

APPROVED
HDC MEETING
FEBRUARY 4, 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 7:00 pm. Rowland stated there were two public hearings on the agenda and advised that the applications had been published, fees paid and abutters notified. The Chair, Vice Chair Hughes, Maher, Murray, and Nollet would be voting.

1. Public Hearing for Chuck and Linda McIntyre, 119 Main Street for dormers on the garage

Guest: Amy Dutton of Amy Dutton Home spoke on behalf of the applicants.

Amy Dutton stated that the McIntyres are renovating a bathroom in the main house and also renovating the studio. They have flipped the garage doors to the side street. There was an existing bathroom in the eave from when the garage was originally built. After looking at the design, they thought they could flip the layout as the sink had 6'8" head clearance which is code, however the toilet had only 4' 6" clearance and the tub had 5' clearance, so two of the fixtures were non-conforming to code. They flipped the layout and moved the tub into the eave. Still the final plumbing would not pass inspection because they did not have 6' 8" clearance in the tub. The only way to comply with code is to add dormers

They propose two 11 feet wide dormers, which are as small as possible to comply with code. There is also a dormer on the other side of the garage. The siding and trim will match the current siding and trim. Windows are 15" high, transom, 8' long, and the sill height will be 4'.

The Chair asked if anyone had questions. Kate Murray stated that when she first looked at the drawings, the dormer on the left didn't look centered over the garage door but she drove by the property and it didn't seem as obvious. She wanted to know if anyone else had looked at it and whether they found it odd that the left dormer was not centered over the door. The Chair stated he saw it as symmetrical with the roof, but asked if the dormer on the left was the one with the bathroom and it was confirmed by Dutton that yes, the bathroom is located in the dormer on the left. She stated that in order to center it over the door, the dormer would have to be approximately 13' or 14'.

Murray asked if they would have to make the bathroom larger to move the dormer over and the Chair asked if the dormer is 8' because of the tub. Elaine Nollet

commented that the dormer doesn't jut out as much as a traditional dormer. Ms. Dutton said the dormer only stands off the roof 3' 1" and their goal is not to have any siding on the front, only trim work.

The Chair asked if there were other questions. Judy Groppa thinks it's an awkward look but understands that they are designing from the point of view of the tub placement and did not see another solution. Chair Rowland stated it is built to the location of the bathroom and that's just the way it is. Murray stated it looks fine viewed in person and also that it is on a side street.

The Chair asked if anyone in the public wanted to speak to, for or against the application. He asked that anyone wishing to speak, please state their name clearly.

Joe Cuetera of 127 Main St stated that they have a similar "eyebrow" that was approved by the HDC, which is on the other side of the street from the applicant. He frankly thought that what the McIntyres are doing complements his house and provides continuity. He noted that Vennard Court is a private road and he and his wife, Bonnie supports the changes.

Tom Smith of 254 Wentworth Road stated he is familiar with the building, and that he appreciates what the McIntyres want to do by turning the focus around. Having reviewed the plans, he thinks this is the best solution to meet code and has been designed as best as possible. He believes it enhances the neighborhood and he is in favor of the application.

The Chair asked if there was anyone else wishing to speak. There being no one, he closed the public hearing at 7:11 p.m. stating he would await further discussion or a motion from the Board members.

Jeff Hughes motioned to approve the project as presented; Kate Murray seconded. All in favor including the Chair, who stated it's a necessary change to meet code.

Kate Murray advised the Chair that with meetings being held virtually via Zoom, he is supposed to take each Board member's vote individually for the record, as in a roll call.

Tom Maher stated a motion could be made at the end of the meeting to inject the language that due to emergency orders from the Governor, these meetings are being held virtually and accommodations are being made for those that wish to participate virtually, whether via zoom or dialing in. Maher added that there was not anyone who wanted to participate that was unable to participate via zoom, as noted by the 25+ residents that had logged in via zoom. Maher advised that there is a need to have a roll call when approving motions, so each person individually states Aye or Nay in response to the motion.

The Chair asked for each Board member's vote on the McIntyre's application:

Tom Maher votes Aye; Elaine Nollet votes Aye; Jeff Hughes votes Aye; Kate Murray votes Aye; Chair Rowland votes Aye.

2. Public Hearing for Tap Taylor, 1 Steamboat Lane for previous changes to exterior

Guest: Tap Taylor

The Chair advised that changes were made to this property without HDC approval and the applicant was coming before the Board to walk through those changes for the Board.

Taylor stated there originally were two steel doors which, being on the water, were quite rusted. He installed a door at the entrance, but it is fiberglass with four lights. The shop door does not have any window. The Chair stated the original main door was a 9 light over 2 panels and the original shop door to the right was a battenboard or beadboard.

Taylor stated other than the doors, the siding and trim didn't change. The Chair asked what the material around the front door is and was informed it is Western red cedar. Tom Maher asked if there was a dormer on both sides and Taylor replied, yes that he had not done any structural changes whatsoever. Irene Bush asked what the material was around the door before the red cedar and Taylor advised that it was pine ship lap, similar to what is there but a different wood. Taylor said he tried to emulate the same look, but used red cedar rather than pine.

Kate Murray stated the doors are very noticeably different from the original doors. Vice Chair Hughes asked Mr. Taylor to speak to his selection of doors. Taylor stated he wanted to keep a more traditional look, very simple, and to keep lights on the main door, but did not necessarily want them on the shop door.

Judy Groppa stated the two replacement doors are very different stylistically. The main door is more of a turn of the 20th century or farmhouse door and the one to the right is a colonial door. She didn't mind the materials but did not like that they are different eras.

Taylor stated that both doors have the same panels, but he didn't put lights in the shop door. The original main door was a 9 light steel door with two panels. The Chair said what he misses is the glass on the original door were the same as the windows on the dormers, which are 6 light. Unfortunately, the pane size chosen is more 20th century, with an Arts and Crafts look and the mullions are very heavy. What's disturbing is that the mullion size on the door got much bigger than the windows around the building so it is now Arts and Crafts instead of a colonial style. Groppa agreed that the pane size and mullions are very heavy on the replacement door and doesn't seem fitting with the rest of the building.

Kate Murray asked if it was possible to find another home for these doors and find doors more appropriate to the building. She then asked the Chair “What is the Board being asked to do here?” or more specifically what can be done when an applicant makes changes in the historic district without coming before the HDC. Rowland stated that the HDC has purview over these details and Taylor should have come before the Board for the changes before they were completed. Because the Board has concerns about the stylistic changes made, the Board asked for a meeting with the owner. Rowland stated that the HDC could ask Taylor to change the doors to something more suitable even though it’s a hardship. The Chair asked Taylor if he would be open to looking at a different front door with a window configuration more in line with the original doors. Taylor asked if he meant a 6 over 6 look and the Chair advised him to look at the dormer detail which are 3 over 3, 6 light, and the mullions are thin and defined. Rowland added that a lot of the architecture in this area is very old and it would be nice to have something earlier in style rather than 20th century. The spec sheet from the Lighthouse collection provided by the applicant showing his door selection has windows flanking it, with mullions that are narrower and Rowland advised that something along that line would be better.

The Chair asked Board members to confirm that is also what they were thinking in terms of changes to the main door. They agreed that yes, in terms of style, that would be more appropriate. Murray would like to see both doors changed to something more like the original but agreed that the main door is more egregious. The Chair stated the shop door is solid panel and not as noticeable.

Taylor said that when he originally was shopping for doors, he tried to match to the original door, but that he also needed an insulated door. Other than going with steel, he was unable to finding anything. He added that he was open to any suggestions the Board may have and would not be opposed to finding another door. Taylor said he would do some research on the door and the Chair advised to look for a door with lights that mimic the rest of the windows and report back to the Board next month.

Tom Maher asked if the Board was voting and the Chair advised they would table the matter until next month and allow Taylor to do some research.

3. Solar Voltaic conversation with Sally Smyser and Revision Energy

Guests: Sally Smyser; Amy Farnham from Revision Energy.

The Chair had emailed the board an image provided by Revision Energy of what the panels would look like on the garage. Sally Smyser stated the garage at 61 Walbach Street was built in the 1930’s and 40’s. There was a shed there before the garage was built.

The building is not historic and Smyser asked Amy Farnham to share a picture of the shed. Smyser stated it is time to do repairs to the roof and she would like to utilize solar panels on the garage roof which would provide 70-80% of the energy for her house. She referred to the images that had been provided showing what the panels will look like and directed any technical questions to Ms. Farnham.

The Chair asked Farnham to put up the rendering of the garage with the panels. Farnham shared her pictures of the garage with proposed solar panels adding that although a lighter color is seen between the panels, that typically does not exist in an actual array. She added that the Board has seen the solar panels on Peter Schwab's house and on the Chamberlin's house, but you don't actually see the silver between the panels. The Chair stated that the Chamberlin's house has a matte finish but Farnham corrected him stating they all have the same glass covering but it depends on how much sun and lighting that determines how shiny the panels look.

The Chair asked if there would be a uniform appearance and Farnham stated there would be about 10" on each side that you would see the roof, but the panels would pretty much cover the whole roof.

Rowland asked in terms of the solar panels whether there are choices as to finish or if there is just one. Farnham stated there are several choices but the HDC has required uniformity and that the panels be less visible so typically they use black; between each cell there is a diamond cut out and typically there is white backing but in the historic district, the black backing is utilized.

Elaine Nollet stated that with black it makes a difference. Kate Murray said the utility pole is far more unsightly than the solar panels adding that she liked the rendering and if it covers the entire roof, she is more comfortable with it. Murray added that in the midst of major climate change, if we don't do something there will be no historic district to protect. Murray added that it is a struggle when there are dormers which create a non-uniform look but if it has a uniform look, she didn't have a problem with it. Nollet agreed stating she believes in the technology, that it is an improvement and looks to the future.

Smyser said that they may have a slightly different arrangement of panels in the final plan but would bring it back before the HDC for approval, however she wanted to know if she can proceed with hopes of getting solar panels.

Tom Maher wanted to confirm that the focus is on the garage and not on the house and that was confirmed. He added that it helps that the proposed look is uniform and Smyser was able to maximize the space. Maher shared with the HDC what he believed to be a solution however it is costly, and that is the Tesla individual solar shingles. He was unsure of Tesla's ability to meet the demand and is aware the cost of the shingles is higher. He stated that Smyser's house is more of a challenge because of the dormers so the panel approach would be

difficult. The HDC is trying to maintain a degree of aesthetic adding that Smyser's house would be a challenge because it is at eye level. Other projects the HDC has approved were either taller, so you could see the solar array but it was not right in the sight line as you looked at the building. A number of homes like Smyser's house are more ground level and you see the roof line. He wanted to echo comments everyone is making that solar panels are a solution we want to encourage on an older home as they are the homes that need energy efficiency. However, Maher wanted to inject caution as the HDC developed guidelines some time ago. He thanked Smyser for communicating with the Board adding that he liked the solution on the garage.

Smyser stated she understands the Tesla shingles have not been working out satisfactorily. Farnham said Tesla is dynamic and innovative but sometimes they have to roll it back because their developments are not quite ready, however, when they are vetted and proven, they will be a game changer. Maher said yes, particularly for historic areas as we have been talking about this for three years and still trying to solve the same problems. Conceptually Maher hopes the solar shingles prove themselves soon as homes are getting retro-fitted with new roofs. Any company that can manufacture a solution that works in historic areas will find that it's a very lucrative business.

Rowland wrote an editorial emphasizing that the HDC is trying to find a balance and a compromise between what the applicant is seeking and what is best for the historic district, adding that when the Board wrote the guidelines for solar voltaic in the historic district, it felt comfortable with them. He believes Smyser's application is a balance as the panels are not on a historic house and they are uniform in appearance which is something the Board was clear that they wanted. The exception is that it's very visible, but he also believes it is a balance and it allows Smyser to get energy for 70-80% of her needs and it is not that detrimental to the street or neighborhood.

Kate Murray asked Farnham about old solar panels, which apparently did not collect as much solar and asked how much more do current solar panels collect in solar energy compared to earlier panels. Murray also asked about a young engineer in California she read about that uses a paint on original solar panels, which boosts their capability to collect energy.

Farnham stated the original panels, what used to be the "bread & butter" at Revision Energy, was solar hot water. Typically, when you see old solar panels on a home it's hot water or glycol running through them. She stated that photo voltaic panels have gone from 200 watts to 330 watts. Every six months technology is going up 5 or 10 watts per panel, so efficiency is gaining pretty quickly as well as incentives from the government. She stated the federal tax credit was supposed to go down from 26% to 22% but they have decided to keep it at 26% for another two years. That decision was made before Biden even came into office.

Farnham stated she has heard of the paint, but that it is used more in applications of painting a roof, not necessarily old solar panels. Apparently, the paint has the ability to collect solar energy, but you have to harness it with a battery. A lot of good research is going on and this is just one of the results.

Elaine Nollet stated she has a neighbor with a good size yard and asked if there is an array that you can put in the yard. Farnham stated there is, but she's not sure it would pass in the historic district. There are solar arrays such as this in Durham, Brentwood, and Portsmouth, to name a few. Individuals sometimes have 20 panels on the ground. So, if it's not visible, you may be able to do it in the historic district.

Jeff Hughes thought the conversation on solar was very good and he takes the same perspective that there has to be some balance. During his work on the commission, he has always tried to balance the right of the property owner vs. the needs of the district. Hughes added that if you were to go with the pure historic approach, power lines or asphalt shingles would not be allowed. So, the question is, where do you draw the line. He is in favor of moving forward, although doesn't want to set a precedent, adding that the board may be going down a new path for the historic district in New Castle.

Judy Groppa is very impressed by the look of the garage. It's a very clean look however, this is in a very visible place as you see the garage from 2 or 3 blocks away as you come down the street. She cautioned the Board to think carefully and check regulations because she thought the guidelines were that we did not want them in a very visible place. Chair Rowland stated that the Board does have guidelines but they are guidelines only, for applicants to follow. They do say we prefer not to see the panels, but leaves each application to be viewed individually. This would be outside those guidelines because they are quite visible but the Chair believes the applicant has found a balance as it has a nice uniform appearance.

Murray stated that the panels are visible but only if you are looking for them. The thread that pulls this together is it's a uniform flat roof and others that have been approved have been on a flat space. We are going to see it because we're talking about it, but I think most people will notice the utility pole first.

Ruth Zikaras asked Farnham how far in the future she believes solar shingles will be available because she agrees with what Maher says, that they are less visible and therefore it will be difficult to say no to the solar shingles. Farnham believes probably within a year but they will be at a premium, adding that solar is not accessible to everyone, it is an expensive endeavor and solar shingles will be even more so.

Irene Bush stated if the Board goes forward with this, the motion should be very clear as to why they may approve it, being clear that it's a non-historic building, and reasons we are approving. The Chair agreed that there are specific reasons why the Board believes this application will pass and it has to detail those reasons.

The Chair spoke with the chief preservationist at Strawberry Banke Museum about this application and her concern was whether the changes were reversible. Any changes should be reversible so that down the road you can swap it out for more advanced technology. Rowland asked Smyser if she is set to come before the HDC for a public hearing next month. Smyser stated that the water is coming up behind the garage, so she is looking forward to solar panels to be sure she has energy when needed.

4. Approve Minutes of January 3, 2021

Jeff Hughes moved to approve the minutes as amended; Kate Murray seconded; Jeff Hughes voted Aye; Tom Maher voted Aye; Elaine Nollet voted Aye; Kate Murray voted Aye and Chair Rowland voted Aye.

5. Any New Business

Elaine Nollet stated that what the Board did tonight was courageous. Jeff Hughes echoed Maher's comments as to the Chair's help navigating solar voltaic panels in the historic district and thanked Rowland for his guidance on this and every project. The Chair stated that he will argue until he is blue in the face that each application is different.

There was some discussion about obtaining packets prior to hearings and the Chair advised that he hopes applications can be provided to Board members electronically. Murray stated that John Chagnon was doing a presentation before the Planning Board, also held via zoom, and he shared plans on the screen and could zoom into the plan, and using a crayon, draw on the screen.

6. Adjournment

Jeff Huges moved to adjourn; Elaine Nollet seconded. All in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 8:08 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Diane L. Cooley, Recording Secretary