

APPROVED
HDC MEETING
OCTOBER 3, 2019

Members Present: Chair Rodney Rowland, Vice Chair Jeff Hughes, Tom Maher, Kate Murray
Elaine Nollet, Irene Bush and Judy Groppa.

Chair Rowland called the meeting of the New Castle HDC to order at 7:00 pm. He advised that there was one public hearing which was continued from last month, a work session which was postponed, and a second work session on the agenda. The Chair asked that anyone wishing to speak, must please sign in. The Chair, Vice Chair, Kate Murray, Tom Maher and Elaine Nollet will be voting

1. Continuation of Public Hearing for Ellen and Randy Bryan, 34 Wentworth Road, Map 16 Lot 64, to add stone retaining walls.

Guests: Mr. and Mrs. Randy Bryan.

The Chair stated that a site walk was made to the premises by several commission members one week prior to the hearing. The Bryans would like to install two stone walls, one by the house opposite the front door and the other down by the street. Rowland added that the wall by the front door has very limited visibility.

Mr. Bryan stated they would like to place a 30 foot long rock wall along the street. As you are looking at the house, it would be placed on the right corner, starting at the Feder property line and coming south about 30 feet. Currently, there is a split rail fence stretching across the entire property facing Wentworth Rd. The far northern corner, or the last 30 feet, has been problematic to maintain as there is an outcrop about 5 feet in from the fence that drops off and causes mowing the lawn and weed wacking to be difficult. They would like to take out the last 30 feet of fence and replace it with a rock wall that will follow the land form behind it, to make the area easier to mow. The wall will be roughly 2 ½' to 3' in height close to the Feders' property, then level out for awhile and taper off to a foot or so at the end. The amount of fill behind the wall will be 5-6' and will phase into the rock wall.

In that corner of the property, the water drains to and under the street and should continue to drain that way. The additional dirt from the fill should buffer any precipitation and the installation of drain holes at the base of the rock wall will insure that any accumulation of water goes to the street instead of toward the Feders' property.

The second rock wall will contain the knoll dirt that is left behind from digging out the driveway. The Bryans use the area between the house and the knoll as a social area and had to dig out a considerable amount of rock and dirt to get into the garage. In order to maximize the amount of area at the knoll for social activity, they propose putting a rock wall around what has been dug up to level

the area and maximize space. The wall will be crescent shaped and located 2 feet in from the edge of the driveway. It will have fill behind it to bring the level up to the knoll, making it smooth and easier to mow. The Bryans also propose to put two sets of stairs in the wall by the driveway, one facing the side entry or porch, and the other facing the shed by the knoll. The wall will have a poured concrete backboard with stone veneer on the front. The concrete will not show and the wall will be built with angular rock which is residue from the outcrops they dug out. New rocks, that will match the rock wall, will be used for the steps and sidewall.

Jeff Hughes asked for clarification on the design of the wall, concerned on the use of concrete. Mr. Bryan referred the board to a stone wall built on Wentworth Road, about 3-4 houses down from the Bryans, at a new 1 ½ story house with the garage that is catty corner, owned by Christy & Joe. The Bryans would like to build their wall the same way and will use the same mason as this house.

Much of the crescent shape stone wall will not be visible and Mr. Bryan concurred that he does not want to have any concrete visible. The intent is to build a rock wall with a little concrete to hold it together. A stone mason's skill is to fit various stones together like a puzzle and create a rock wall with a flat face and flat top. Judy Groppa was concerned about the aesthetics of having a split rail fence and half way across the front of the property, changing to a shaped stone wall. She thought it would look a lot better if the wall were more natural looking, as if it had been there a long time, rather than with a flat top and flat sides. If the rock was rounded with no cement showing, it would look as if it had been part of the original property.

Mr. Bryan shared some pictures of rock walls with the board, stating that using round field stone for a rock wall takes a lot more cement to hold it together. There are a lot of old stone walls around the island, made of loose stone and they have fallen into disrepair due to natural erosion. The purpose of adding a stone wall is to have it easy to maintain, and mowing by a loose stone wall, over time, will hasten the demise of the wall. If a lawnmower goes over a loose stone wall, it will knock stones and over time, leave it in disrepair. The Bryans believe the wall will contribute to the beauty of the house and look a little more kept.

Judy Groppa stated that she doesn't think that the split rail fence and a very shaped stone wall go well together. It seems that this enormous front yard is being split in half. Mrs. Bryan pointed out it is the exact combination of stone wall and split rail fence as in front of the Wentworth Hotel and believes the stone walls will make it more tidy. The Bryans stated it currently is an eyesore.

Irene Bush asked if the wall on the street will have dirt coming right up to the back of it and Mr. Bryan stated yes it will come right up to the rim of the wall. The wall on the driveway will have dirt coming up to one side and on the other side will be the driveway. They would like steps to drop down to the driveway. Mr. Bryan stated they would also like to put a set of steps in the wall by the street

as it would shorten their path from the driveway to the neighbors. The steps would be 2' wide, about half way along the stone wall, with 2 steps coming up.

Jeff Hughes asked what the steps would be made of and how the wall would interface with the Feders' stone wall. Mr. Bryan stated there is a loose stone wall that bisects the property line between their property and the Feders. The new stone wall would make a fairly tight corner. The loose stone wall between the Bryans and the Feders would be left as is. None of the stones would be changed and the Bryans would fill in their side of the stone wall with a custom interface.

Hughes asked how deep is the ell in the fence and was told it is about 2 ½'. The Chair showed the Vice Chair on his tablet how the fence and stone wall would interface. Mrs. Bryan stated that by making the interface on the existing wall with the new wall, lilacs could be put in which the Feders would like, as currently they cannot plant anything because it's a dropoff from bald rock.

The steps would be made of cut stone, similar to stones for the steps on the crescent shape wall. They will be matched to the stones that make up the wall. Judy Groppa thought the steps would help the overall look of the wall and make the wall more prominent. Elaine Nollet stated that it was helpful doing the site walk of the Bryans' property as it is very uneven and adding fill will smooth it out. Nollet also commented that the concrete will support the wall adding that she rode around town and looked at several stone walls. She believes the cement will help the stone wall's longevity. Judy Groppa stated that if it is not done by an expert, the concrete can disintegrate. Mr. Bryan stated that the mason did work for them 10-12 years ago in Dover and has been in business a long time. He has also done stone walls in New Castle, including one on Oliver Street, as well as Joe & Christy's house on Wentworth Road.

The Chair opened the hearing to the public at 7:29 pm but there was no one to speak to, for or against.

Kate Murray was concerned that this was the first time the board heard about the addition of steps to the stone wall. She also asked if the board could get a rendering as to how the stone wall will look from the streetscape. Irene Bush added that she was having trouble visualizing how high the wall would be and where the property dips. The Chair asked the applicants for drawings for the next meeting, adding that if steps are their preference, to be sure they are in your renderings. Kate Murray also would like to be sure the drainage goes out to the road and to see how the drainage holes work into the wall. Although it is not for HDC purview she was concerned what would happen if rain does not drain out to the road.

Elaine Nollet asked if the board really wanted the applicants to come back again as they had brought a picture of a stone wall similar to what they want to install and the board had done a site walk so should have a good idea of the property and location. The Chair stated he would like to see the streetscape and would like to

understand how the wall is going to look and tie into the neighbor's property at the corner.

M/S/P Kate Murray moved to table the Bryans' installation of stone walls until next month; Tom Maher seconded. Murray and Maher voted yes; Jeff Hughes & Elaine Nollet voted No. The Chair voted Yes because he doesn't believe there's a rush to get the stone walls in.

However, the Bryans stated they cannot start the walls after a frost so they will be waiting until next year and will have dirt and stone in their yard. Mr. Bryan stated that as far as the drainage is concerned, the Building Inspector thought that if drainage was of a scale to warrant concern, he would have advised the Bryans to go before the Planning Board. Rowland stated the entire knoll drains to the road and if you put drainage holes in the wall, the water should keep moving.

Elaine Nollet then stated there were two walls and wondered if the board could approve the wall by the knoll and driveway.

M/S/P Tom Maher motioned to approve the wall at the driveway, up by the house and knoll, adding that the nature of the front yard is undulating and the profile of the wall near the knoll will not be very visible from the road. As a result of the way it is being constructed, only a small part of the wall will be visible because ledge, lawn and flagpole will obscure it. Kate Murray seconded. All board members were in favor including the Chair. Mrs. Bryan was very thankful stating it saves her tree and will allow them to install the driveway and plow this winter.

2. Work session for Thomas and Lisa Breen, 46-48 Cranfield Street, for demolition of existing structure, Map 17, Lot 28.

Guests: Tom Breen and Lisa Breen. Brendan McNamara, Architect

The Breens bought this house two years ago and spent the summer of 2018 going through one of the units and tore it apart to salvage and rebuild. There has been so much work on the house done incorrectly over the years, it's just been a hack job. It is a two family house which has been unoccupied for years. When the furnace was installed in the crawl space basement, they cut through beams to put ductwork in. The center chimney is long gone and when other fireplaces and a chimney were installed, more beams were cut. The house is collapsing where the two houses come together, as a corner is rotted where an electrical panel was installed, and the corner brace was hacked through.

The Breens brought two carpenters through the house and they both concluded that so many parts will have to be replaced that it will be a brand new house. The windows are completely shot and the siding is totally deteriorated. The house has not been taken care of. The Breens are proposing to build something that looks as though it were built in the 1700's, the exact same style house but slightly bigger to allow for stairs and bathrooms and to bring it up to code.

They will have cedar clapboards, wood corner boards, asphalt shingles, and Green Mountain wood windows. They are trying to drop the foundation and will use stone veneer on the foundation; there will be a faux center chimney with real bricks covering it. They are proposing the same shape except they would like to install a door on Cranfield Street as well. The Breens have met with all the abutters and they are all in favor of taking the house down and replacing it. Joe Almeida prefers to keep the house at an angle to the street but the Breens would like to keep it in line with other houses on the street. They have been before the ZBA which overwhelmingly approved aligning the house with the other houses on the street.

Jeff Hughes suggested the board deal with the issue of demolition first and asked if anyone had any questions. Elaine Nollet stated she has been in the house and agrees that it is not salvageable and believes it would be nice to see it revived. Mrs. Breen stated she is hopeful they will be able to keep some of the beams but there is nothing else to salvage.

Tom Maher asked if the work that has been done in the past is compromising the structural integrity of the house. Mr. Breen stated yes, adding that when they pulled a building permit, he was told that no one has ever pulled a building permit on this house.

Chair Rowland had asked the town historian his thoughts on the history of this house and read an email from Jim Cerny which is made part of this record. Rowland stated there were two decisions currently before the board: 1. demolition and 2. leaving the house at an angle or turning it to align with other houses on the street. The angle of the house is a unique attribute of this house and Rowland would argue that having it face the road isn't really replacing it as it were. Mr. Breen stated there were two building lots and there was a cottage in the front which may have been why the house was turned on the lot.

Vice Chair Hughes stated the board has had hearings on a couple of houses that it has tried to preserve, i.e., 25 Piscataqua and the Decoursey house. Hughes discerned that the email from Jim Cerny indicates there is not a lot of historical significance to this house and its historical value is minimal. Given the assessment of the structural soundness or lack thereof, he did not have an issue with demolition of the home and understands that the general intention is to reproduce something that fits into the neighborhood.

Kate Murray stated she is also comfortable with reproducing something in the same vein and is comfortable with the demolition but would argue that the positioning is particular to the house. The Chair agreed stating that he would agree to demolition but would like to do a site walk so the board can do its due diligence. This being a work session, there is no need to make a decision tonight.

Brendan McNamara, Architect, stated that the house was not well built to start. It was built with a crawl space, stone foundation initially, and at some point someone put an enormous boiler in to heat the house, but there was no room in the basement so they excavated in the middle of the crawl space, put concrete down, and hacked away at the beams to make room for the boiler. And again did the same thing to make room for bathroom waste pipes. It was not a well constructed house and it has been bastardized over time. He stated that it has unique placement but the motivation isn't to align it with the rest of street but to allow for an effective rear yard because it's a corner lot on Shore Lane, and there is no privacy whatsoever.

Judy stated she prizes the streetscape and the way the house fits in with the whole village and believes the orientation has a story to tell. This house has its own personality and is unique. She considers the federal style of the house and the orientation to be of great importance. Board members agreed a site walk is appropriate and the Chair advised it would be scheduled before the next meeting so the Breens can be on the agenda for the next meeting. Rowland stated he would like to schedule it closer to the next meeting so it will be fresh in board member's minds for the meeting.

Jeff Hughes asked if the Breens knew why the house was constructed at an angle originally. Mr. Breen stated he is not sure but thought it may have been due to the big Curtis Hotel nearby, just two houses down. Hughes commented that from the streetscape standpoint, lining it up with the front of the other houses on the street is more aesthetically appealing. Chair Rowland stated he likes that it's unique and is part of New Castle's history. If you turn this house to align it on the street, then you have massing, whereas the angle breaks it up a little.

Mr. Breen stated that one of the benefits of turning the house is that there is not much of a back yard and trying to hide things such as a generator would be difficult. Also there is a shed that a neighbor asked if the Breens would move it from the left side of the house to the right side so the neighbor could have a better sight of the water. So neighbors would receive a benefit from straightening the house on the street and moving the shed. Mrs. Breen stated that there is a sliver of land which is quite overgrown but also makes it look like no one is living there, and because there's no door on Cranfield Street, there are always cars parked right on top of the house. If the house is straightened, they hope people won't park there so much.

Brendan McNamara stated the rotation to bring the house parallel to Cranfield Street is probably about 10° – 15°. The ZBA approved the rotation because it brings the house 10' off Cranfield Street instead of the current 7' off Cranfield Street, so makes it less non-conforming.

McNamara then walked through the design for the board members. They would like to make the house a little bit bigger with a gable end facing Cranfield Street, which is called unit 1 and is the main part of the house. The apartment is a small

section running parallel to Cranfield Street. The current apartment is 17' x 22' and they propose 18' x 28', so it would be a foot wider and 6' longer. The main house is going from the current 19' x 22' to 34' x 38'. Even the main part of the house is still a relatively minimal structure. The trim elements at the soffit are slightly different from what is currently on the house to bring it more in line with the federal style, and probably more of what the original house was. At some point it was remodeled to Victorian. It's a replica historic house, using Green Mountain old wood windows, an exterior trim package of wood, and a concrete foundation with real stone veneer.

Kate Murray asked if the two chimneys become one. There are currently three chimneys and it will go back to a center chimney style. The house will remain a two family home and the Breens will live in the main house and the other side will be a rental.

McNamara stated it would be nice to bring the house back and make it historically correct. Vice Chair Hughes stated he likes the design of the traditional colonial as it builds on the character of the house and cleans up a prominent corner in town, adding that it's been sad watching the house fall apart. McNamara stated their design is trying not to be noticed – it's nice, simple and a well put together house. Mr. Breen stated they are trying to find old granite steps or used granite steps and they will keep the color of the house yellow.

Murray stated it is a prominent and well known house and supports their attempts to keep the personality and replicate it. Elaine Nollet stated that a prominent town historian, Maxim, lived there.

McNamara stated they would like to have a porch in back facing the water and that it may be visible from Shore Lane but is set back and not visible from Cranfield Street. The Chair said he would be in touch to set a date for the site walk.

3. Caroline & John Barrie house. Oliver Street.

Guests: Shannon Alther from TMS Architects

Mr. Alther came to address the board's concerns from last meeting with regard to the front door, porch, soffits and windows of the Barrie house. He stated that the project took longer because the frame of the house was rotted which wasn't known until they tore siding off. The neighbors were concerned because the house was under construction for so long and the contractor wanted to put it back together quickly. The contractor went ahead and redid the roof overhang and soffits which actually helped because the small fascia board caused water to run down the side of the building. The Building Inspector gave them permission to expand the roof. The contractor was getting a lot of pressure to clean up the site and went ahead quickly.

The Chair stated that the window manufacturer changed and the screened in porch became a four season porch. Looking directly north where there is a new addition, there was a window well that would allow light down into the basement and the contractor extended the awning over the side door 7-8' to cover the window well.

Jeff Hughes stated that he lives in the blue house to the west and understands the changes due to the rot, but one thing that caught his eye was that the house was a historic structure and the spacing of new clapboards looks different. The reveal at the hearing showed clapboards much narrower than what is there which makes the house look new rather than historic. Alther stated they can potentially take off clapboards from the lower level and do short spacing, gradually increasing the spacing on the way up and stated he would speak with the contractor and owners.

Alther stated with regard to the overhang and trim, the contractor mimicked the neighbors' houses. Hughes' house and another down on Oliver Street, have soffit or rake detail trim, which the contractor was trying to imitate. They may be able to add trim to bring a more historic look but cannot put the trim back to what the original house had.

Chair Rowland stated that it has drifted substantially from what was approved and any attempt to get back some of its historical character will be an improvement.

Shannon said he will put together some materials and changes and come back before the board and will have pictures showing before, now and proposed changes as well as elevation views from three sides.

4. Approval of September 5, 2019 Minutes

M/S/P Kate motioned to approve the minutes of September 5, 2019 as amended; Tom Maher seconded. All approved.

5. Old Business

Chair Rowland advised the board that he had drafted a letter to the Select Board about the building inspectors, but would like to offer a solution as part of his letter and wanted the board's input. If the Building Inspector is not trained to understand the zoning code relative to the historic district commission, then we need someone who is trained. It falls to the Select Board to see that the Building Inspector adheres to the code or the commission will have to see any building permit application in the district and evaluate whether they need to come before the HDC.

A homeowner in town wanted to change his garage doors from wood doors to another material and change the look of the doors, and asked the Chair whether he needed to come before the board and Rowland advised that yes he did. At the same time, the Building Inspector advised that he did not have to.

Hughes asked if it would be helpful to invite the Building Inspector to a meeting with the commission to come to some understanding but members stated he has been invited and has not come to any meetings. The Building Inspector is supposed to be part of the board. Tom Maher stated he does not have a problem with the commission sending a letter to the Select Board.

There has to be an inspector on site. Kate Murray stated she appreciates that the Chair is trying to offer a solution but wondered if it is the job of the commission to do so, to which the Chair replied that he really would like to get the issue fixed. He stated that one solution would be training and course work, adding that Ian has had a lot of experience with the Portsmouth Historic District and has also reached out to the Chair with questions. Rowland originally thought that Ian should be the inspector on all historic district homes but he is a contractor and cannot inspect a project he is working on.

M/S/P Kate Murray motioned to adjourn; Elaine Nollet seconded. All members were in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 8:31 pm
Respectfully submitted,
Diane L. Cooley, Recording Secretary