



Somersworth Historic District Commission

One Government Way
Somersworth, NH 03878

Minutes of Workshop Meeting on 25 January 2017: Adopted amended

Present:

Laura Barry, Chair
Arthur Hendrickson, Vice-Chair
Martin Dumont, City Councilor and Representative to the HDC
Tim Metivier, Building Inspector
Richard Brooks, Commissioner
George Poulin, Commissioner
Pius Charles Murray, Commissioner and Secretary

In absentia:

Jenna Dunham, Alternate Commissioner
Beth Poulin, Commissioner

Workshop Agenda & Minutes

I. Call to Order: At 6:04 P.M. by the Chair.

II. Workshop Agenda: Discussion on guidelines, materials, techniques, and styles for windows and trim.

The Chair opened the HDC Workshop by explaining that the Commission had expressed interest in examining its guidelines concerning windows and walls. The guidelines seek to stay with original materials in so far as feasible. Furthermore, the Chair re-iterated the Commission's desire to be more consistent in its rulings so applicants would know what to expect. The Commission's task is to describe as fully and accurately as possible what it wants.

Mr. Poulin led off the discussion stating that the Commission should be more specific as to what type of stone is permissible. In addition, he said that in the past, the HDC has allowed PCV.

Mr. Metivier said that two years ago Mr. DeMaris had come before the HDC with examples of PCV materials which, if painted, could be acceptable in the historic district. Mr. Metivier furthermore explained that PCV materials are not real wood but when painted come close enough to be acceptable. Mr. Hendrickson said that the HDC has approved the use of PCV materials on a case-by-case basis; as an example, he pointed to Shanna Saunders's recent request to the HDC to approve as a project of minimal impact an application using PCV materials. Councilor Dumont inquired how the HDC should prevent the City from doing what it wanted to on buildings in the historic district. The Chair responded updated guidelines needed to be formulated that are specific but flexible enough. Councilor Dumont offered a suggestion that a member of the HDC serve on the city's other land-use boards.

Councilor Dumont asked if any building permits were ever turned down. He differentiated between renovation of a new home which didn't require an applicant to appear before the HDC but planned renovation of an older home in the historic district should require such an appearance before the HDC. Permits furthermore should include some inspections to insure the work approved was the work being done. Mr. Metivier responded that some building permits were turned down (e.g. a deck too large, wrong design, too close to a set back, etc.). In response to Councilor Dumont's question about the correct way an application for an historic house would be handled, Mr. Metivier said that it would first appear before the HDC and would only move to the ZBA after HDC approval since HDC denial would stop the application process in this case.

Mr. Metivier said that historically the HDC has approved vinyl windows; does it want to continue to do so? Mr. Hendrickson opined that the HDC would prefer wood. The Chair explained that this is why the HDC should adopt updated guidelines. Councilor Dumont said that he was in favor of the HDC having more stringent guidelines but he cautioned that the City Council would want to know what value is added to the city and property. The Chair stated that this is why the HDC should be more consistent in its rulings so that the public would know what to expect. Councilor Dumont recommended that before accepting applications the HDC could list types of acceptable materials without requiring them; the issue in Somersworth is that the community is fractured with decisions in the past sometimes based on who one knew rather than on objective guidelines. The Chair underscored why consistency in HDC rulings is important. Councilor Dumont offered the example of Lydia's House where the contractor did not know or understand the process of applying for approval for renovations of that property through the HDC. The Chair re-iterated that consistency in rulings should raise respect in the community for the process of appearing before the HDC. The Chair furthermore said that contractors must own up to their responsibilities and do due diligence or end up paying a fine.

Councilor Dumont brought up hardship cases. The Chair said that the HDC was not supposed to take cost into consideration. Mr. Metivier suggested that one way to indirectly address the issue of hardship cases would be to give examples of acceptable materials along with exceptions. In answer to a question about list of approved contractors, Mr. Metivier noted that the HDC could not recommend any contractor but could supply a list of contractors who've done work in the historic district.

Mr. Poulin asked if separate guidelines should be offered for windows. The Chair said that guidelines for windows is a huge issue in historic preservation. Councilor Dumont opined that

people do not fully understand what their responsibilities are when they purchase a home or building in the historic district. As an example, he offered the Hilltop School where the city was required to replace all the windows to qualify for a grant since the windows were not historically accurate. Mr. Metivier offered the Mills as a successful program that is both historically accurate and energy efficient. Mr. Brooks asked about replacing metal shingles with asphalt. Mr. Metivier said that if the replacement material is the same as what it is replacing then it is considered minimal impact and would not have to come before the HDC for approval. To make some projects minimal impact (thus reducing the need to appear before the HDC), the guidelines should be set by prescription.

Mr. Metivier recommended, and the HDC accepted, that the Commission could begin with Mr. Brooks's written guidelines for walls; the Chair would work on guidelines for windows, and Mr. Hendrickson on decks. The drafts could be presented at the Workshop on 28 February 2017.

III. Adjournment:

The Chair adjourned the Workshop at 7:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,
Pius Charles Murray
(Mr.) Pius Charles Murray
Secretary

