

**APPROVED
MARCH 3, 2022
HDC MEETING**

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

The meeting was held in the Macomber Room. Chair Rowland called the meeting of the New Castle Historic District Commission (“HDC”) to order at 7:01 pm. Rowland stated the only item on the agenda was a work session and some new business.

1. Work Session – 42 Piscataqua Street - Map 18 Lot 24

Guest: Brendan McNamara architect

Homeowners Rob Deflorio and Vicki Reed would like to renovate the home by doing the following:

- remove both rear additions
- move the building back from the street 5 feet
- elevate the building slightly
- add an addition and deck to the back.

The house is the yellow house at the corner of Steamboat Lane and Piscataqua Street also known as “the nuns’ house”. The front steps sit right on Piscataqua Street. McNamara stated the house is in pretty good shape, the foundation is good. There is the main or “core” house and an addition on the rear, both of which are historic, the rear addition being built later than the front of the house. The rear foundation is only a crawl space; the basement in the front of the house is only five feet. The grade of the lot comes up from the rear; the architect showed how the floor is below grade on the driveway side which has caused deterioration to the floor of the rear addition.

McNamara proposes to preserve the original core rectangle or front of the house and demolish the rear addition. The front steps are on the road and they would like to take the core house, lift it up, put a new foundation that is the same size but move it back from the road. They would also like to lift the house 3’ so they can stand up in the basement. The new foundation will be continued to the rear addition, however, they are restricted because of lot coverage and will therefore turn the rear addition rectangle, so the house will be a T shape. From the road, the house will look the same but will be moved back three feet.

Chair Rowland asked McNamara why they would not dig down so as not to disturb the streetscape, as the 3’ rise is a considerable change to the streetscape. McNamara stated they decided not to dig down because of the floor level, the

grade or topography of the rear of the lot, and there is also ledge. The back deck is 2' above the first floor level of the house, because of the grade. Tom Maher asked if it could be solved by re-grading more of the lot. McNamara stated it would have to be an ambitious re-grading of the entire lot. The Chair stated 3' reveal on the streetscape is more than any neighboring house. Ruth Zikaras asked for clarification on the reveal because the reveal is currently almost 2' so if they lift the house 3', would it be a 5' reveal. McNamara showed drawings of the house which currently show 1 ½' reveal, and the plans for lifting the house which would have 4 1/2' reveal on the front street. Board members didn't like the amount of reveal on Piscataqua Street.

The rear addition has a second story, however, McNamara cannot stand up in it. The large window in the back of the house on the first floor is the kitchen and the ceiling comes down so the height is only about 5'-6' in the back of the kitchen. There is also a bathroom which is very basic. The second floor above is only about 3'-4' high at the wall.

McNamara stated that the house has to be lifted and moved back in some manner. They need approval from the Board of Adjustment because it's non-conforming. However, the footprint on the lot should be a fairly easy approval because the non-conformance is being made better. There is also a boat shed going at the rear of the property which will be for storage because there is no storage in the house.

McNamara stated the house is moving back 3' from the street with a little bit of rotation as they are truing it up a little bit to Piscataqua Street. The Chair stated that setting the house back is not a detriment. McNamara stated that the front entrance is on the street so moving the house back will require a new foundation.

In terms of lot coverage, the home is currently in conformance with regard to lot coverage, but with the new addition, it reaches the maximum percentage on lot coverage. McNamara advised that they are currently just under the percentage allowed for lot coverage but the setback issues are irresolvable because of the 20' setback on Steamboat Lane and 20' setback on Piscataqua Street. However, the non-conforming is being reduced as the house is moved back a bit from both streets. The house will be moved 5' off Steamboat Lane, making it 10', and 3 ½' off Piscataqua Street. They are adjusting the angle of the house to make it parallel to the sideline of the house next to it on Piscataqua.

Essentially the roof geometry of the existing house sets the geometry for the rear addition. The ridgeline will be at the same level as the existing ridgeline. They have substantially increased the volume of the house as much of the 2nd floor square footage is currently unusable. The Chair asked about the front door and McNamara advised that the solid panels will change to glass panels as it is on the South side and they would like to maximize the sun. Kate Murray asked if the stairs were just to one side and how many more stairs there would be. McNamara stated there will be three more stairs.

McNamara stated they are not preserving the chimney as they are abandoning the interior fireplaces. The chimney will be replaced with a faux brick chimney that will match what is currently there but it will not be a fireplace chimney. The chimney flues will be for heat recovery and the gas fireplace. The current fireplace is very large as there are 3 fireplaces on the first floor and two on the 2nd floor. They will use the room to build new stairs to the second floor.

Chair Rowland asked about the East and North elevations. The East elevation is Steamboat Lane and the plans have a porch with 2nd floor deck and French doors. If the deck doesn't remain, they will just have the French doors on the first level. The North elevation is the river view, which has double French doors on either side of a fireplace. The homeowners would like to put a real masonry fireplace at the rear of the house as it is less obvious from the street. However, the Chair stated that he drove by and the back of the house is very visible from Steamboat Lane, adding that the fireplace and pizza oven would be very visible. Chair Rowland stated he does not like the 2nd floor deck as it's visible from Piscataqua Street and there is no historic precedence for a 2nd floor deck. Rowland did like the window theme carried straight across. McNamara stated without a 2nd floor deck, the French doors on the second floor would become a third window. The French doors on the 1st floor will remain as it is facing Southeast and gets the morning sun. McNamara will remove the 2nd floor deck and put a conventional roof with a pitch. Murray asked how high the porch is and whether it has a different reveal. The porch is two feet high and has a 1" x 4" slatted skirt enclosing the open space under the porch.

Irene Bush asked if they could re-grade the lot but McNamara stated they are limited by the road as the grade that exists on Piscataqua and Steamboat slopes down and cannot be changed. Elaine Nollet asked if moving the house back will bring it in line with the house next door or whether the house would be back of other houses on the street. McNamara stated the house will still be forward of other houses.

The Chair then brought up the pizza oven stating that it's an impact to the Steamboat Lane streetscape and not historic. McNamara stated there are a few elements that are questionable— the French doors, the entire chimney assembly, and the roof covering over the French doors on the back yard which are supported with brackets. They are required to have a 3' landing off the French doors so the roof covering is about 3' deep; the roof goes past the face of the chimney. There's a chimney oven and a double flue fireplace. It is a masonry fireplace on the outside which has a metal flue box inside. Rowland thinks the pizza oven is too much and his compromise would be to approve the French doors however, he doesn't like the chimney splitting the windows and Judy Groppa believes the windows need to be further away from the chimney. There was discussion about moving the chimney to the West side which is the driveway side. The Chair liked that idea better as it would be much less visible. If the fireplace was moved to the

West side, the windows on that side would be removed. Groppa didn't think it would be fair to neighbors to place the fireplace on the West side and there is also not much space because of the driveway. Zikaras asked the dimensions of the fireplace and the board was informed it is 4' x 2 1/2'.

Thomas asked whether there was a landscaping plan as that would affect the visibility from Steamboat Lane but landscaping hasn't been planned yet. McNamara will come back for another work session. The Chair advised the architect should work on the elevation, eliminating the 2nd floor deck, as well as the outdoor fireplace and oven. McNamara asked whether the Commission would be interested in a site walk.

Ruth Zikaras asked about the material of the foundation and was advised it's currently a stone foundation and the new foundation would be stone veneer. The foundation will be concrete poured in foam blocks that stay and form the outside skin; they are Nudura foundation insulated concrete forms. It will have a cut, real stone veneer and they can specify the nature of the cut stone and the dimension.

Betty Tamposi, an abutter at 12 Steamboat Lane asked McNamara to show her where the boat house is being placed on the lot. McNamara thought the Board would be concerned about demolition of the rear addition but they are preserving the essential character of the house. There was some concern about the glass in the front door as it looks more Victorian.

This work session was continued to another work session next month.

2. New Business

The Master Plan committee is releasing a questionnaire done in conjunction with the Rockingham Planning Commission. It will be a boiler plate low level questionnaire asking what's important to townspeople. The committee for the Master Plan will not meet this month because it wants feedback from the survey and will meet in April. The survey is going to all townspeople via mail and email and the survey will be posted online at the town's website. The results will guide priorities for the town.

The area survey done on the historic district is on the town website and the Chair stated he has received good feedback on it. It was two huge documents. You can go to the town website, to HDC and there's a green box "architectural survey of NC 2021" which is the real meat and potatoes. There is another document under "historic homes of NC" which is a guide to architectural forms and styles in New Castle. It is very simple and easy to read and also has pictures and descriptions of architectural styles.

The Chair informed that the next step, which the preservation company asked to defer for a year, is to do further research to understand the dates of houses, ownership, how they looked originally and how they were altered over time. Groppa asked if copies could be printed and held at town hall, the library and Historic Association for townspeople to view.

The Chair advised that new FEMA flood regulations have come out and given the sensitivity of the historic district, the FEMA regulations contain the following language that allow us to manage that change to protect the historic district:

Any structure that is:

1. *Listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or preliminarily determined as meeting the requirements for individual listing on the National Register;*
2. *Certified or preliminarily determined as contributing to the historical significance of a registered historic district;*
3. *Individually listed on a state inventory of historic places; or*
4. *Individually listed on a local inventory of historic places.*

Communities may exempt historic buildings from NFIP substantial improvement and substantial damage requirements in either of two ways. First, they can exempt them through their definition of substantial improvement. Second, they can issue variances for historic structures. However, the improvement must not preclude the structures continued designation as a historic structure and must be the minimum necessary to preserve its historic character.

The Planning Board and Building Inspector are revising the zoning code to comply with new FEMA regulations. The HDC will have to determine which variance or exemption we want to use to protect the district from massive change as a result of the FEMA flood regulations. We are fortunate to have a historic district and an area form survey to assist us.

There are regulations for properties in the flood district and we have options to help manage the change. The Planning Board is working on language that if owners are making changes to their house of fifty percent or more of its value, then FEMA regulations will kick in. A variance could be issued on a case by case basis, which would exempt the property from specific NFIP regulations, and allow the HDC to work with the homeowner. The HDC is about compromise, about determining a solution that both the HDC and homeowner are comfortable with. Rather than putting the house on stilts, they have panels that look like a

foundation that would break away and let water travel under the house. That would require a variance and the exemption may be even easier.

The Building Inspector has weighed in and is happy about the variance. How would a homeowner know they have to come for a variance? The Building Inspector will make them abide by FEMA flood regulations and there will be language in the new zoning code saying the property needs to adhere to FEMA flood regulations, however if the house is in the historic district, they can apply for a variance. It would give the HDC more flexibility as each house is different and the commission could review each on a case by case basis.

Irene Bush stated that her neighbor's home, which is not a historic house but is in the historic district on Piscataqua Street, is totally in the flood plain. Rowland stated that the streetscape is one of the HDC's main charges and just because a house is non-historic, we wouldn't want it 15' in the air on stilts. Rowland showed a historic district in Virginia that adopted the FEMA regulations and immediately the houses got jacked up on stilts. The town has now retracted the regulation and has a variance system at work in the historic district. Thomas asked what if someone wants to protect their house and wants to raise it. Rowland stated that rather than stilts they can use the breakaway panels; the house will have to be raised, but not as much. They can also do wet-proofing on the traditional foundation which is designed to accept water in a flood and then drains and dries. Have to find compromise where it won't impact the historic streetscape.

It was brought up that the owners of the Piscataqua Café made changes without permits and there was no compliance with any regulations.

Groppa asked about historic houses that are not in the historic district, like Wild Rose Lane, asking the Chair if he thought the HDC can go so far as to enforce the variance on historic homes out of the district, but Rowland advised that people outside the historic district can do what they want. A town cannot legally micro zone to protect a house. Elaine Nollet asked about adding to the historic district. Rowland stated that many inhabitants of the island who put the historic district in place are no longer here and he is worried the majority of townspeople wouldn't want to expand it. The Chair is excited about the town survey as it asks whether the historic district is important. Rowland will consider it a win if the survey approves of furthering the historic district.

There wasn't a single abutter who objected to the plan on the Chappy house. Kate Murray stated there was nothing to object to as the house was in terrible shape, hadn't had any work in decades and could have fallen on its own. Nollet said the design is an ultra modern house. Murray thought it was well done, although, not to her taste but the owner bent over backwards for energy efficiency, and to accommodate many issues.

Maher stated in the next fiscal year the town is going to do substantial renovation to the front porch of town hall and advised the Chair it is time to have a discussion with DPW soon after town meeting to be sure materials used will be like kind materials. The Select Board is committed to starting a building and maintenance fund for town buildings. They aggressively dealt with a water problem in the basement of town hall this winter and Maher also heard a lack of happiness with the handicap ramp in the back of town hall. Eventually it will come full circle with an interior renovation also. The town has been trying to handle the outside and maintain the building properly. The Chair asked that they don't do anything that couldn't be undone. The Building Inspector wanted to lose the upper windows but Rowland asked that they don't lose them, just put plywood over them so in the future, the windows can be brought back.

Kate Murray stated she was by Peter Rice's house and it appears to have a white plastic fence to hide the propane, asking for confirmation that if you put up a fence in the historic district, you need to come before the HDC. It's a white plastic fence facing the house on the right side. Thomas says she has to look at that fence. The Chair stated he will take a look and have the Building Inspector talk to him.

Kate Murray moved to adjourn; Tom Maher seconded.
Meeting adjourned at 8:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Diane L. Cooley, Recording Secretary