



Historic District Commission Meeting
Monday, November 20, 2006
Council Chambers, City Hall, Claremont at 7:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes
Approved 1/23/2007

Meeting called to order by Chair Messier at 7:00 PM.

I. ROLL CALL

Present: Deborah Cutts, Lori Richardson, Jeffrey Barrett, David Messier, John Hall, Trinity Dix

Absent: None

II. APPOINTMENTS

Trinity Dix appointed as regular member

III. OLD BUSINESS:

- **St. Mary's Parish, 32 Pearl Street, Claremont, NH 03743** – A Certificate of Appropriateness Application has been submitted to demolish the St. Mary's Convent located at **16 Central Street**. Map 119; Lot 39, Zone R2. Property owner of record, Roman Catholic Bishop of Manchester – Diocese of Manchester.

Chair Messier summarized where the application process stood at this point: At the meeting of October 26, 2006 the applicant presented their arguments for demolition of the St. Mary Convent. The commission asked various questions of the applicant. The meeting was then opened for public comment at which time people spoke both for and against the application. At the end of the public comment period, the Commission began deliberations but decided to continue the application to the November meeting.

The Commission then spent time reviewing the facts from the last meeting. Chair Messier advised that the commission would use the review criteria set out in the zoning ordinance to help them make a determination on the application.

Chair Messier gave the board members a handout from the National Trust for Historic Preservation with a list used to evaluate a property for historic, cultural, or architectural value. The list helps determine what facets of history a building might relate to on a local, state, or national level. The commission went through the list and agreed by consensus that the building in question has relevance in the following areas.

Architecture: as an outstanding example of Greek Revival architecture by a noted architect/builder who has other buildings listed in the National Registry. James Garvin, the NH State Architectural Historian has determined that it has state wide importance as architecture.

Ethnic Heritage: for its connection to the emigrant communities that came to Claremont to work in the mills.

Landscape Architecture: because of the way the land was worked to assure that all four original houses were on the same plain, elevated above the street level to increase the impact of their presence. It also allowed the four homes to be in perfect alignment to one another.

Community Planning and Development: Central Street, Pearl Street and parts of Main Street were all laid out and developed during this period with Central Street being the prime residential choice of the emerging

industrial leaders of the community resulting in the construction of this building as well as the other matching buildings in the complex.

Education: for its connection to St Mary School, which catered to the growing catholic emigrants moving into Claremont for jobs in the mills.

Industry: as the home of industrialist Ormond Dutton, agent for the Sullivan Manufacturing Company, then to Mr. Goddard, agent for the Monadnock mills.

Religion: as part of a religious complex that has played an important role in catering to the spiritual and educational needs of a large Catholic congregation for over one hundred years.

Having established the building's areas of significance, the commission moved to discuss its six review criteria taking into account to the Purpose of the zoning division.

Criteria #1 Consider the historical, architectural or cultural value of the building and it's relationship and contribution to the setting.

Mr. Hall felt that the building is symbolic of the wealth derived around the manufacturing industry along the river. Chair Messier agreed and added that this building and others in the complex were massive mansions built of brick which set them apart from the other typical residential buildings built mostly of wood. The owners were making a statement that they were important and this was the place to be. They were the leaders of the first major industrial phase of the community which set the tone for the history of Claremont for the next 150 years.

Chair Messier suggested a series of questions to help consider this issue. *"Does this building help tell a number of different stories which helped shape the community?"* Look at the other uses the building has had. Does it help tell another story beyond the residential uses? The next owner was the Catholic Church. This building was part of a cultural, religious and educational center catering to the Irish, French Canadian and other ethnic immigrants who made Claremont their home because of the work provided by the mills. Claremont was part of a national trend toward industrialization, which in turn brought immigrant populations to the U.S. to be part of the growth of the country. So not only was this building the home of prominent local citizens who played a key role in the industrialization of the city, it then went on to play a role in meeting the social, spiritual, and educational needs of an immigrant community.

Another question to consider: *"Is the building associated with a person or people who made important contributions to the community, a profession or a local tradition?"* Ms. Cutts suggested that this concept begins with the architect. He was an important architect/builder who made contributions across the state. Many of his buildings are listed with the national registry. In addition, the first few owners made significant contributions to the community and ran businesses that employed a large number of people.

Other relevant questions are: *Does the building embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction? Is the building a well preserved example of local architecture, design, construction or engineering, or as a long standing focal point in a neighborhood or community? Does the building represent the work of a master architect or builder, known or unknown?* Mr. Messier comments: The historic survey completed when the historic district was established gave this building the highest rating possible and called it an "outstanding Greek Revival Mansion". Even with the additions and modifications made to the building over time, the building was still given the highest possible rating. This set of buildings is also featured in the book "New Hampshire Architecture" by Bryant Tolles, Jr. which, according to Ms Haywood represents the best of the best in New Hampshire architecture. Mr. Garvin, the state Architectural Historian wrote "Together, these four dwellings represent one of the most dramatic expressions of the Greek Revival style in New Hampshire. We know of no other example in the state where houses of such uniform temple form are placed in perfect alignment on a terrace with broad lawns leading down to a street. These buildings proclaim the pride and

prosperity that marked Claremont's first golden age in the 1830s. Central Street is a dramatic testament to the optimism that characterized Claremont's early industrial era." Mr. Messier stated there is a lot of evidence pointing to the architectural importance of this building.

There was a master architect involved, and this building, along with the others in the set, has been a longstanding visual focal point in the community.

Ms. Cutts added that the N.H. Division of Historical Resources advised that there are no other known instances where three of these buildings stand together. The words "there are no other known" is a remarkable statement. Chair Messier added that the N.H. Division of Historical resources mentioned that the proposed demolition of this building is a matter of state wide concern.

Ms. Richardson stated that she had other questions she would like to ask the applicant, such as, had they exhausted all their options? She stated that she did not want to burden them with a building that they cannot take care of just because of its historical value. She felt that if they had done everything possible to preserve the building, she would not want to vote against the demolition. She also wanted to ask how much the applicant had spent on the building in the past two years. Ms. Richardson stated that things are never black and white and, in order for her to make her decision, she would like some questions answered. After some discussion among the commission, Ms. Richardson said she was under the impression that the applicant had asked for a demolition permit for this building two years ago and had been denied. Chair Messier clarified that this was the first demolition application on this building.

Chair Messier advised that the public comment period had been closed and that opening it back up could present a procedural problem. He advised that if the commission wanted to clarify something specific about the proposal, a specific question might be allowed by consensus. He advised that the applicant's proposal was to demolish the building, and that he felt asking about possible alternatives is not a clarifying question and might not be a proper question at this point in the procedure. He felt that many of these questions had been asked in the public comment section. He also felt that knowing how much had been spent on the building in the past two years would not clarify anything about the proposal for demolition. He asked the commission for their thoughts.

After discussion, the commission agreed by consensus that the questions were not clarifying questions about the proposal and would not be appropriate at this point in the process.

Motion: I move that the building located at 16 Central St does indeed have historic, architectural and cultural value and that it does relate and contribute to the setting

Made By: Ms. Cutts Second: Ms. Dix

DISCUSSION:

Ms. Cutts stated she is sympathetic to the challenges of the church. The Historic District is an especially important part of the city. When she joined the commission, she wanted to make sure that as the city grows, develops and recovers, that it does not forget the significance of these particular areas. This building is very important in itself and to the area.

Mr. Barrett advised that he concurs with Ms. Cutts.

Mr. Hall advises that clearly there are very few buildings in Claremont that have been mentioned in books and that have bearing in the architectural history of New Hampshire. It is difficult to argue that the building does not have local significance and also significance in other parts of the country.

Ms. Dix advised that, with everything they have seen, it does point out how important this building is to Claremont.

Chair Messier stated that Bryant Tolles' book features the most important architecture in the state, and this set of buildings is featured in the book with photos. There is also the fact that the historic survey sheets gave this building the highest rating possible when the Historic District was established. It is also mentioned in Waite's book *The History of Claremont*. We have a letter from the State Architectural Historian stating its importance, as well comments from Judy Hayward who is a nationally recognized historic preservation professional. They have all stated that this building is of outstanding importance. There are no other known places in the state where there are a series of buildings of this style that hold such historical value. Mr. Messier stated the buildings are something the city should take pride in, and he will vote yes on this motion.

Vote: Unanimous by roll call

Cutts – Aye

Richardson – Aye

Barrett – Aye

Chair Messier - Aye

Mr. Hall – Aye

Ms. Dix - Aye

The Commission reached consensus that Review Criteria #2 does not apply to this application as it concerns a proposed renovation or new construction.

The Commission reached consensus that Review Criteria #3 does not apply to this application as it concerns a proposed renovation or new construction.

The Commission reached consensus that Review Criteria #4 does not apply to this application as it concerns proposed yards, landscaping, etc.

Criteria #5 – Consider the impact that the applicant's proposal will have on the setting and the extent to which it will preserve and enhance the historic, architectural, and cultural qualities of the district and community.

Motion: I move that the applicant's proposal for demolition will have a negative affect on the setting and will not help to preserve or enhance the historic, architectural and cultural qualities of the district or community.

Made By: Mr. Barrett **Second:** Ms. Dix

DISCUSSION:

Mr. Barrett advised that with all the evidence provided regarding the history, the architectural significance, and the fact that it relates to a group of buildings, demolishing this building and leaving a hole there would be a detriment to the Historic District.

Chair Messier stated that one of the applicant's argument was that demolishing this building will help them preserve the rest of the buildings. He asks the commission to address this point and determine if it is a valid argument.

Ms. Dix stated that the commission has to determine if the buildings are stronger as a group, and whether they remain as strong with the demolition of this building. Does the demolition of this one make the remaining ones more important or less important? My feeling is that if you tear down one of these buildings, the importance of the group is diminished.

Mr. Barrett stated that he felt that "moth balling" the building would be cheaper than demolishing it. Then there would be more money to maintain the remainder of the buildings.

Chair added that "Moth Balling" is a concept that Judy Hayward proposed as an option for the church. It is an option, and it is usually preferable to moth ball a building than to demolish it. It allows choices to be made in

the future, whereas there are no choices once the building is gone. The applicant has provided two reports stating that taking down one of these buildings is not significant because there are two others like it. The State Historian James Garvin contradicts that theory saying “Each of the surviving buildings in the group is crucial to the coherence of this remarkable architectural composition; none could be removed without significantly diminishing one of the most powerful expressions of the Greek Revival style in northern New England.” Our job is to decide whose opinion we will give more weight to.

Ms. Cutts advises that in her opinion, the authors of the two reports that stated there would be little impact from the demolition of this building, did not retain the credentials to make such a decision. There was no evidence that they considered the guidelines or criteria that the Historic District follows.

Chair Messier stated that the recommendation in the first report was that the church should demolish three of the four Greek Revival buildings. The first report does not even have the author’s name on it, does not list any qualifications of the author, nor does it provide any information that would lead us to believe they are qualified to make these statements. They provide no background on their ability to make comments on the impact of demolishing historic structures. The State Architectural Historian, who has written a book on New Hampshire’s historic architecture, disputes their assertion, and I would have to give more weight to his opinion. The negative impact of this proposed demolition on the Historic District really hit me when I was at the visitor’s center last week. The Visitor Center was placed in its location for a reason. From there you have the whole history of the town in front of you. From there you can view the river, which provided the impetus for the whole industrial era of the city. You can see all the mill buildings built because of the river. You can see City Hall, the Baptist Church built around 1830, and you can see the convent, a mansion built by one of the early industrial leaders of the community. There is a story to tell about the river, and the mills that were built to use the power of the river. There is also the connection with the people who built these industries and shaped the history of our whole community. From the Visitors Center, the Convent is the only one of these Greek Revival mansions built by early industrialists that can be fully seen from this vantage point. When trying to tell the story of how the city developed, it is important to be able to make these connections visually. If this building is demolished, that story will be harder to tell. The demolition of this building will negatively affect our perception and understanding of how the community was established and grew over time. Chair Messier advised he will have to vote in favor of the motion that the proposal will have a detrimental affect on the entire district and the community.

Ms. Richardson stated that she felt it was not the job of the writers of the reports to check in with HDC. Their job was to assess the value of the property, not to determine whether or not this will affect the Historic District.

Chair Messier agreed that the report was for the church to determine the condition of their buildings and how they should spend their limited funds. However, as stated by Mr. Garvin, they are not the types of reports one would expect to see when seeking a demolition permit for an important historic building. Also, the second report, as stated within the report, was limited in scope and was focused on confirming the findings of the previous report”. The second report was geared toward confirming the earlier findings.

Vote: Unanimous by roll call:

Cutts – Aye

Richardson – Aye

Barrett – Aye

Chair Messier - Aye

Mr. Hall – Aye

Ms. Dix - Aye

The Commission reached consensus that Review Criteria #6 does not apply to this application as it relates to rehabilitation projects.

Chair Messier summarized the findings of fact based on the two motions. The commission has looked at the 6 criteria and found that two of the criteria relate to the demolition proposal. We have determined that the building is important, architecturally, historically, and culturally, that it contributes to the setting and that demolition would have a negative impact on the Historic District and beyond that the community. He then asked for a final motion on the application.

Motion: based on the previous findings of fact, that two motions were unanimously passed based on the applicable criteria; one stating that the building located at 16 Central Street has important historical, architectural, and cultural value and one stating that the demolition proposal would have a negative affect on the Historic District and the community, I move that the Historic District Commission deny the application for a demolition permit for the property located at 16 Central Street; map 119 lot 349, zone R2.

Made by: Mr. Barrett **Second:** Ms. Cutts

DISCUSSION:

Mr. Barrett stated that although he sympathizes with the maintenance issues the church has with this building, given the information provided and the criteria that the commission must legally consider, he cannot come to any other conclusion.

Ms. Cutts stated she is also sympathetic. However, we are charged with looking at what is presented, and it is important that our decision be based on the criteria in the zoning ordinance. She stated that she planned to vote for the motion. She feels that if the architectural and cultural significance of the building were embraced, the other challenges would become less.

Ms. Dix stated the commission has guidelines to go by and, once everything was discussed, it was cut and dry and she planed to vote for the motion.

Mr. Hall advised that, because the building has so much documented historical relevance, in considering the review criteria he finds no other choice but to vote for the motion.

Ms. Richardson stated she will not vote in favor of the motion. She said that while she understands the guidelines, she feels this is not a black and white issue, and there are other things to consider.

Chair Messier stated that he keeps referring to the Purposes of the Historic District in the zoning ordinance. This Zoning ordinance was created for the greater good of the community and that this proposal does not meet the purposes of the Zoning Ordinance. Some of the purposes are to strengthen the city's economy, protect and enhance the city's attractions, stabilize and improve property values. We have developers in the city right now making major investments in the historic district. Their investments could be negatively impacted if precedence is set for demolishing important historic buildings in the district because an owner can't afford the upkeep. I don't think all the options have been exhausted on this building. I don't think parking is a detriment to developing this building considering the city just sold three nearby mill buildings with limited parking, and that there is a public parking garage being built adjacent to the subject property. Another of the applicant's concerns was the proximity of the convent building to the school. Again, I don't think this precludes all development, though it might limit some uses. I don't believe there is good evidence that this building is beyond use. It may be beyond use for the current owner, but I don't believe that is enough reason to allow the demolition of this important building, as that would have a negative impact on the whole district. I believe denying this application is right thing to do

Vote: 5-1

Cutts – Aye

Richardson – Nay

Barrett – Aye

Chair Messier - Aye

Mr. Hall – Aye

Ms. Dix - Aye

Motion: Motion to appoint Chair Messier to act on behalf of the Commission on any further proceedings in this matter.

Made by: Mr. Barrett **Second:** Ms. Cutts Mr. Barrett and Ms. Cutts advised that the goal will be to have one person who has been involved in the proceedings and be able to speak to the process.

Vote: Unanimous

IV. NEW BUSINESS:

- **40 CENTRAL ST, LLC, Kevin LaCasse, 80 Lakeview Drive, and New Hampton, NH 03256 –** A Certificate of Appropriateness Application has been submitted to apply vinyl siding on the building located at **40 Central Street.** Map 119; Lot 250, Zone R2.

Mr. Kevin LaCasse advised his proposal is to put up vinyl siding on the building. The building is very run down and sticks out from the rest of the buildings on the street. He already has the permits to do the windows and the roof.

Mr. LaCasse advised that the clapboards are deteriorated and in bad shape. The building next door has vinyl siding along with some other buildings on the street. The trim on the building across the street is the same color as he is proposing. He also found some paint on the building showing that at one period in time it was this color. He would like to improve the building to help attract better tenants.

Chair Messier stated that the survey sheet shows a photo of the building with asphalt shingle siding, that he thinks was removed about a year ago. There are also some windows on the front that have been replaced.

Chair Messier advised that although it is usually preferable to replace the siding with the same material as the original, there is a situation on this street where many of the other buildings have vinyl siding.

Mr. Barrett advised that the commission should also take into consideration what rating this property has on the historic survey.

Chair Messier explained that the buildings ratings go from 0 to 3. This building has a rating of 1 indicating that it has minor value in its contribution to the district.

Usually a building like this is included as part of a neighborhood that shows patterns of development. It may not be individually important although it relates in its mass and sizing and the time period in which it was built.

This building is part of this residential street profile, and it has some elements that one would recognize as an 1850's building. Its gable end facing the street makes it a Greek Revival design, as well as its 6 over 6 windows. The front door trim is also of the period. We would like to try to keep as much of the original details and dimensions of the building as possible to help recognize it as such. Some other properties on the street have vinyl siding, though they were done without a building permit or Historic District Commission approval.

Chair Messier asked if Mr. LaCasse would be willing to put the siding only on the clapboard and leave the trim, etc exposed. Mr. LaCasse advised that from a maintenance standpoint he would rather not. Mr. Lacasse indicated he would be willing to cover the trim with aluminum and keep the proportions of the trim elements the same as they are now. He advised that the reveals could be wrapped in aluminum; he does want to keep the look and the integrity of the building. He is not going to remove any of the wood or details.

Criteria #1 is to consider the level of historical, architectural, or cultural value of the building and whether it relates and contributes to the setting.

Motion: I move that the building located at 40 Central Street has limited historical, architectural, or cultural value, but does relate and contribute to its setting.

Made By: Ms. Cutts **Second:** Mr. Barrett **Vote:** Unanimous

Criteria #2 – Consider how the proposed exterior design, arrangement, textures, and materials relate to the existing buildings or structures in its setting, or if new construction, to the surround use.

Motion: I move that the exterior design, arrangement, texture, and materials, proposed being vinyl siding and metal covered soffits with appropriate corner and bottom trim are compatible with the existing buildings or structures in its setting.

Made By: Mr. Barrett **Second:** Mr. Hall

Mr. Barrett: Based on the rating of the building, the vinyl siding covering is similar enough to the surrounding buildings; you will not lose the sense of proportion of the building

Vote: Unanimous

The Commission reaches consensus that Review Criteria #3 does not apply to this application.

The Commission reaches consensus that Review Criteria #4 does not apply to this application.

Criteria #5 is to consider the impact that the applicant's proposal will have on the setting and the extent to which it will preserve and enhance the historic, architectural and cultural qualities of the district and community

Motion: I move that the applicant's proposal will have a positive affect on the quality of the district and will have no negative affect on the setting.

Made By: Mr. Barrett **Second:** Ms. Cutts **Vote:** Unanimous

Criteria #6 Consider how the proposal relates to the "Secretary of the Interiors Guidelines for Rehabilitation"

Motion: I move that the applicant's proposal to cover existing clapboard material and trim pieces with trim that as closely matches the size and scale given the level 1 rating of the structure is in keeping with the guidelines set out in the Secretary of Interior's Guidelines for Rehabilitation

Made By: Ms. Cutts **Second:** Mr. Hall **Vote:** Unanimous

Motion to: based on our preceding findings of fact, I move that the HDC approve the application to cover existing clapboard material and trim pieces with trim that as closely matches the size and scale given the level 1 rating of the structure for a certificate of appropriateness for the property located at 40 Central Street.

Made by: Ms. Cutts **Second:** Mr. Hall

Chair Messier advised that he is approving the application based on the fact that the rating of the building is low with a rating of 1 and due to circumstances beyond the Commission's control. This being that other the buildings in the area have been vinyl sided without HDC approval. The efforts to do a vinyl siding correctly given the rating of the building and it surroundings should be approved.

Ms. Cutts advised that she does agree with the Chairs comments.

Mr. Barrett approved based on the criteria the chair just described. A note of thanks to the applicant for being part of the process and making the building look better.

Mr. Hall advised he is voting affirmative that due to the rating and setting, the proposal is in keeping with the nature of the area it is in. Also that it maintains a sense of its original features.

Vote: Unanimous

Motion: To have the Chair meet with the Planning and Development office to familiarize them with all activities requiring certificates of appropriateness.

Made by: Mr. Barrett **Second:** Mr. Hall **Vote:** Unanimous

V. REPORT OF SECRETARY:

Minutes from September 28, 2006 and October 26, 2006 Meeting

Motion: to accept the minutes of 9/28/06 as written

Made by: Mr. Barrett **Second:** Mr. Hall **Vote:** Unanimous

Motion: to accept the minutes of 10/26/2006 as corrected

Made by: Mr. Hall **Second:** Mr. Barrett **Vote:** Unanimous

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to: To Adjourn

Made by: Mr. Barrett **Second:** Ms. Cutts **Vote:** Unanimous

Meeting Adjourned at: 10:10 pm

Respectfully Submitted By,

Michelle Aiken

Boards and Commissions Coordinator