



Somersworth Historic District Commission

One Government Way
Somersworth, NH 03878

Regular Meeting, 24 August 2016: Adopted as Amended

In Attendance:

Albert Marotta, Chair
Martin Dumont, City Councilor and Representative to HDC
Laura Barry, Alternate
Richard Brooks, Commissioner
Arthur Hendrickson, Vice-Chair and Commissioner
Jenna Higgins, Alternate
Beth Poulin, Commissioner
George Poulin, Commissioner
Tim Metivier, Code Inspector
Charles Murray, Commissioner and Secretary

Petitioners Present:

Robert Baldwin (on behalf of HDC #10-2016)
Mark Davenport (on behalf of HDC #16-2016)
Jeff Westover (on behalf of HDC #14-2016)

Agenda

- I. *Call to Order*: The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.
- II. *Approval of Minutes*: Motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of 27 July 2016

as submitted was made by Mr. Murray and seconded by Councilor Dumont. Motion passed unanimously.

III. *Projects of Minimal Impact*: Mr. Metivier reported one project of minimal impact approved during the previous month.

IV. *Public Comment*: There was none.

V. *Old Business*:

A. Knox Marsh Development, LLC is seeking a Certificate of Appropriateness for exterior repairs and renovations on property located at 149 High Street, in the Residential/Business Historic (R/BH) District, Assessor's Map 10, Lot 131, HDC #10-2016.

Mr. Robert Baldwin was present to describe the project (HDC #10-2016). The Commission's discussion divided the project into two aspects: (a) attempting to find a way to standardize the siding in the back of the structure which as it stands is a hodgepodge of T-111, vinyl, and aluminum; and (b) determining the type of railing for the front.

Motion to allow either T-111 siding or clapboard siding (e.g. pine, cedar, or cement) but not vinyl was made by Mr. Brooks and seconded by Mr. Hendrickson. Motion was adopted unanimously on a roll call vote.

Motion to approve the installation of a pipe-railing as discussed during the Commission's site visit was made by Mr. Brooks and seconded by Mr. Poulin. Motion was adopted unanimously on a roll call vote.

B. Any additional Old Business that might come before the Commission.

VI. *New Business*:

A. Highland Property, LLC is seeking Certificate of Appropriateness to replace stairs on property located at 2-4 Lord's Court, in the Historic Moderate Density (HMD) District, Assessor's Map 11, Lot 59, HDC #14-2016).

Mr. Jeff Westover was present to discuss the project (HDC #14-2016). Mr. Metivier explained to the HDC that this project was discovered already completed during a drive-by inspection. Mr. Westover informed the HDC of the necessity of immediately replacing at least Staircase #2 because a tenant had fallen through it; Staircase #1 was

also rotting and required replacement according to Mr. Westover.

The Commission's discussion centered on the need for both the ballast and handrail and for a determination of their code compliance. Mr Poulin asked about an overhang at the bottom of the stairs for safety reasons, to which inquiry Mr. Metivier replied that only if the original stairway had an overhang would a new one be necessary. The Commission discussed the need for two handrails but Mr. Metivier informed the HDC that only one was necessary for code compliance. Mr. Poulin and Councilor Dumont expressed concern about the schedule for painting the stairway; the Chair expressed concern that there were no pictures of the previous stairways to make comparisons to the new structures.

Motion to approve the newly installed stairways, retaining their original function as entrances, with a to be painted handrail on one side that is to conform to code. A friendly motion requiring that a painting schedule that was to be submitted to the HDC at its next regular meeting was made by Councilor Dumont and seconded by Mr. Murray. The original motion approving HDC #14-2016 along with the friendly amendment was adopted unanimously by roll call vote.

B. Mark Davenport is seeking a Certificate of Appropriateness to frame the garage doors and replace the front side porches on property located at 16 Lincoln Street, in the Residential Single Family-A, with a Historic Overlay (R1AH) District, Assessor's Map 11, Lot 127, HDC #16-2016.

Mr. Mark Davenport was present to discuss his project (HDC #16-2016). Mr. Metivier explained that he discovered that the work on the garage had already started so he issued a Stop Work Order and informed the owner that permission was needed from the HDC prior to beginning the repairs.

Mr. Poulin suggested that the HDC consider the second project first because it was easier to deal with. The Chair agreed. Because there were no pictures, or lists of materials for the HDC to look at, the Chair recommended tabling the first project; the Chair asked Mr. Davenport if he would agree to a tabling for him to obtain the information necessary for the HDC to reconsider the project at a later meeting. Mr. Davenport agreed to let the second project be tabled. Motion to table the second project which concerned repairing the porches was made by Councilor Dumont and seconded by Mr. Brooks. Motion was adopted unanimously.

Mr. Hendrickson expressed reservation that the first project reframing the garage doors might be the first step in a change of usage for the building. There was considerable discussion about the historical accuracy of the vinyl siding and the newly

installed windows. Mr. Metivier did remark that in one of the photos the original carriage house could be viewed in the background; the garage then was a later addition. Eventually the Commission's consensus was not to lose any more historical value on the property. Motion to require restoration of the garage doors was made by Mr. Poulin and seconded by Mr. Murray. Motion was adopted unanimously by roll call vote.

C. Any other New Business that might come before the Commission.

VII. *Public Comments by Visitors:* There were none.

VIII. *Workshop Business:*

A. Mr. Brooks wrote some background material concerning the use of retaining walls in the Historic District that the Commission felt could be useful in a future workshop on this issue. A copy of Mr. Brooks's comments is included in the minutes.

B. Any other Workshop Business that might come before the Commission.

IX. *Communications and Miscellaneous:*

A. Councilor Dumont reported that he and Councilor Pepin had made a study of properties and types of repairs/renovations (e.g. stairs needing painting, etc.) needed in the Historic District. This was done because depreciating properties in the Historic District affected property values across the city. This report was given to the City Manager and City Planner. Mr. Poulin said that this report gives incentive to the HDC to buckle down on ensuring that property owners keep their property up in the Historic District. Ms. Barry inquired if the HDC had a list of preferred or recommended contractors who would be familiar with HDC and state Historic District requirements as some other towns had; the Chair said that while a preferred list wasn't possible, a recommended list could be investigated.

B. The Chair expressed his displeasure that two of the applications considered at this meeting weren't complete and thus should not have been added to the agenda. He promised that he would work more closely with Mr. Metivier and Mr. Metivier's office to ensure that only completed applications would be submitted to the HDC agenda for its consideration. This would allow the HDC to work more effectively and expeditiously.

C. Any other Communications and Miscellaneous that might come before the HDC.

X. Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn at 8:44 pm was made by Mr. Poulin and seconded by Councilor Dumont. Motion was adopted unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Pius Charles Murray

(Mr.) Pius Charles Murray, Secretary

Enclosure (1)

Retaining walls

We all know the Historic District here in Somersworth has very little flat land. High Street is an obvious example, next time you travel that street, take a moment and look up hill. Whether you're looking up a side street or between buildings you will likely see some form of retaining wall, most of which are natural stone and have stood for decades if not well over a century. Whether it is rubble walls, cut granite or stacked slate, take a moment to appreciate them before they are gone.

Due to the steep hills and dense construction within the District retaining walls are found on almost every piece of property. They range from simple low walls similar to curbs to large retaining walls much taller than a person. One purpose of the historic districts is to help keep the historic look, feel, and aesthetic appearance of the district. To do this Historic Districts oversee more than just buildings. They can also address bridges, cemeteries, fences, and even open spaces to name a few.

Somersworth's HDC Guidelines include a section titled Streetscape Features. That section addresses parking areas, vegetation, fencing, and terracing. Fences are subject to HDC approval. Retaining walls create terracing and often mark boundaries and are essentially the same as a fence by definition. Now with the city actively acting on safety and code violations, I'm sure any walls that are leaning or in disrepair will be appearing before us. In the last few years several walls have been replaced and apparently now the only option ever used is modern landscape blocks such as the walls built along High St between Hamilton and Noble Streets. These modern mass produced block walls can already be found on streets such as Emery, Beacon, Maple, and Prospect. Each time a wall is built with that sort of modern uniform block another piece of Historic Somersworth is lost forever. We need to consider updating this guideline to protect the integrity of the historic landscape features. Is there anyone on this board that would disagree with allowing only natural stone would be a simple and sensible guideline? That would not be overly restrictive, allowing property owners many options ranging from rubble rock to cut granite. Not sure if it is true, but I have heard that Portsmouth's Historic District allows only "Portland Granite". We should never be that overly restrictive, but if we do not address this soon we will miss out on the one opportunity that will effectively help protect historic landscape features.

May I make a motion to adjust the Streetscape Features section to officially allow only natural rock on any hardscape features within the Historic District?

GUIDELINE: Retaining walls or stone walls shall be constructed of cut or uncut natural stone only. Standard Red Brick is the only exception allowed. Any other uniform mass produced block is discouraged and will need approval by the HDC and should only be allowed if it appears to have no repeating pattern when finished.

Signed Richard Brooks

Dated: 08-24-16