Patrick said if PEA could jump right to the separate building as opposed to the triplex that would be a huge leap forward. Mark said that is their preference at this point. He then asked if the commission could vote on the demolition of 8 Gilman so they could the direction of this is where you want to go. Patrick said this is where we get into that sticky situation and we cannot separate because we have made a special exception in the past to vote on demolition only without knowing what was going to replace it and we had two separate approvals and what was proposed was never done. Patrick said they have learned their lesson from that and that is why they tie the two into one decision. They do not make any special exceptions for demolition first and then a separate approval. Mark said he was just trying to save time.

Mark then said that they will focus on what they are proposing as a single family, three bedroom and a two family, which is really 2/3 of what was a three family and option 2. Patrick asked him if he any map that shows the existing foundation location. Mark then showed the commission one of the slides.

Doug said he thinks they should take one item from the existing house that is undoubtedly of historic value and put it in the new one. Mark said they would definitely do that.

Christina O'Brien from Market Square Architects spoke and said they are considering putting a single family and a two family in the space where the three family was. This is mainly to bring down the massing of the three family building. They are hoping this fits a little better in the neighborhood and it brings down the scaling and massing. Christina then showed slides to the commission members showing what is being proposed. For materials, they are proposing a 50 year architectural asphalt shingle. Very similar materials to what they are proposing for 35 High Street. Christina then passed out some printouts to the commission members of what is being proposed and this is a new design.

Mark Harberson from Market Square Architects spoke via Zoom and said this is a preliminary pass and the commission will not see the typical detailed package to follow. They wanted to focus on getting as much information on the existing structure as possible and then reviewing the site plan and reducing the scale of the three family down to two structures.

Next Christina spoke about the two family, as well as showing slides. She said all of the materials would be the same on this. Christina said these are just preliminary and we are looking for your feedback and we are open to comments and suggestions.

Doug said he had an idea of where they have the two garages together, perhaps put some kind of landscaping element there.

Christina said this is the third choice. It was the two family with two garages next to each other. It is the third option.

Patrick said, I want to applaud you for making a decision to split the building into two pieces. Patrick said the triplex was just too out of place. The single family that was presented, minus the bay window, he thinks that the single family with all of the elevations he sees is very well developed and they look nice. The two family looks like you sliced it right at the one family and left what was left over as a two family from the triplex. It kind of looks like left overs of the triplex.

Rob Harberson spoke and said they are further ahead on the single family and they made a first pass at the two family but it is not as far developed so he thinks that comment is absolutely accurate.

Mark spoke and wanted to ask a question to give better direction to Christina and Rob, is it safe to assume we can use the single family details and incorporate some of those elements into the two family. Patrick said yes and he thinks someone earlier said it appears that the proportions are a little bit more Victorian in that. Patrick said using the proportions and the massing of that single family that has been presented is a good starting point.

Patrick then asked the applicants if they feel they have good direction and was this helpful as a work session to bring us to a conclusion next meeting. Christina said it was for her and Rob. Mark also said it was a great process and they seem to be on the right track.

Patrick then said he thinks the commission has all the information that is needed and asked for a motion to continue this application at the next meeting. Julie said so moved and Pam seconded. All were in favor and application tabled.

Next on the agenda is the application of Exonian Properties LLC for change in appearance including 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.

Sharon Somers spoke and said they were here the last time on the 16th of December. On December 15th, the Heritage Commission met and authorized the partial demolition of this property. She asked to have their letter of decision be incorporated into the record.

Finally last week on January 14th, there was a site walk on the property that Doug did with Chairman Gordon and Gwen English. In addition to that, Sharon said she knows there have been several letters of support that have been submitted today and she hopes the commission

members all have copies of. She said the presentation will be done by Tony Chow of Finegold Architects and he will be presenting the proposal. The contexts of the presentation is to recap a little bit about what we were talking about last time.

Tony Chow spoke and said he would be showing slides again to the commission members as a follow-up from the last meeting. Their intent is to convert the church into residential use.

Julie said she wanted it noted that the color blue on the dormers (shown on the slides) is not the color they will be because a few people were concerned about it. Tony said it is not the color that is being proposed.

Tony said when you look at the ground floor area, we are proposing a ground level terrace with an aluminum railing and they are proposing a black color.

Tony said for the dormers the material they are proposing is a zinc coated copper and this is a metal material and has a nice quality to it. Tony said the railings along the dormers, they are proposing a clear glass railing. Tony showed also that the doors leading out to the balconies are proposed to be French doors coming out of the residential units.

Tony said in regards to the roof, a lot of the slate is in poor condition and needs replacement. He showed a slide with an example of a luxury asphalt shingle that was put on a historic building in Cincinnati. Tony said this shingle is highly decorative and has a lot of detail.

With the windows, Tony said they are proposing to remove the existing stained glass, the existing wooden window sashes and refurbish existing wood decorative window frames and replace the sashes with new wood sashes with insulated glazing.

Tony said about the stairs, they looked at the option of removing the stairs entirely and then replacing them with essentially a new arrangement where you have new sort of sheet wall and a new set of stairs on either side leading to the private unit with their own private terraces.

Tony ended his presentation and Patrick asked the commission members if they had any questions or comments.

Kate Desoy spoke and said that she has lived in town for about 10 years and previously she has lived in Boston. She has seen a bunch of refurbished churches in and around the city. She said the new additions when they stay new and if they are done with this concept like keeping a lot of the colors and blending into the roof, you really do not notice it unless you are looking for it. Kate said there is one in South Boston on West Broadway near the T station, people walk by it and really do not even know that it is a residence because the integrity of the church has been kept and it still looks like a church. Kate then highly recommended that if anyone is concerned about how it will look try and find and drive by some existing churches that have been refurbished and see how they look.

Grayson stated that he was not at the last meeting when this was discussed but obviously there was some discussion about a glass railing vs the metal railing. He said he thinks the glass would be more visible in theory, but thinks it will clash with the design.

Tony said at the last meeting they did show pictures on a project where they did use a glass railing and it largely disappears because some of the church form is so dominant. Tony also said they are proposing the glass railings rather than the picket ones because he thinks the picket ones will draw more attention to it.

Patrick said a glass railing is going to look great at first and then it is going to get dirty. Patrick said that Dave and he talked about this a little bit on the site walk.

Doug asked about the parking and Dave said they have been having ongoing discussions about the parking. Dave said they just met today with Dave Sharpel and Doug and are exploring all of the options. Dave also said that it definitely will be a challenge.

Julie spoke about the doors. She said she really does not know what should go there, but she is thinking maybe solid panels because it is a church. She understands the whole thing is changing into residential units. Tony said they are open to suggestions but he does want everyone to know that they need to bring light in because it is living space behind the doors.

Patrick thanked Dave for the site walk even though Dave was reluctant to have Patrick and Gwen go in and check things out, not that our purview extends to the interior but that helped Patrick immensely to understand the massing of the building, understand where penetrations were coming through and it made Patrick a lot more comfortable with what is being proposed.

Sharon Somers spoke and said at this point, she has listed some items the commission is asking for but she thinks the commission can take a vote that the application is complete and hopefully we can come back with these new designs at the next meeting. Patrick said that he agrees and feels they have enough information to accept the application as complete. Pam made a motion to accept the application as presented. Gwen seconded. All were in favor and application accepted. Patrick then said the public meeting is closed and the commission will discuss what is needed to make a final decision.

Sharon then read off the items she had on her list.

- 1) Shingles
- 2) Front door color
- 3) Exploring the option of a shed roof
- 4) Specs for the slat fence
- 5) Correlation between the design of front door and the side entrance
- 6) Landscaping

Patrick then asked for a motion to continue the application until next month when the applicant will come back with what the commission has asked for. Gwen said so moved. All were in favor and application will be continued at next month's meeting.

Other Business: Approval of Minutes for November 18th and December 16, 2021. Patrick said that the December 16th minutes were missing some pages and asked the Recording Secretary to look into this. Patrick made a motion to table both sets of minutes until next meeting. All were in favor and minutes tabled.

With no further business, Patrick adjourned the meeting at 10:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Herrick

Recording Secretary