Town of Exeter
Zoning Board of Adjustment
July 21, 2020, 7 PM
Exeter Town Hall
Final Minutes

## I. Preliminaries

**Members Present**: Clerk Rick Thielbar, Laura Davies, Kevin Baum, Christopher Merrill - Alternate, Esther Olson-Murphy - Alternate, Ann Surman - Alternate

**Members Absent:** Chair Joanne Petito, Vice-Chair Robert Prior, Martha Pennell - Alternate, Hank Ouimet - Alternate

Others Present: Doug Eastman, Barbara McEvoy

**Call to Order**: Acting Chair Rick Thielbar called the meeting to order at 7 PM. Of the alternates present, Mr. Merrill and Ms. Olson-Murphy will be voting tonight.

## II. New Business

A. The application of Benjamin and Sarah Anderson for a modification to a previously granted variance from Article 4, Section 4.2 which permitted the use of the existing accessory barn on their property for community gatherings. The Applicant is seeking relief to permit the operation of a nano-brewery and tasting room, with limited hours, in the basement/ground floor of the barn structure. The subject property is located at 66 Newfields Road, in the RU-Rural zoning district. Tax Map Parcel #24-29. Case #20-2. [Deferred]

Mr. Baum moved to approve the applicant's request for a continuance of case #20-2. Ms. Davies seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

B. The application of One Home Builders LLC II for an Equitable Waiver of Dimensional Requirements per RSA 674:33-a to permit each of the three (3) existing buildings on the property at 69 Main Street to remain as constructed which exceed the maximum height requirement in the C-1, Central Area Commercial zoning district. Tax Map Parcel #63-255. Case #20-6.

Christian Smith of Beals Associates discussed this case, which relates to buildings that have already been constructed. They're requesting that each of the three buildings stay at 38 - 39 feet in height, rather than the 35 feet required by zoning. He discussed the four criteria for their request. a) The height violation was not noticed by the owner, owners' agents, or Exeter Planning and Building department until all buildings were substantially complete. b) The violation was not the outcome of

ignorance of the ordinance or bad faith by the owner or any of the owners' representatives. Building height as defined by the 2015 International Building code is from the eave to the ridge when measuring building height, which is not how the Exeter code defines it. This was a simple good faith error by the architectural professionals. Additionally, the standard building framing studs were replaced by trusses, which are larger structural members that added to the roof height of the buildings. c) The violation does not result in a public or private nuisance, nor diminish the value of abutting property, and does not adversely affect any current or future use on the parcel. d) The cost of correcting this minor height violation outweighs any possible public benefit gained by requiring correction of the roof heights to bring them into compliance.

Ms. Davies asked Mr. Smith to explain the "eave to ridge measurement." Doug Eastman, the Building Inspector, said that Town Zoning Ordinance regulations only allow 35 feet maximum building height, while the building code refers to the average of the ridge and the eave height. The applicant also increased the thickness of the materials to make it more solid, which added height. Mr. Thielbar asked if any member of the public had complained. Mr. Eastman said one abutter wrote a letter requesting a 12 foot fence, which they would not allow, but the building owners have put up an 8 foot fence. Mr. Baum asked if the building plans stated a height of 35 feet, and Mr. Smith said yes, but they weren't aware of an issue until the buildings were complete.

Mr. Thielbar asked for public comment, but there was none. He closed the discussion to the public.

Mr. Baum said they're talking about tearing down and redesigning the three buildings for a few feet, which seems disproportionate. He thought the relief was appropriate. Ms. Davies agreed. Ms. Olson-Murphy agreed, but said she found it hard to believe no one on the site caught this issue earlier.

Ms. Davies moved to approve the equitable waiver of dimensional requirements for this application at 69 Main Street. Mr. Merrill seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

C. The application of Carol Miller for an Appeal from an Administrative Decision made by the Historic District Commission at their November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019 meeting regarding a request for replacement windows. The subject property is located at 30 High Street, in the R-2, Single Family Residential zoning district. Tax Map Parcel #71-6. Case #19-20.

Anthony Bearisto said the company he works for, Window World, is looking to put new vinyl windows in at 30 High Street. They already have a previous approval for 40 High Street, but the Historic District Commission denied them for this property. Mr. Thielbar said the minutes of the HDC meeting make it clear that the applicant did not find out what the requirements are, nor did the application give a clear definition of the

scope of work, such as how many windows are involved. He finds that the material submitted to the ZBA has the same issues. The application that was rejected was inadequate.

Mr. Baum said they should treat this as a rehearing from scratch, not be deciding whether the HDC was reasonable. The applicant has the same burden to show that they meet the Historic District Ordinance requirements, and must show how their plan meets the standard. Mr. Bearisto said that at 30 High Street, some windows have already been replaced. There are only 10 windows left to finish the house. Mr. Baum asked if when those windows were replaced, it was with the approval of the HDC, and Mr. Bearisto said he didn't know.

Carol Miller, the owner of 30 High Street, said she thought that she was just putting in replacement windows, and that as long as there were no dimensional changes it didn't require approval. The other windows were replaced four or five years ago. Mr. Bearisto added that the windows to be replaced are mostly on the side and back, although there could be two on the front. Ms. Olson-Murphy said that the HDC minutes say there are 13 windows to be replaced, but Mr. Bearisto said that his records say 10. Ms. Surman asked if Ms. Miller was given the HDC guidelines. Ms. Olson-Murphy said the HDC minutes note that they were sent to her.

Mr. Thielbar opened the discussion to the public.

Patrick Gordon, the HDC Chair, said that the Historic District Commission guidelines are clarified in Article 8 of the Zoning Ordinance. The ZBA must make a de novo judgement based on Article 8 and the HDC's recommendations. The vinyl windows were replaced at this property in the past without an application to the HDC. Doug Eastman told the applicant that if the windows were replaced in kind as far as material, proportion, and look, an application would not be needed, but they were not replaced in kind, and so they were in violation of HDC guidelines. Those windows are now being used as precedent to replace the remaining windows. The proposed windows violate several sections of Article 8.8.2c, specific design considerations: #2, the proportions of the openings in the facade; #7, the relationship with adjacent structures, which do not have vinyl windows; and #9, the relationship of color of prefinished or natural materials, as vinyl fades more quickly than other materials. They tabled the application to allow the applicant to review the zoning ordinance, but the applicant did not. The guidelines spell out the preferred material options, such as composite, fiberglass, or particulate fiberglass and resins, which have better color retention and structural properties. The vinyl windows are historically not appropriate.

Mr. Baum said in the past, an applicant has submitted some information on how they meet the historical guidelines of Article 8, but there has been no such submission by the applicant in this case. These windows don't meet #2, 7, and 9 as discussed by the HDC, as well as #10, relationship of architectural details. The other windows were replaced not in conformance with the ordinance, so their replacement should not be

used in the consideration of the appeal.

Mr. Thielbar said due to missing information in the minutes of the HDC meeting, he doesn't have a clear idea of why the HDC rejected the application. The applicant installed aluminum storm windows over the historic windows, so replacing them with vinyl windows would be an improvement.

Ms. Surman asked if they deny the appeal, if the applicant can go back to the HDC with information about how they're meeting the historical guidelines? Mr. Baum said yes, if the applicant submitted a different application attempting to address concerns, the HDC would consider it.

Mr. Baum moved to deny the application for appeal from administrative decision by the Historic District Commission at the November 21 2019 meeting regarding a request for replacement windows. Ms. Olson-Murphy seconded. The motion passed unanimously

D. The application of Blake Properties of NH, LLC for a variance from Article 4, Section 4.2 Schedule I to permit the proposed construction of a 12-unit multifamily building on the property located at 57 Portsmouth Avenue; a special exception per Article 4, Section 4.4 Schedule III (Note #12) to permit the height of the proposed building to exceed 35 feet; and variances from Article 4, Section 4.3 Schedule III seeking relief from the minimum yard setbacks, maximum building coverage, dwelling unit density and maximum height requirements for the proposed construction. The subject property is located in the C-2, Highway Commercial zoning district. Tax Map Parcel #65-137. Case #20-5.

John Ratigan of Donahue, Tucker and Ciandella, representing applicant Gary Blake, was present to discuss the application, as well as Jonathan Ring of Jones and Beech Engineering and Michael Keane, the architect.

Mr. Ring said the property is located on Portsmouth Avenue. The lot is 11,770 square feet. They are proposing one building with an area of 5650 square feet, containing 12 one bedroom condominium units. There would be 12 parking spaces on the first level, 6 units on the second floor, and 6 units on third floor, with 3 additional parking spaces outside. The plan meets the Planning Board criteria for parking spaces. They will have stormwater detention before the water drops into a town catchbasin. He added that six years ago, a coffee shop approached the owner about being located at this property, and a special exception was granted at that time.

Mr. Keane, the architect, said the site rises 14 feet from Portsmouth Avenue to the back property line. By putting the parking on the first level, they can use the parking wall as a retaining wall and maintain the slope. The first level disappears into the ground in the back. The roofs are pitched, which requires a height variance; if they had a flat roof, they would meet the 35 foot height requirement. The peaks break up the roof line and resemble more traditional roof forms. The proposed height is 44 feet

 maximum, from the Portsmouth elevation to the peak of the roof. They don't intend the area behind the building to be used by the residents.

Mr. Ratigan described the requested variances, to permit a multifamily dwelling in the C2 zoning district and to allow narrower setbacks. In the C2 zone, the setback requirements are 30 feet in the rear yard and 20 feet on the sides, while the applicants are requesting 4 feet on one side, 7 feet on the other side, and a rear setback of 14.3 feet. This application is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Master Plan, which calls for housing that supports walkability and healthy living as well small housing. Given the hotel around the corner, this development is consistent with the character of the neighborhood. People at the hospital are very interested in small housing near their employment, especially in the Covid situation. Multi use is allowed in this zoning district, and they think this project fits into the spirit of the ordinance. Nothing about this project is adverse to public health, safety, and welfare. There is no public benefit to denying this application that outweighs the substantial benefits the proposed development will provide to the community. Real Estate Agent Florence Ruffner has submitted a letter stating that the development would not diminish the value of surrounding properties. Regarding hardship, the special condition of this property is its size. Any development of this property for uses permitted in this zone will require some kind of zoning relief.

They've also submitted an application for a special exception from the height criteria; the Board could either grant the height variance or the special exception.

Mr. Baum asked about the height difference of the project with the buildings on either side. Mr. Ring said Hampton Inn and Suites is about 60 feet tall. The driveway on the other side is very steep, so the house is up relatively high, perhaps 10 or 15 feet above. It's at least at the second level of the building, perhaps 35 feet above Portsmouth Avenue.

Ms. Davies asked where the 12 unit density came from, as it seems aggressive for this lot. Mr. Keane said that one of the allowed uses here is a hotel, so one alternative they considered was extended stay hotel rooms for the Hampton Inn, but transient occupancy doesn't seem as desirable for the neighbors as longer-term residents. That plan informed the design put forward with their application.

Mr. Thielbar asked if there will be a problem with Fire Department access, given the building's fit on the property. Mr. Ring said they do have yard access to the back of the building, and they are not required to have a fire lane around the entire property. The FD could get around the entire property on foot. There will be fire suppression such as sprinklers inside. The fire code allows 12,000 square feet per floor for a sprinkled building, while the proposed building is only 5,000 square feet per floor. Ms. Davies asked if he was saying they could get a bigger building on this site, but Mr. Ring said no, the 12,000 feet would be for a larger lot, but he was discussing code compliance in general.

Mr. Thielbar said they're being too aggressive with the building size on this lot. Lot coverage is 48% instead of 30%. Mr. Ratigan said that the parking is determining the size. Ms. Davies said it's the decision to go for 12 units that is driving the size of the parking. Mr. Thielbar said there should be ways to design it that would put less building on the property.

Kim Montgomery, an abutter of the property, said it's a huge building but with apartments that are very small, which will attract single people and lots of visitors. It will not be good for the neighborhood, which is congested, and will make more traffic. Making a smaller building with larger units would make for larger setbacks.

Rachel Trabelsi of 12 Highland Street asked why she didn't receive an abutter's letter for this project. Mr. Baum said she is on the abutter's list and the notice was sent certified mail, so she would have had to sign for it. Ms. Trabelsi said when the property was regraded, it was put out of alignment with the abutting properties. She has a working horse barn on her property, and a small business composting manure. There will be smells and issues with the three apartments on the back. There was sex trafficking in the neighborhood and in the hotel, and a building for single people will encourage more of this activity. She would prefer to see something commercial in this space. They also have issues with parking and accidents in their neighborhood already. She asked why the zoning restrictions are a hardship for this property. It will be a hardship on her if the building is constructed this way.

Kim Montgomery said she reviewed the plans and didn't see where the garbage or HVAC system are. She has Seacoast Mental Health as an abutter and their systems vibrate her wall. This will be a large system as well.

Mr. Keane said HVAC equipment would be on the roof, likely 12 ductless split units on the center section of the roof. These residential HVAC units are fairly quiet. Trash would likely be in the lot in small bins, although they haven't designed a trash area yet. "Multifamily" is a term used in the code, it doesn't refer to how many people are living in each unit, just that there are multiple units. By design, they're most suited to single occupants, but it's not the applicant's intent to restrict it. Ms. Davies asked if they would consider that kind of restriction, given the parking situation. Mr. Keane said yes, potentially, and the lease will also stipulate there is only one space per unit. Ms. Davies asked if this will be a condominium form of ownership, but Mr. Keane said he doesn't think there's been a determination of that; he thinks it would likely be rental apartments. He said regarding the number of variances, the developable portion of this lot is only 50 feet long and 10 feet wide without setback relief, so there is virtually nothing that could be constructed without relief. Mr. Thielbar asked if the site has gotten smaller since they purchased it; Mr. Keane said no, but the zoning has become more restrictive. The abutters' concerns can be addressed by a fence, so if the Board imposes a fence as a condition of approval that would be fine. Ms. Davies asked if the HVAC units would be proximate to the abutters' buildings. Mr. Keane said the units will

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Mr. Baum said the special exception granted in 2014 has expired, so they're looking fresh at an exception from a 50 foot setback.

Mr. Thielbar closed the discussion to the public.

Ms. Davies said she doesn't have an issue with the use, but this is a massive building for this site. She didn't hear why it's necessary to have 12 units. Ms. Olson-Murphy said there will have to be variances no matter what, but these variances are extreme. Mr. Baum said there are special conditions here and some relief is warranted, but this is asking too much for the site.

Mr. Ratigan said they can come back with a redesign, but they would like an approval of the use case for multifamily use. Mr. Merrill asked if that locks them into doing a multifamily use. Ms. Davies said if they don't use the exception, it will expire. Mr. Baum said the distinction is whether the Board is ok with parking vs commercial on the first floor. He's fearful of granting just that variance without knowing how it would be applied. Mr. Thielbar said they should consider the proposal as a whole. Ms. Davies agreed.

Mr. Ratigan stated that the applicant would like to withdraw the application.

E. The application of Gerry Hamel for a special exception per Article 4, Section 4.2 Schedule I: Permitted Uses and Article 5, Section 5.2 to permit the proposed construction of a second residential unit on the property located at 7 Hampton Road. The subject property is located in the NP-Neighborhood Professional zoning district. Tax Map Parcel #69-32. Case #20-7.

Mr. Hamel would like to build a house at 7 Hampton Road, in an NP area. This is a large, oversize lot with one house that they're renovating on it already. The second house would be the same size, 30x24 feet, a two story building with three bedrooms. There are more than ample setbacks. There are other multiunit properties in the neighborhood.

Ms. Davies asked if the new building and the existing building would be attached. Mr. Hamel said yes, he wanted to attach the corners.

Mr. Baum said no relief is needed for the density or setbacks. Two family is permitted, but with a special exception.

Ms. Davies went through the special exception criteria. A) That the use is a permitted special exception as set forth in Article 4.2 Schedule I; yes, it's in the NP district, so residential uses or conversions are permitted. B) That the public health, safety, welfare, and convenience are not adversely affected; she can't see an issue with any of those factors in this application. C) That the proposed use will be compatible with the zoned district and adjoining post-1972 development; yes, she doesn't think it's incompatible with any uses in the area. Mr. Thielbar said there are a lot of houses there

already. D) Adequate landscaping and screening are provided; Mr. Hamel said there is existing screening on the site that would be maintained. E) Adequate offstreet parking and loading is provided and ingress and egress is so designed as to cause minimal interference with traffic on abutting streets; Mr. Hamel said the existing driveway configuration will remain, and there will be no new curb cut. F) The use conforms with all applicable regulations governing the district where located; Ms. Davies said doesn't see any issues relevant to this criteria. G) May be required to obtain Town Planning review; she doesn't think that's necessary for a two unit building. H) Shall not adversely affect abutting or nearby property values; as the applicant stated, there's already multiunit development in the area. I) Bulk storage of Materials; not applicable. J) Tech Park district; not applicable.

Mr. Thielbar asked if any member of the public would like to speak about the proposed development, but there was no comment. Mr. Thielbar closed the session to the public.

Mr. Merrill asked how Mr. Hamel will do both this project and the other project for which they applied for an extension. Mr. Hamel said they are in process with the latter renovation first, then they will build the new house. He will be doing more GC work than physical work on the new house.

Ms. Davies moved to approve the application for special exception Article 4 section 4.2 schedule 1 for the proposed construction of a second residential unit on the property located at 7 Hampton Road, as proposed in the application. Ms. Olson-Murphy seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

F. The application of William P. Bragger, LLC for a variance from Article 4, Section 4.3, Schedule II and Article 5, Section 5.1.2(A) to permit the proposed construction of an additional dwelling above the existing 4-bay garage structure on the property at 111 Court Street. The subject property is located in the R-2, Single Family Residential zoning district. Tax Map Parcel #83-52. Case #20-9.

Justin Pasay of DTC Lawyers spoke on behalf of the applicant, William Bragger, who was also present by phone. Jonathan Ring of Jones and Beech Engineering was also present for this application. Mr. Pasay said that in 2006, this property came before the ZBA; at the time, it was a five unit property, and they came for a special exception to expand a non-conforming use and attained approval. This time they are seeking a variance from two articles, Article 4, Section 4.3, Schedule II regarding density provisions, and 5.1.2(A), which prohibits the expansion of a non-conforming use without a variance. These are to facilitate an 11th and final two-bedroom unit on the property. The density in the R2 zone for multifamily is 12,000 square feet of lot area

per unit, where the amount they have is 7,097 per unit. The plan has sufficient parking: 16 spaces are required and 18 are provided. The unit would be built onto an existing four bay garage, with no change in the building's footprint. This is in the R2 zone, and several developments in this area have a similar density. The goal is for the owner to move into the new unit.

Mr. Bragger, the owner, said that he is in failing health and is planning to move into the unit to be closer to his daughter, who lives in another unit on the property.

Jonathan Ring from Jones and Beech Engineering said he was involved in the 2006 project to take the property from 5 units to 10 units. In this project, they are adding onto an existing garage, so there is no additional impervious surface area. It's 1.63 acres and it's on water and sewer, but there are no changes to drainage or setbacks.

Mr. Baum asked about the height difference between what is present now and what is proposed. Mr. Ring said about 12 additional feet, but it's still less than the limit of 35 feet for this zone.

Mr. Thielbar and Ms. Davies were concerned about the footprint changing, as there didn't appear to be room for egress from the unit. Mr. Bragger said they're planning an unenclosed outside staircase to the second floor. It would be on the existing pavement. Mr. Ring said even if they lose a parking space, they have two more than required. Mr. Eastman said if the staircase is the only egress, it must be enclosed. Mr. Bragger said he accepts that stipulation. Mr. Baum said it sounds like the footprint will be slightly larger; if they need dimensional relief, they would have to come back for another variance. Mr. Pasay said he doesn't believe that they will need dimensional relief, but he will defer to the Building Inspector.

Mr. Pasay went through the variance criteria. 1) Whether the variance is contrary to public interest; no, the density regulations are about preserving the aesthetic appeal and function of property and protecting public safety, all of which are done by this proposal. This will beautify the property, and if it's even discernable from the street it will improve the view. 2) Will the variance alter the essential character of the neighborhood; no. This is proven by the tax maps submitted with the application which show the various multifamily properties nearby, some of which have greater density than what they're proposing. He also cited the Master Plan, which talks about the importance of diverse housing stock. 3) Substantial justice is done by granting the variance; there is a huge benefit to the owner, and it also supports the Master Plan, while causing no harm to the public. There's no public benefit to denying the variance. 4) Diminishment of property values; there's no evidence to support that. This development may even have a positive effect on surrounding property values. 5) Literal enforcement of the ordinance would result in unnecessary hardship; the special conditions here are the relatively large size of this property versus surrounding properties. It's also located next to town property, the skatepark, which makes it seem larger.

 Mr. Thielbar asked for public comment, but there was none. He closed the public session.

Mr. Baum said they're talking about one additional dwelling unit on a large parcel that already has multiple dwelling units, in a large area that is adjacent to the skatepark and conservation land, as well as a commercial property. He doesn't think the addition of another dwelling unit will have an impact on the essential character of the neighborhood or threaten public health, safety, or welfare. Regarding substantial justice, the impact to the public doesn't outweigh the benefit to the applicant. The tax maps showed that the density is fairly consistent with other properties in the area. It won't diminish surrounding property values, it's a beautiful building, and this will improve the garage which is the least aesthetic part of the property. The hardship is in the uniqueness of the parcel and the area. The use is permitted and reasonable.

Mr. Baum moved to approve the application of William P. Bragger LLC for a variance from Article 4 Section 4.3 Schedule 2 and Article 5 Section 5.1.2a to permit the construction of an additional dwelling unit above the existing four bay garage structure at the property, subject to the condition that there be no additional units added to the property. Ms. Davies seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

## III. Other Business

 A. Benham Investment – Case #17-13 - 28 Newfields Road Request for extension of variance approval (expires 3/21/20)

Mr. Thielbar considered Mr. Hamel's request for extension first. March 22nd, ask for extension to variance for two houses at 28 Newfields Road. Mr. Hamel said he's been trying to sell his house, at which point he can tackle this project. He applied prior to the expiration of the variance. Mr. Eastman said there have been no changes to the ordinance that would affect this request. Mr. Baum said they tend to grant the initial extension as long as the zoning has not changed. Mr. Hamel said two single family houses on this lot.

Mr. Baum moved to approve the request for a one year extension of the variance from March 21 2017, to March 21, 2021. Ms. Davies seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

- B. Approval of Minutes: January 21 and February 18, 2020Ms. Davies requested to table these minutes until the next meeting.
- C. Election of Officers

Mr. Baum requested to table the election of officers until more members were present.

403 Mr. Thielbar moved to retain the current officers until the next meeting. Mr. Baum seconded. 404 The motion passed unanimously. 405 <u>Adjournment</u> 406 IV. 407 Ms. Davies moved to adjourn. Mr. Baum seconded. All were in favor and the meeting was 408 adjourned at 10:10 PM. 409 410 Respectfully Submitted, 411 412 Joanna Bartell 413 Recording Secretary