

APPROVED
HDC MEETING
JANUARY 7, 2021

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

Due to Covid-19, the meeting was held via Zoom.

Chair Rowland called the meeting of the New Castle Historic District Commission to order at 7:04 pm. Rowland stated there was one public hearing on the agenda and advised that he, Vice Chair Hughes, Maher, Murray, and Nollet would be voting.

1. Public Hearing for Julie Thomas, 15 Atkinson Street for new fence

Guests: Julie Thomas

Chair Rowland advised that the application was published, fees paid and abutters had been notified. He then uploaded the applicant's submission to Zoom for everyone to see. Ms. Thomas had submitted a picture of the style of proposed picket fence located where she would like to install it, toward the back of the driveway which is now unused, to enclose two raised beds.

Judy Groppa asked if the gravel would remain in front of the fence and yes, Ms. Thompson advised she will keep the gravel for extra parking. She often allows neighbors to use it when it is snowing.

The Chair asked if there were any questions. Kate Murray stated she was very impressed with the applicant's submission as it looks like a picture of the house with an existing fence, but there is currently no fence there.

Vice Chair Hughes moved to approve the application as submitted; Murray seconded. All in favor, including the Chair.

2. Approve the Minutes of December 3, 2020

Kate Murray moved to approve the minutes of December 3, 2020 as amended; Elaine Nollet seconded. Jeff Hughes abstained as he had not attended the meeting. All in favor, including the Chair.

3. New Business

Chair Rowland advised that Sally Smyser of 61 Walbach Street wants to put solar panels on her house and/or garage. The HDC's current guidelines would prohibit panels on the street side which is where they need to be placed as that is the side that gets sun. Kate Murray stated that it is very visible from road, so it will be

difficult; you would see it as you go down the road. It was suggested the panels would be better on the river side as they would not be visible, especially on the garage. The Chair asked members to please drive by the house to take a look at it before the discussion next month. Rowland said he's been doing a lot of lecturing on the effects of sea level rise on cultural institutions and he is beginning to worry that telling people they cannot put solar panels on their house because they are ugly may not sit well with them when historic sites are being destroyed.

Elaine Nollet asked if Smyser is thinking of doing panels such as on Riverview Road where they covered the entire roof and it looks uniform. Rowland stated that Smyser will listen to what guidelines and advice the Board offers as she needs HDC approval. The main house has dormers which would prevent uniformity with the panels however, she may be able to put them on the garage. It would not allow for many panels on the garage alone but it may be of interest to her as it is a step in the right direction.

Irene Bush stated that this could be precedent setting and could open the door to others wanting to do the same. Nollet reminded the Board that they had stated they would consider every house individually. The precedent is if the Board allows a house to install panels that you can see from the street. The Chair stated solar panels would be incredibly "in your face" on Smyser's house from the street side.

There was some discussion as to the roofline of the house and garage and whether it faces the road. Murray stated that if the entire surface of the roof can be covered, and they do not use a really reflective or glossy material, it doesn't look so bad. The uniformity of covering the entire roof helps mask the panels.

Tom Maher asked if the production or availability of panels that look like roof shingles has progressed any. Rowland stated it has not and it remains very expensive.

Ruth Zikaras stated the panels on the Schwab's house are very low profile as they are very high up. Rowland mentioned to Sally Smyser that Peter Schwab had also wanted panels on his garage but it was denied as they were too visible from the street. However, Schwab's panels were installed on a roof three stories up so are barely visible. The Chair again asked members to please take a drive by the Smyser residence, adding that Ms. Smyser is just coming in to have a conversation.

Kate Murray stated that if Board members are going to have the discussion again regarding solar panels, it may be helpful to meet with someone from the solar industry and obtain information as to what's happening in the industry, what progress has been made, and what may be coming in the near future. Chair Rowland stated he would reach out to Revision Energy.

The Chair advised that there will be a February meeting and the owner of 1 Steamboat Lane will have applied and appear at that meeting. Irene Bush believes someone may be living there but Rowland was told it's the owner's office.

Jeff Hughes moved to adjourn; Tom Maher seconded. All approved

Adjourned at 7:21 pm

Respectfully submitted,
Diane L. Cooley, Recording Secretary