

- Historic District Commission
Final Minutes
April 18, 2024

Call Meeting to Order: Kevin Kahn, Vice Chair, called meeting to order at 10 am in the Novak Room of the Exeter Town Office Building

Members Present: Pam Gjettum, Clerk, Kevin Kahn, Vice Chair, Julie Gilman, Select Board Rep. Gwen English, Planning Board Rep., Emily Heath, new member, Dave Sharples, Town Planner

New Business: Public Hearing: The application of Brayden Tuscher for an amendment to a previously approved application for revision to the proposed new construction of a two car garage with living space above on the property at 87 Front Street.
Case #23-4.

Pam gave Kevin a letter the commission received about this and Kevin read it for the record. It was from Brayden Tuscher giving his permission for Tyler Palmer to represent the project because Brayden is unable to attend for medical reasons.

Tyler Palmer spoke and said that most of it is staying the same except for the flat roof above the garage. Due to budget reasons, we are getting rid of that and then using some of the existing windows in the backside of the garage to keep within budget. This is pretty much it for changes.

Kevin then opened it up for questions. Julie said, I think it actually has improved at least as far as the deck and the flat roof on the garage. I am not a big fan of the larger windows. They are really the only thing that is out of proportion with the building.

Pam said this is as you are going in towards the school so basically no one is going to see the windows anyway. Julie said that is why I said I was just not a fan, that's all.

Pam said, I think it is fine and it is wonderful seeing that house being fixed.

Kevin had one question. On the west elevation (A7), it looks like there was a set of double windows on the top floor that is being reduced now to one.

Tyler said they were changed because they are now bedrooms. They were small double windows and they will be made into larger single windows.

Kevin asked the commission if there was any more discussion and there was not and then he opened it up to the public and there was none from the public. Kevin then asked for a motion to accept the amended application as complete. Julie made a motion to approve the amended application for Case #23-4. Pam seconded. All were in favor and the application approved.

Next is a request from Hajjar Management for a conceptual review of a proposal for new construction of a mixed-use development at 11 Front Street. Parcel #72-224-2.

Emily Heath recused themselves because they live and work at the property next door.

Paul Mahoney from Hajjar Management spoke and he also had Chris Hajjar with him. He said, we are here on an informal basis. We hope to come before the Board again in the future to talk about the specifics you would hope to see and the final design and things like that. Paul said it made sense to come before the Board because this is something you would care about 11 Front Street. Our hope is to get this building to a fourth story and we are bringing this before you because we are trying to get the numbers to work on the project. The housing demand is there, but we also have to make sure we are doing things that are suitable for the commission.

The commission members each had a diagram of this project. The building as proposed with forty-four units would then be about fifty-six feet in height. What we thought we would do is bring this before you and show it to you in reference to the city hall.

Julie asked Dave Sharples, Town Planner if fifty feet was our height limit. Dave said go under a mixed use neighborhood development, then it is fifty feet, four stories. They are proposing fifty-six feet, five stories and they would need relief for the height and the stories from the Planning Board.

Pam said to Paul Mahoney, you don't think that is too big? Paul said, we don't but again, it is important to make sure that the commission is happy with what we are bringing forward. We think it is going to bring some beautiful quality construction to downtown that is much needed. We also think that it will look very nice in the end. The projects that we have done in the past, we only do quality and make sure it looks good. This would also be rentals with retail at the base level. This is part of the condominium so it has parking underneath, as well as some of the parking in the surrounding areas that is related to the condominium. This is where the Citizens Bank ATM is now and Citizens ATM will continue to be part of it in some way.

Pam said, if you have forty-four apartments then you have to have parking for at least forty-four cars, so where are they going to go?

Paul said, we have opportunities for parking underneath the building and around it. Since we are part of the condo association we do have a total of between this structure, as well as for 154 Water Street which is the other condominium as part of this complex, we have a total of 58 spots.

Kevin said, between the two projects and the parking spaces available currently what you see is going to be allocated to the Swampscott Building and what is going to be needed for here, do you see this project being parking space neutral in that there are enough to cover the needs of those buildings.

Paul said, yes. Julie said this is really not for our consideration and Pam said, yes it is our consideration because there are going to be x number of cars coming into Exeter.

The commission members all agreed that the height of this structure is too tall and would overpower the town hall.

Kevin then read a couple of letters that were sent. One was from Kevin Argien who is against this project and said the only thing that should be put there is a duplicate of the historic courthouse that used to occupy that property.

The next letter was Elliot Berkowitz who also is against this project. The proposed building is very large and looks out of place compared to our old town hall next door.

Kevin then asked if anyone from the public would like to speak.

Emily Health spoke. They said they live at 12 Center Street which backs and will look into the apartments. I am also the Pastor of the church. It is a very close lot line and with the church, it is almost a 0 lot line. We have a working burial ground right over that line that we have funeral services at. It is hard because it is between two historic buildings and these two historic buildings still serve a lot of our town. I know that we have talked about parking and some people don't think we have a parking issue, but living on that block, I can tell you that we have a parking issue. People run out of parking and park in our church driveway all the time. There is not much parking to be had even on Sunday mornings and now we are adding forty-four apartments to the mix.

Chris Scales spoke and said he is a resident of Exeter and recently moved downtown and is the moderator of the church. My concerns, like Emily's, are the parking. This morning when I walked over the spaces currently in that lot, three of them are reserved for the Finance Department here in town, two are handicapped, there are four public two hour spots, three reserved for the salt caves, two for the SAA Gallery, one for maintenance, two for the brewery and six are reserved I presume for Citizens Bank. That is twenty-three that are reserved and in my mind, that is a wonderful balance of retail and government which get used during the week in the day and the church that gets used on the weekend on Sunday mornings. The church has been there since 1798 and the lot line is really tight. We have four parking spaces in our driveway and over 100 parishioners who come to church Sunday morning. Some parishioners are older and need to park close by. There are twenty-three spaces that if this project is constructed will disappear from the inventory in town. Even without a parking waiver, this would have a negative impact on the church. The parking bothers me a lot and I don't know if this is the right venue for that, but I sure hope it is considered in the approval process for this project.

Dave Montgomery spoke. I live at One Holly Court and have been a resident of Exeter for twenty-eight years. I am also a member of the Congregational Church. I have three concerns about the proposal. The first one is the size of it which the Board brought up and Pastor Emily as well. I understand that the developers are trying to make it big enough for their numbers to work. However, I feel like it would dominate that area. Second is that aesthetically, I wish this building would work a little better as it goes up Water

Street. I have looked on your website and seen how you have done that on other projects. My third concern would be the traffic and the parking. We already have congestion. Last night at 5pm, I came out of Fulton Street and came down High Street and traffic was backed up to the hospital. This is going to make this worse, not to mention that parking is an issue already.

Sally Oxnard spoke and said, I have lived here since the 70s. I just want to speak to the argument that we need more housing in Exeter. Please do not feel pressured to put in million dollar condos and more top of the line rental apartments. Let's look at what we are putting in recently in Exeter. There is Exeter Gateway on Epping Road, there is the Wilson Development across from the academy, there is a unit that is going in next to Main Street School, there is the development on the Exeter Stratham line. There is a lot of new housing coming in.

Lynn Monroe spoke and said, I am a resident of Kensington but I am a member of the Congregational Church. The commission gave permission for Lynn to speak. I am a Historic Preservation Consultant and have lived in Exeter and Kensington for about forty years. I am concerned about this project. I will read from one of Barbara's articles and this is referring to the courthouse. The building gave the downtown an undisturbed line of respectable edifices that stretched along Front Street to Water balancing the federal houses that stood on the opposite side of the street. It was like a healthy smile. Respectfully, I am not quite sure this new building as completed would have the same satisfactory result. It is oversized and does not bring much to the place and I am extremely concerned about its proximity to the

church and the fact that it blocks the church in many site lines and those are the important iconic parts of the district. As we walked around the church today the lot lines are two feet from the corner of the church and the cemetery part of the church, we will be looking right into everybody's windows and it seems disrespectful.

There were no other comments from the public.

Kevin thanked the people from Hajjar Management for their presentation and asked if there was anything they would like to ask the commission before the subject is closed.

Paul said, I just want to thank you and I really appreciate all the feedback. We like to come more prepared and complete but sometimes it just makes sense to see where people stand on things and that is what we have done and I really appreciate it.

Julie said I would like to add what I have heard from the public. Part of this is the breakdown of the facet. You cannot tell, it looks very flat. I would recommend getting more depth. There is also not a lot of detail on it. It is very simple and when you are sitting next to the town hall and even the church, it still has a detailed feeling to it. I am concerned about maximizing the total site. I understand why you are doing it. There are parking concerns also. I would recommend you consider shorter and narrower.

Paul said, for me to be fair to the architects, I think they would also want to take more time because they are starting with a block.

Other Business: Approval of September 21, 2023 Minutes. The minutes will be submitted as is.

With no other further business, Pam made a motion to adjourn. Julie seconded. All were in favor and the meeting adjourned at 7:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Herrick
Recording Secretary