

Historic District Commission (HDC)

Minutes

February 13, 2024

APPROVED: April 9, 2024

AGENDA: OLD BUSINESS:

- RSA 79 E Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive – Discussion

NEW BUSINESS:

- Member Binders
- Reformatted COA Form
- Review 2024 meeting dates
- By-law Review - Amendments
- Membership
 - New SB Rep
 - Expiring terms
- Town of Bristol "All Committees" Meeting - Discussion
- Proposed Parsonage and Parking Lot Project – Christina Goodwin

ATTENDING: Dorcas Gordon (Chair), Kyle Sandler (Vice Chair), and Shaun Lagueux (Select Board Representative)

ABSENT: Steve Favorite

STAFF: Donna Sullivan (Land Use Administrative Assistant) and Christina Goodwin (Town Administrator} *via Zoom and in person.*

Public: Susie Putnam

Chair Gordon called the meeting to order at 7:15 pm

OLD BUSINESS:

RSA 79 E COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION TAX RELIEF INCENTIVE PROGRAM – Discussion:

Chair Gordon reviewed information received from the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance regarding this RSA which was adopted by the Town of Bristol offering tax incentives for property owners improving properties in the Central Square area.

There was additional discussion about those who have taken advantage of this to date, the qualification process, the valuation issues and benefits, and the Commission’s desire to communicate this program to those who could take advantage of it.

Options for making the public and property owners aware were discussed. Promotional suggestions included a presentation at the library, a mailing to Realtors in Town and flyers or letters to property owners.

It was decided that Land Use will send letters to Historic District property owners reminding them about the tax incentives that are available to them. If there is enough interest, a potential presentation and Q&A session could be booked at the library.

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NEW BUSINESS:

MEMBER BINDERS:

Ms. Sullivan stated that the Commission binders and forms were being created/updated will include bylaws, forms and other information for the Commission members.

REVIEW 2024 MEETING DATES:

Ms. Sullivan shared a schedule of HDC meeting dates for 2024. The Commission reviewed these and asked to change the March 12th meeting date to Monday, March 11th.

PROPOSED PARSONAGE AND PARKING LOT PROJECT:

Chair Gordon asked audience attendee, Susie Putnam if she had anything to talk with the Commission about under New Business. Ms. Putnam stated she could talk about the Baptist Church Parsonage and Parking Lot project. Ms. Goodwin came into the meeting in person to discuss these plans.

The Commission reviewed the plans for the Town to purchase the church parsonage and parking lot in Central Square. This project will be proposed by warrant article at the Town Meeting in March. Ms. Goodwin explained that the plans were to purchase this and tear down the parsonage and improve access for public use of the parking lot.

Discussion followed about concerns for loss of a building in the face of housing needs and other Historic District values seen for keeping the building. Mr. Sandler expressed concern for future Town space needs that may be serviced by use of this building. Ms. Goodwin and Mr. Lagueux explained the road access issues and other issues with the building, which indicated the demolition as the best option. The Commission indicated that it had a concern for the historical character of Central Square and the possibility that creative thinking might find a way to keep and improve the building for some type of occupancy or economic development project.

Mr. Sandler shared his understanding that the project as proposed offered the advantage of additional parking in Central Square and the demolition would mean the town would not have to rehab or maintain another building.

More discussion followed about the green space, parking lot area and safe access plans for the lot. Chair Gordon indicated she understood the safety and road access issues but once the building is demolished the character of Central Square will change and this is of concern to her.

Overall, the Commission was in favor of the additional parking advantages but not the demolition of a building in the Historic District without exploring other possible outcomes for use of the building.

Chair Gordon asked Ms. Putman if she had questions or would like to comment. Ms. Putnam, a member of the Church and resident, shared her thoughts about this project. She indicated that she was in favor of historical preservation, but she indicated the parsonage has been altered many times over the years and the safety issues outweigh the concerns of preservation in her opinion. She stated that the Church was considering demolishing the Parsonage due to its condition and its economic hardship for maintenance. There was discussion of merging the lot and subdivision issues. She felt the plans as presented will provide the Town and residents with safe access for parking and travel in Central Square.

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BY-LAW AMENDMENTS:

Ms. Sullivan presented some by-law changes for approval by the Commission. The changes were to number of Commission members, verified mailings for abutter notices vs. certified return receipt, and Public Hearings requiring reasons for approval and denial per RSA.

After discussion, Mr. Lagueux motioned to approve the by-law amendments as presented. Mr. Sandler seconded. The motion carried 3-0-0.

POTENTIAL MEMBERSHIP ISSUES – NEW SELECT BOARD REP AND EXPIRING TERMS:

Mr. Lagueux explained that he was not seeking re-election to the Select Board and there were two candidates running for the position. The Select Board would appoint a new representative after election at its re-organization meeting. He indicated he would be present for the March HDC meeting, but a new representative would be present thereafter.

Ms. Sullivan indicated that terms were expiring for Mr. Sandler and Mr. Favorite. Ms. Sullivan stated each would have to let the Select Board know if they wished to be re-appointed. Mr. Sandler indicated he would like to continue. Ms. Sullivan will contact Mr. Favorite. Mr. Lagueux stated that typically new appointees would be interviewed by the Select Board prior, but re-appointments would be renewed by the March meeting.

CONDITION OF APPROVAL (COA) FORM REVISIONS:

Ms. Sullivan presented an update to the Conditional of Approval Application Form. She indicated that it was reformatted to make the form easier for applicants and to be consistent with other Land Use forms.

Following discussion, Mr. Lagueux motioned to approve the reformatted Condition of Approval Application Form as presented. Mr. Sandler seconded. The motion carried 3-0-0.

TOWN OF BRISTOL "ALL COMMITTEES" MEETING:

Chair Gordon updated the Commission about the All-Committees meeting held January. She indicated it was a great group representing 13 Committees and Boards that do work on behalf of the Town. She stated the focus was to understand the work conducted by these volunteers in relationship to the Select Board or Planning Board as well as understand the need for better communications for timing of grants proposals, goals, or projects. Mr. Lagueux and Chair Gordon spoke about the issues discussed at the meeting and the opportunities the gathering of this group presents for collaboration. Mr. Lagueux stated that communication has been a struggle for the Select Board when presented with projects or grant deadlines and the need for on-the-spot decisions which might not be able to be accommodated. The issues are real, the ideas and projects may be great, but more time may be needed to properly consider these as a Select Board and the Board does not want to discourage the work and energy of the Committees. These All-Committee meetings are moderated and will continue. The hope is that a better communication policy and better interaction will result.

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MINUTES APPROVAL:

Mr. Lagueux motioned to approve the minutes from August 8, 2023, as presented. Mr. Sandler seconded. The motion carried 3-0-0.

COMMUNICATIONS: None

NEXT MEETING: The next meeting scheduled for March 12th has tentatively been moved to March 11, 2024.

ADJOURNMENT:

With no other business before the Commission, Mr. Sandler moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:21 pm. Mr. Lagueux seconded. The motion carried 3-0-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet Cote
Land Use Associate