

## **Schenectady Historic District Commission**

### **Meeting Minutes February 24, 2022**

#### **I. CALL TO ORDER**

Commission Yager called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

#### **II. ROLL CALL**

**PRESENT:** Patricia Yager, Chair; Dr. Dean Bennett; Shaun Andriano; Richard Unger; Joe Fava; Chris Marney, Assistant Corp. Counsel; Sylvia Jimison, Secretary.

**VIRTUAL:** Matt Smith, City Planner

**ABSENT:** Frank Gilmore

#### **III. CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

None.

#### **IV. ADOPTION OF MEETING MINUTES**

Motion by Commissioner Unger, seconded by Commissioner Fava, to approve the minutes of the January 27, 2022.

#### **V. CALL FOR MEMBERS OF PUBLIC TO SPEAK ON AGENDA ITEMS**

#### **VI. APPLICATIONS**

- A. Consideration submitted by Douglas & Elizabeth Davis to replace the front stairs. The premises is located at 607 Union St. in the Union Street Historic District.**

The applicant at 607 Union Street stated said his stairs are cracked, wobbly, and cracked. He received a notice from Code Enforcement about the steps. He wants to repair the steps so they are safe. He will keep the side wall and match what is there. Commissioner Yager asked if the applicant changed his mind about adding stones on the side of the walls. The applicant stated that he had changed his mind, and will be leaving the side wall as it is.

Commissioner Bennett asked if existing sandstone and material change will need to be considered. Commissioner Fava wanted to know if the concrete will be a material color of beige, light pink, similar to the stairs with the church. Commissioner Andriano stated

that the applicant should try to restore what is there and the cracks that are in the steps, could be repairable surface cracks.

Commissioner Bennett stated the first thing to consider if the sandstone is to be replaced. Commissioner Unger stated concrete is fine. Commissioner Fava asked if it would look the same and will the color match. The patio is a light gray and he stated the steps should match the patio color. Commissioner Yager indicated that matching the existing color would be desirable.

Commissioner Andriano stated that he doesn't believe all the check marks have been hit that would indicate that the stairs need to be replaced as opposed to being restored and preserved. He also stated that there are no details as to whether the proposed concrete stairs will be cast in place or cast off site, and there are no details as to the finish of the cast concrete.

Commissioner Fava stated that he believes that the original steps for the building were likely cut stone based on the age of the building and that the current steps were probably a replacement. He further stated that installing cut stone now would be prohibitively expensive. The applicant stated he is trying to eliminate the gap between the wall and the steps and pouring the steps in place would be the best way to achieve that result.

Commissioner Unger, asked, if concrete could be finished to look like sandstone. Commissioner Andriano stated, it will be tricky. An architect from the public, Robert Woods, stated that using a magnesium float finish would be the best way to replicate sandstone finish.

Commissioner Unger stated that he doesn't have a problem with the use of concrete, but believes that the finished product should match the side walls in color and finish.

Commissioner Andriano stated that he believes that the stairs could be repaired and reset.

## **RESOLUTION**

Motion by Commissioner Unger, seconded by Commissioner Bennett to approve the application with the following conditions:

1. The project will be completed within one year.
2. The concrete steps will be tinted and finished to best match the existing side walls.
3. The finished project will have the same dimensions and same number of steps as the existing sandstone steps.

And with the following finding of fact:

1. This is a Type II SEQRA.
2. The Commissioners cited Preservation Standards #2, #5, and #6 as the guidelines for their decision.

*Motion carried 4 in favor, 1 opposed (Commissioner Andriano).*

**B. Consideration for approval submitted by Robert Woods to install a new driveway. The premises is located at 32 Front St. in the Stockade Historic District.**

The applicant stated it is going on 15 years that he has been renovating his house and want to address the sidewalk. He stated that there are three concrete panels on the sidewalk that are cracked and he would like to replace them. He stated there is currently brick surrounding the sidewalk that he would like to replace with Belgian block. He further stated that the driveway has been a dirt driveway forever and it's not easily maintained. He stated he would like to install two bands of concrete where the tires go and cobble stone in between. Mr. Woods acknowledged receiving a letter from Matt Smith, City Planner regarding the fact that the historic commission does not review sidewalks that are in the right-of-way. Mr. Woods stated that he does not agree with the recently adopted streetscape plan because he believes that saw cut sidewalk edges are more vulnerable to weather as opposed to a tooled edge.

The applicant stated he plans to go with stamped panels on the driveway and will be a stained charcoal. Commissioner Andriano asked if it will lighten over time. The applicant stated that the concrete will darken, and in his opinion could not get dark enough.

**RESOLUTION**

Motion by Commissioner Bennett, seconded by Commissioner Unger to approve the application with the following conditions:

1. The project will be completed within one year.
2. The concrete bands on the driveway will be stained a charcoal color.

And with the following finding of fact:

1. This is a Type II SEQRA.

*Motion carried unanimously.*

**C. Consideration submitted by Joel Sodano to install snow guards on the roof. The premises is located at 1105 Adams Rd. in the GE Realty Plot Historic District.**

The applicant stated that the house currently has a slate roof and snow and ice lands on the peak of the porch roof and causes damage. He also stated that freezing and thawing of the snow that falls off the roof has caused rot to the siding. He explained that he plans to mitigate the situation by adding snow guards on the roof. The snow guards will be copper and retro fit by sliding underneath the existing slate tiles. The applicant showed the copper snow guards to commissioners and stated that the snow guards will be set in 3 rows approximately 20 inches apart – staggered across the roof line. The applicant showed a photograph from other projects that the contractor, EC Buck, installed on similar houses.

Commissioner Fava asked how the snow guards work. The applicant stated that they hold the snow so that it melts slowly and doesn't fall off the roof in large sections. Commissioner Fava also wanted to know if snow guard came in other material. The applicant stated that they do but that he wouldn't use anything other than copper on the front. He asked if he could use a less expensive material on the rear. Commissioner Bennett stated that the rear of the house is outside of the field of vision and therefore not within the commission's purview to decide.

Commissioner Unger wanted to know if applicant looked into snow bars. Commissioner Andriano stated that the snow bars would be harder to retrofit.

**RESOLUTION**

Motion by Commissioner Andriano, seconded by Commissioner Fava to approve the application with the following conditions:

1. The project will be completed within one year.
2. The snow stops are a true copper material, not copper plated.

And with the following finding of fact:

1. This is a Type II SEQRA.

*Motion carried unanimously.*

**D. Consideration submitted by Niressa Sukhu and Parasram Sooknanan to install replacement windows. The premises is located at 68 Union Ave. in the Union Triangle Historic District.**

Parasram Sooknanan appeared before the commission. He stated that he purchased his home in July 2020 and was told he could pretty much do anything within reason

to the house. He received a letter from City Planner, Matt Smith that vinyl windows are not acceptable. Mr. Sooknanan stated that the previous owner had vinyl windows throughout the house. On December 9, 2021, he signed a contract for Window World to install new windows and learned the windows need to be aluminum or wood.

Additionally, he stated that he recently had a baby and is a young couple and didn't know what he was getting into and cannot return the windows. He explained that he does not know what the next step should be. He stated that he looked at the neighbor's windows and a couple of houses have vinyl windows.

The applicant stated that the current windows in the house are not safe, with no guards, or mesh outside of the windows. In addition, the windows seem to be nailed down and cannot open them. He stated that he is not in a financial spot to afford aluminum windows and cannot return the currently purchased windows.

Commissioner Yager asked if the windows are obligated under contract by Window World and if windows had been made and are custom sized.

Applicant stated the windows are not installed but are custom made for the house. He also stated that 3 out of 5 houses on Union Street near his house have vinyl windows. He also added his daughter's room gets cold.

Commissioner Yager stated that the commission's jurisdiction is limited to what can be seen from the street and how many windows does that entail. Commissioner Fava stated he does not understand why Window World did not inform the applicant about the requirements for historic district windows.

Applicant stated the house has 22 windows and he paid for the windows December 9, 2021. Commissioner Fava asked applicant if he found out the windows were not acceptable when he went to get a permit.

Commissioner Yager asked applicant if he were given one year could he replace the seven front windows with wood or aluminum clad. The applicant stated that he does not mind replacing the seven windows on the front.

The applicant stated that three out of the five houses near his also have vinyl windows. Commissioner Unger asked if the attic windows in front, which look like leaded windows were going to be replaced. The applicant stated he will not replace the attic windows. Commissioner Andriano stated that even if there are vinyl windows in adjacent properties, the current commission did not necessarily approve them, and therefore they look at properties on a case-by-case basis. He stated further that it would be helpful to have a plan, such as elevation drawings marked up showing which windows are going to be replaced, with what material, what type, finishes and manufacturer.

Commissioner Yager asked how soon can the wood windows in the front be put in. The applicant stated he did not know, but I will be happy to get correct windows in front of the house.

Commissioner Andriano stated that he wanted to state for the record that he wanted to be careful that the commission doesn't approve anything that may set precedence for other future applicants to install vinyl and that the commission is consistent aside from any hardship that may be claimed.

Mr. Marney stated that Matt Smith is authorized to make the determination whether a window is visible from the right-of-way and under the historic commission's purview to review. He stated that the commission could table the application and wait for a plan from the applicant addressing the windows that Mr. Smith has determined are visible from the right-of-way. The applicant in the meantime would be able to pull a permit to install the windows that are not visible from the right-of-way.

### **RESOLUTION**

Motion by Commissioner Unger, seconded by Commissioner Andriano to table the application with the following conditions:

1. The application is deemed incomplete.
2. The applicant will return with a plan consisting of diagrams or photographs indicating how many windows are going to be replaced, which windows will be wood and which windows will be vinyl.
3. It is understood that the windows being proposed with a vinyl replacement, will only apply to those windows determined not to be visible from the right-of-way.
4. The existence of vinyl windows on neighboring properties does not necessarily indicate that their installation was approved by the Historic District Commission and therefore has no bearing on the review of proposed vinyl window installation on this application.

And with the following finding of fact:

1. This is a Type II SEQRA.

***Motion carried unanimously.***

**E. Consideration submitted by Stauber Irrevocable Trust for the installation of replacement windows, performed without a prior Certificate of Approval . The premises is located at 852 Union St. in the Union Street Historic District.**

Malerie Alexander, the property manager for 852 Union Street, appeared before the commission and stated the owner of the property had a fire at the property that damaged a lot of the windows. She stated that one of the contractors had sought approval to install vinyl windows and was denied, but the owner went ahead and installed them regardless. She further explained that she is requesting a temporary grace period due to the fire and to generate income to pay for the windows that they will gladly change to wood.

Commissioner Andriano stated that before the commission discusses the windows, he would like to discuss the process in how they could draft an approval. Chris Marney stated that the commission can approve a timeline for the replacement of the windows, but his advice would be to not tie the approval to income generation on the property or completion of other work on the property. Commissioner Yager stated applicant can be given a year and if needed can request an extension.

The applicant asked if she could get an extension for now and address the type of windows later.

Chris Marney stated he believes the commission would need to give an approval for a window and time frame for the applicant to complete the work. He stated that the applicant is currently in court and requires an approval at this meeting to clear things up with their pending court case.

Commissioner Andriano asked if the applicant was any intent on having grills in the windows. The project manager said it will not be anything visible from the street.

Commissioner Andriano stated that several window openings on the right side elevation were shrunk down when new windows were installed and that would need to be returned to the original size when the new windows are installed.

**RESOLUTION**

Motion by Commissioner Andriano, seconded by Commissioner Unger to approve the application with the following conditions:

1. The project will be completed within one year.
2. The approved window is a white, aluminum clad wood window in a one-over-one configuration.
3. The approved window style shall replace the unapproved vinyl windows that were previously installed.
4. The window openings that were reduced in size when the vinyl windows were installed, will be returned to their original size to maintain the proper proportions.

And with the following finding of fact:

1. This is a Type II SEQRA.
2. The Commissioners cited Preservation Standard #9 as the guideline for their decision.

**VII. MISCELLANEOUS**

**VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

Motion by Commissioner Andriano, seconded by Commissioner Fava, to adjourn the meeting.

*Motion carried unanimously.*

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 p.m.