

Schenectady Historic District Commission

Meeting Minutes May 26, 2022

I. CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Yager called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Commissioner Yager expressed her sadness over the recent passing of Commissioner Frank Gilmore and asked that those present take a moment of silence to honor Commissioner Gilmore.

II. ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Patricia Yager, Chair; Richard Unger; Joe Fava; Dr. Dean Bennett; Matt Smith, Senior Planner; Sylvia Jimison, Development Staff; Chris Marney, Assistant Corporation Counsel.

ABSENT: Shaun Andriano; Frank Gilmore

III. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

IV. ADOPTION OF MEETING MINUTES

Motion by Commissioner Fava, seconded by Commissioner Bennett, to approve the Minutes of the April 28, 2022 meeting.

Motion carried unanimously.

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

Commissioner Yager stated that she received a written public comment regarding agenda item “D” and would read it into the record at that time.

VI. APPLICATIONS

A. Consideration for approval submitted by Nicholas Plowman to paint the house. The premises is located at 6 Washington Ave. in the Stockade Historic District.

Nicholas Plowman appeared before the commission. He stated that he would like to repaint the exterior of the property in Hale Navy. He explained that he removed the asbestos siding and exposed the original clapboard siding that he will restore. The trim he explained, would be painted Stonington Gray, which is also from the Benjamin Moore line of historical paint colors. He stated that the door would be painted Classic Burgundy.

Commissioner Yager asked what color he was going to paint the trim boards. The applicant stated that he would likely paint those Stonington Gray. Commissioner Yager asked about the striping that is shown on the original photo of the house. Mr. Plowman stated that he intended to reintroduce that feature to the house by adding a piece of trim to the clapboard.

Mr. Plowman stated that he intends to reintroduce the shutters, but would submit a future application for that modification.

Commissioner Unger stated that he believed there was an existing approval for this property for the façade from years prior that had no expiration date, and asked how that would affect any approval given today. Mr. Marney stated that the prior approval was a simple approval to restore the façade and that any approval given today would be essentially the same with the addition of a painting plan, and would replace the prior approval.

RESOLUTION

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

1. The project will be completed within one year.
2. The main house will be painted Hale Navy from the Benjamin Moore paint collection.
3. The primary windows, cornice and trim will be Stonington Gray from the Benjamin Moore paint collection.
4. The door will be painted Classic Burgundy from the Benjamin Moore paint collection.
5. The cornice, friezes and horizontal stripe will be restored or replaced to replicate those found on 8 Washington Ave.
6. The window lintels will be replaced or reconstructed to replicate those found on 8 Washington Ave.

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 unanimously.

B. Consideration for approval submitted by Wendy Van Bellingham to replace the front steps and paint the property. The premises is located at 1296 Lowell Rd. in the GE Realty Plot Historic District.

Haley Van Bellingham appeared before the commission. She explained that the property was repainted the same color so she believes she didn't need approval from the commission for that. She further explained that the issue with the rebuilt steps is that they were not constructed correctly because each riser had a different height. She presented two options to the commission for the proposed stair rebuild; a three-step and a four-step option. Commissioner Bennett asked if the applicant had a preference. The applicant stated that they're proposing both options because they didn't know which one would be acceptable. Commissioner Unger asked if both options meet building code. Ms. Van Bellingham stated that her understanding is that either option would meet height so long as the risers are all the same height.

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. Three or four risers are approved provided that the final construction meets building code requirements.
3. Treads will be painted a blue or blue-grey color, and the risers will be painted white to match the columns.

And with the following finding of fact:

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

Motion carried unanimously.

B. Consideration for approval submitted by Clarke and Cathy Darlington to replace the carriage house roof. The premises is located at 1176 Stratford Rd. in the GE Realty Plot Historic District.

Clarke and Cathy Darlington appeared before the commission. Mr. Darlington stated that the commission approved the replacement of the roofing on the main house last year and would now like to replace the carriage house roof with the same Brava tile.

Commissioner Unger stated that unless there are questions from the commissioners he is prepared to make a motion.

RESOLUTION

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

1. The project will be completed within one year.
2. The roofing on the carriage house will be replaced with the same style and color roofing previously approved for the main house.

And with the following finding of fact:

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

Motion carried unanimously.

D. Consideration for approval submitted by Spencer Napolitano to remove fencing. The premises is located at 713 Union St. in the Union Street Historic District.

Spencer Napolitano appeared before the commission. He stated that he recently purchased the property and explained that he removed the hedges surrounding the cast iron fence and the fence fell over. He stated that he removed the fence due to safety concerns and placed all of the pieces in his garage for storage. He explained that he has plans to rehabilitate the entire building and plans on presenting something to the commissioner to replace the removed fence in the future, but isn't at that point yet in the project to do so.

Commissioner Bennett stated that he saw pictures of the fence when it was still standing and it had holes throughout and had disintegrated. Mr. Napolitano stated that the previous owner had gone to Armando and Sons 30 years ago to see if he could restore the fence, but it was too expensive, so the solution at the time was to plant the hedge to try and hide the deteriorated fence. Commissioner Fava stated that he grew up next to the fence and it has been deteriorating for years.

Commissioner Unger stated that he understands the reasons why the current fence can't be fixed, but would like the applicant to consider the options for recreating the fence out of an alternate material using the existing pieces as a template. Mr. Napolitano stated that Armando and Sons explained that the only way to recreate the fence would be to cast it in bronze using carved wax as a mold, and that would cost no less than \$75,000.

Commissioner Bennett stated that perhaps another cast iron, or wrought iron fence that is period, but not an exact replica could be an option. Mr. Napolitano stated that the estimate for an iron fence would be \$30-40k and is not a possibility given the costs of the rehabilitation projects on the house.

Commissioner Yager read a letter from the Schenectady Historic Foundation condemning the removal of the fence and asking that the commission require the applicant provide additional information and costs regarding replacement of the fence.

Commissioner Bennett stated that the fence being removed is a loss in terms of the streetscape and it feels like a hole in the street, as the fence had a cozying effect to the streetscape. He explained that without an idea of what will replace the fence, it's hard to give approval to remove it because of the importance the fence played serving that streetscape function.

John Samatulski, a consultant to Mr. Napolitano on this project, stated that if the fence can't be restored, that he and Spencer would welcome the opportunity to come before the commission next spring with either a landscaping plan or alternative, more affordable, fence option.

Gloria Kishton from the Schenectady Historic Foundation spoke and stated that the fence was a very important feature of the property. She suggested that the applicant warehouse and archive all of the pieces of the fence that are now stored in the garage. She further suggested that the applicant do research on all of the options that may be available to recreate or restore the fence. She stated that there are new technologies and materials available that may be able to be used to replicate the fence, and to bring the research and documentation back to the commission.

RESOLUTION

Motion by Commissioner Unger, seconded by Commissioner Fava to approve the application as submitted with the following conditions:

1. The project will be completed within one year.
2. The request to remove the wooden fence is approved.
3. The removed historic iron fence shall remain in the control of the current owner.
4. The owner will return to the commission with a plan for the reconstruction or replacement of the fence within six months.

And with the following finding of fact:

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

Motion carried unanimously.

E. Consideration submitted by Thomas Hodgkins to replace the front stairs. The premises is located at 15 N. Ferry St. in the Stockade Historic District.

Thomas Hodgkins appeared before the commission and stated that the current pre-formed concrete steps are in disrepair and would like to replace them with new steps formed from brick and bluestone.

Commissioner Yager stated that her concern is that the neighboring house is a mirror image and believes that the replacement steps should match the neighbor's house. Mr. Hodgkins stated that he's not sure how those steps were allowed to be put in because there are not historically appropriate. Commissioner Bennett stated that the pair of steps right now don't exactly match and doesn't believe the commission should require that they match. He further stated that the proposed steps are an improvement and perhaps when the neighbor would like to replace their steps, they would be required to match the proposed steps and Mr. Hodgkins will have set a higher standard.

RESOLUTION

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

1. The project will be completed within one year.

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 guideline for their decision.

Motion carried unanimously.

VII. Miscellaneous

Mr. Smith stated that next month there will be the special meeting of the Historic District Commission for the Historic District Guidelines project and is hoping all of the commissioners can attend either virtually or in person. He explained that the meeting will be recorded for those that can't make either. He stated that there will be no applications heard at that meeting.

VIII. Adjourn

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

Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:14 p.m.