



Somersworth Historic District Commission

One Government Way, Somersworth, NH 03878

Regular Meeting of the HDC held on Thursday, 27 December 2018. First Draft

<u><i>Present</i></u>	<u><i>In absentia</i></u>
Laura Barry, Chair	David McNicholas
Richard Brooks, Vice-Chair	George Poulin
Edward Levasseur, City Councilor	
Matthew Gerding, Commissioner	
Tim Metivier, Building Inspector	
Pius Charles Murray, Secretary	

Petitioners Present:

<u><i>Name of Petitioner</i></u>	<u><i>HDC #</i></u>
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Agenda & Minutes

I. Call to Order: At 7:00 pm by the Chair

II. Approval of Minutes:

- A. Motion to approve the minutes of the HDC meeting of 26 September 2018 as submitted was made by Mr. Brooks and seconded by Mr. Gerding. Motion passed unanimously.
- B. Motion to approve the minutes of the HDC minutes of 28 November 2018 as submitted was made by Mr. Gerding and seconded by Mr. Brooks. Motion passed by majority vote; Mr. Murray abstained.
- C. Motion to approve the minutes of the Education & Outreach Subcommittee as submitted was made by Mr. Brooks and seconded by Mr. Gerding. Motion passed by majority vote; Mr. Murray abstained.

III. Projects of Minimal Impact: Mr. Metivier reported that one project of minimal impact had been submitted and approved:

A. Melanie Amarosa, 12 Mt. Vernon Street, Assessor's Map 10, Lot 150, HDC #48-2018. Approved to repair and replace roof.

IV. Public Comments by Visitors: There were none.

V. Old Business:

A. Any Old Business that comes before the HDC.

VI. New Business:

- A. Fabienne Flanagan is seeking a certificate of appropriateness to install a fence on property located at 64 Winter Street, in the Residential Single Family-A, with a Historic Overlay (R1AH) District, Assessor's Map 12, Lot 23, HDC #50-2018.

No petitioner was present. Mr. Metivier described the project as a request to install a black chain link fence, 5' in height, for the small garden. Mr. Brooks read some prepared remarks (please see attached) about the history and development of chain link fences, the approval of which has vexed the HDC. Councilor Levasseur thanked Mr. Brooks for his research on chain linked fences and mentioned that the current petition's request would be extremely visible to the public. The Chair asked Mr. Metivier for a clarification about an HDC approval of a chain link fence for commercial not residential use. Mr. Metivier read the city's ordinance on fences which stipulates that the architectural style of fences must follow that of the surrounding neighborhood. Mr. Brooks noted that at 5' it would be quite high and visible.

Motion to deny HDC #50-2018 due to a lack of information was made by Mr. Murray and seconded by Mr. Brooks. Motion passed unanimously.

B. Any New Business that comes before the Commission

VII. Public Comments by Visitors: There were none.

VIII. Workshop Business:

A. Recommendation for HDC website

Mr. Gerding recommended that an info graphic on types of fences allowed in the Historic District be added to the HDC website. Mr. Brooks agreed to add that request to the next Education & Outreach Subcommittee agenda.

B. Education & Outreach Subcommittee

Mr. Brooks announced that the next meeting of the Education & Outreach Subcommittee was scheduled for its regular 2nd Wednesday, 9 January 2019, at 6:00pm at City Hall which was changed in a subsequent email to 16 January 2019.

C. Any additional Workshop Business

X. Communications and Miscellaneous:

A. City Council Workshop on proposed ordinance changes

The Chair reported that there was not a big turnout of supporters for the 2nd reading of the proposed Historic District ordinance changes; this may be explained by the delays and re-scheduling of the hearing. According to the Chair, the HDC has offered to prepare a Workshop during which the proposed changes would be explained and any questions by City Councilors could be responded to. One big issue appears to be the size of the Historic District; the Chair said that the proposed ordinance changes do not address that issue. Rather the proposed changes are intended to address ambiguities in the current ordinances. The HDC would like to separate the debate on Historic District size from the consideration of the ordinances. The HD size could be considered afterwards.

B. Compliments to the Planning Department

The Chair complimented the Planning Department staff for the amount and excellent quality of its work during 2018. The 50 petitions that the department handled has been the highest it has seen recently.

C. Any additional Communications and Miscellaneous Business

XI. Adjournment: Motion to adjourn at 7:28pm was made by Mr. Murray and seconded by Mr. Brooks. Motion enthusiastically passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Pius Charles Murray

(Mr.) Pius Charles Murray, MLS, MPA
Secretary

Happy New Year

Interesting how we end up with similar topics one after another. The last meeting we approved a chain link fence at the VFW. This time it is a residential proposal with the fence placed along the driveway near the front, very much in the open. Our last meeting there was much discussion about the chain link fence, before it was approved. The fence topic also arose during the City Council discussion of our proposed ordinance and that discussion suggested that the HDC is being too subjective at times. Being such a current and relevant topic, I would like to give a bit of background info. I believe the opinion of most HDC members chain link fence does not belong, but the VFW got approved last month because the fence is located near the back of the property.

Chain link fence, I guess it is historic to some degree, invented in 1844 in the UK, and initially offered in 1891 here in this country. Once the manufacturing process was improved it gained affordability and popularity. The three most common uses for it are Sports Fields, Industrial Buildings, and High Security Facilities. Besides chain link, fences come in many shapes and sizes. I recently flipped through this book titled "*Around Somersworth*", a very interesting book with lots of historical pictures throughout Somersworth's history, and found only one picture showing a chain link fence. That fence was located inside a courtroom, likely a holding cell for dangerous prisoners if not all prisoners appearing before the judge. I could not find another chain link fence in any of the other pictures. I did see many picket fences of many styles. Some had straight top edges, some have peaks and valleys, some had a top board or rail along the top edge, and if not, the individual slats could be flat, pointed, or rounded. That sort of variety adds character to the property. Split rail, wrought iron, and stockade fences can also be found, but not as common, but still no chain link fences. Fast forward to current day, everybody wants cheap easy and fast, and the fence salesman will quickly suggest the same. If we keep allowing the same cheap easy and fast option, everything starts looking the same and the district loses a bit more character with each new chain link fence. One of the HDC purposes is to quote "Enhance the visual character of the City by encouraging and regulating the compatibility of architectural styles within Historic Districts reflecting unique and established architectural traditions;" Chain link fence has little to no historical value in my opinion, chain link fence has a purpose and place, such as the noble pines ball field or a factory within the District, but no real reason for a residential setting since chain link fence was not even available in this county when 90% of the buildings in the District were built. We are not saying this applicant or any other applicant can't install a fence, we are only asking that they consider a fence with style and character fitting the Historic District period, and there are many, many, more options that could be considered, not only in style, but in affordable price ranges as well. This is a perfect example for why a clearer definition is needed in our ordinances and standards to help residents understand what is preferred or not allowed, before they have plans drawn up and appear before us. That would offer them more advice during their planning, rather than finding out different here at an HDC meeting. The proposed ordinances would stop subjective decisions by providing better clearer guidance for the HDC in future decisions. As for now, I will not be in favor of another chain link fence, especially one located in such an easily seen location.

Richard Brooks
12-27-18 HDC Meeting