



**Schenectady Historic District Commission**

**Meeting Minutes  
April 18, 2016**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Commissioner Craven called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

Commissioner Craven noted that due to the recent expiration of the terms of several Commissioners the Commission is currently without a Chair or Vice Chair. The Commissioners decided that for three meetings the members with the most seniority (Commissioners Britt, Craven, and Wiles) will each take a turn as temporary Chair, thus allowing the new Commissioners to get to know each other and the workings of the Commission before voting on a new Chair and Vice Chair.

Commissioner Craven read a brief statement explaining the role and purview of the Commission. She also presented to the Commissioners a photograph of the property at 847 Union Street (at the corner of Gillespie Street) where the Commission had approved the removal of a large maple tree last month. The photograph was taken since the tree has been removed.

**II. ROLL CALL**

**PRESENT:** Dr. Dean Bennett; Carrie Britt-Narcavage; Jackie Craven; David F. Lowry; Patricia Yager; Ben Wiles

**EXCUSED:** Mark Meigher; Ryan Bailey, Assistant Corporation Counsel

**STAFF:** Rima Shamieh, Assistant Planner; Jennifer Mills, Secretary

**III. CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

None.

**IV. ADOPTION OF MEETING MINUTES**

Motion by Commissioner Wiles, seconded by Commissioner Britt, to adopt the March 14, 2016 Meeting Minutes as submitted.

*Motion carried unanimously.*

**V. NEW BUSINESS – Applications**

**A. Consideration for approval submitted by Judy and Greg Miller to replace the second story porch columns. The premise is located at 1037-1039 Gillespie Street.**

Judy Miller, owner of the property, and Chaya Tal, property manager, appeared before the Commission. Ms. Miller explained that when the contractor began work of the second-story porch he became aware that the 4x4 columns were rotted from the bottom and also needed to be replaced. She stated that he believed that the columns should match the existing first floor columns, and that he selected columns which matched the appearance of the first floor but which are constructed of Permacast Fiber-Reinforced Polymer instead of wood. Ms. Miller stated that the contractor believed that the Permacast FRP material was a better material to use in this load-bearing location. She explained that she provided a letter from a professional engineer stating that this material would be the best choice for this application, due to its ability to withstand heavy loads on the roof.

Commissioner Craven asked the applicants if they, or the contractor, contacted the City to ask about using the columns before installing them. Ms. Tal stated that they did not, because they were under the impression that if they used columns that appeared identical to those on the first floor they would not need additional approval. She stated that the contractor explained to them that he believed that the Permacast material was the best choice for this application. Commissioner Craven noted that under the guidelines that the Commission must follow the preferred option is always to repair the existing material, and the second option would be to replace in kind.

Commissioner Bennett asked the applicants if the 4x4 columns that were removed were original to the building or replacements. Ms. Shamieh pointed out that in her staff notes she provided a photo from the assessment form which dates back to the 1960s, and in that photo the columns are round, identical to the first floor, so the 4x4 columns that were recently removed were indeed replacements. Commissioner Bennett asked Ms. Shamieh how the Permacast material is regarded by SHPO and what the agency's suggested material would be in the instances where modern wood replacements would not be strong enough. Commissioner Craven stated that she is not certain that wood would not be strong enough in this case.

Commissioner Lowry stated that the engineer's letter provided by the applicant stated this. Commissioner Craven replied that she is not certain that this would be her interpretation of the letter, but rather that the engineer stated that he believed the Permacast to be a better choice than wood. Ms. Shamieh stated that she is not familiar with this specific material and thus is unsure what SHPO's opinion would be.

Commissioner Britt commented that it is difficult to judge the use of the Permacast columns against wood columns when there is so much information missing regarding the options, such as, what is the general life span and load capacity of new wood columns and how does the Permacast material compare to the other newer materials approved by SHPO. Commissioner Craven noted that these are all important questions. She stated that historic preservation is not just about visual appearance but also about preserving materials, and if wood could be used in this

case she feels that the columns should be wood. Commissioner Bennett asked the applicants about the cost of the Permacast columns as opposed to wood columns. Ms. Tal responded that the Permacast are significantly more expensive, but that they have a much longer lifespan than that of the wood. She also stated that had she realized that using the Permacast columns was not allowed she would not have installed them without seeking permission first. Commissioner Craven asked Ms. Shamieh if she has heard from any of the neighbors regarding this issue. Ms. Shamieh stated that it was a neighbor that reported the installation of the new columns, but that she had not received any other comments. Commissioner Lowry stated that he believes that the use of the Permacast columns should be allowed in this particular case, especially since once they are painted they will be indistinguishable from wood.

Commissioner Wiles noted that this application comes at a time when the Commissioners have just completed a training regarding allowing different materials within the historic districts but have yet to discuss the alternatives and agree on what they believe to be acceptable alternatives. He suggested that the Commissioners discuss a document which would give applicants acceptable alternative materials to consider when the existing material might not be the best choice, due to issues with excessive water damage, etc. Ms. Shamieh pointed out that many of these alternatives are provided within the design guidelines that the Commission follows. Commissioner Wiles agreed but explained that it would be helpful to have a document listing specific alternative materials issued by the Commission that they could provide to applicants if they need to consider these options. Commissioner Britt agreed, stating that if there are cases such as this one where new growth wood will not match the load-bearing or longevity of old growth wood painted with lead paint, the applicants need the option of alternative materials. Commissioner Craven commented that in the past the Commissioners have approved alternative materials, such as where wood cellar windows would not be the best choice due to repeated water damage, but that she feels that under the current guidelines these applicants have not demonstrated a sufficient need to use a material other than wood. She explained that she believes that the current guidelines support the use of wood in this case. Commissioner Wiles responded that in this case there is evidence that the prior wood columns failed due to repeated water damage.

Motion by Commissioner Wiles, seconded by Commissioner Lowry, to approve the application as submitted with the following condition:

1. Once commenced, the project will be completed within one year.

***Motion carried, with Commissioner Craven opposed.***

Findings:

1. This is a Type II SEQRA.

2. There has been repetitive water damage to the existing columns which justifies the use of non-wood materials in this case.

Commissioner Craven noted that she believes that historic preservation is not just about visual appearance, but also the preservation of original materials and construction practices specific to the time period of the structure.

**B. Consideration for approval submitted by John Chequer to install shutters on the side of the building. The premise is located at 10 Front Street.**

John Chequer appeared before the Commission. Mr. Chequer explained that there were originally shutters on this side of the house but they were removed. He stated that he found the original shutters in the basement, and that several are salvageable and he has been able to match them with identical new shutters. Commissioner Craven asked if the shutters are wood. Mr. Chequer confirmed that they are. He also explained that he would like to apply the shutters everywhere except the first floor windows, where they would impact his use of the driveway for parking, and that he will be using the original hardware. Commissioner Britt asked the applicant if the shutters will be the same color as those on the front of the house. Mr. Chequer confirmed that they will be. Ms. Shamieh commented that there is hardware on the front of the building that holds the shutters flat to the wall. The applicant stated that this hardware is not remaining for the side shutters, so he will be attaching them directly to the façade. The Commissioners had no other questions for Mr. Chequer regarding the application.

Motion by Commissioner Britt, seconded by Commissioner Bennett, to approve the application as submitted with the following condition:

1. Once commenced, the project will be completed within one year.

*Motion carried unanimously.*

Findings:

1. This is a Type II SEQRA.
2. There had previously been shutters on this side of the house which had been removed at some point.
3. The replacement shutters will match the existing front shutters in style and color.
4. The shutters will be restored to the top two floors (6 windows) and not the ground floor.

**C. Consideration for approval submitted by David Lefflear to replace 6 aluminum windows with wood windows and paint the building. The premise is located at 1030 Park Avenue.**

David Lefflear appeared before the Commission. He stated that he would like to replace the six existing aluminum windows of the front of the building and paint the entire structure. He explained that the windows are Pella Enduraclad pine windows, which have a recycled composite finish on the outside that is intended to help improve the longevity of the window. Commissioner Britt stated that from information she found on the website it appears to be a factory baked-on finish over an aluminum-clad wood window. Commissioner Wiles stated that he believes that the windows should be two over two pane, as is shown in the assessment picture from 1963. Commissioner Lowry asked the applicant if the neighboring houses' windows are two over two divided light. Mr. Lefflear stated that they currently are most, if not all, a single pane. Commissioner Bennett asked if the two over two windows are available. Commissioner Britt replied that they are but they are more expensive. She explained that frequently a faux divided light window is also currently used, in which case a faux mullion is installed between the two panes and two pieces of material can be snapped in over it on the inside and outside of the window, thus giving the illusion of a divided pane. She stated that this is a less expensive alternative to the real divided light panes. Commissioner Wiles stated that he believes that the divided panes are a significant historic aspect of the building and that they should be restored.

Commissioner Britt commented that she believes that the clad wood windows are the best choice, as they are wood windows but are extremely durable and long-lasting. She added that she would support requiring the faux divided light alternative. Commissioner Craven asked Mr. Lefflear if he has considered repairing the existing windows. Mr. Lefflear stated that they are only a single pane aluminum window, and that they have been broken many times and do not provide any energy efficiency. Commissioner Wiles stated that he does not believe that the faux divided light windows will be significantly more expensive. He asked the applicant if he had gotten a quote for the new windows. Mr. Lefflear stated that replacing the six windows with the Pella clad wood windows would be approximately \$5,000, including installation. Commissioner Wiles stated that he believes that the faux divided light would not be significantly more.

Commissioner Craven asked Commissioner Britt why she believes this particular wood window is an excellent choice, explaining that the Commission has not allowed this type of clad wood window in the past. Commissioner Britt explained that when she worked for an architecture firm which specialized in significant historic projects such as Mount Vernon and Monticello, this is the type of window that was frequently used. Commissioner Craven asked if she believes that the Commission should be shifting toward allowing this type of window in the future. Commissioner Britt stated that she believes that it is allowed under SHPO guidelines, and that while it is a more expensive alternative to wood it is a very good product which appears to sufficiently address the goals of historic preservation.

The discussion next turned to the repainting of the building. Mr. Lefflear explained that he would like the main body of the building to be blue, with the trim remaining white and a deep red accent color. Commissioner Yager stated that although the applicant had stated that he believed the building to date from 1894 she had research stating that it was built in 1919. She provided an example of sample colors that would have been used on a building of that time period, noting that the red is significantly more muted than the example Mr. Lefflear had provided in his application. Mr. Lefflear explained that he believed that the color looked much brighter on the screenshot provided than it does in person. He explained that it is a deeper brick red, and not the brighter cherry tone as it appears. The Commissioners agreed that the colors presented would be appropriate for the building, noting that the red should be a deeper, brick-like color.

The applicant asked the Commissioners to also consider the porch spindles that he had installed. Commissioner Britt noted that they are common stock spindles that can be found at various large retail stores, such as Home Depot. Ms. Shamieh noted that in the assessment drawing there are no spindles on the front porch. Commissioner Wiles stated that what is shown in the photo would not meet code today. Mr. Lefflear noted that if he replaced the spindles with the same ones as are used on the second floor porch they would not meet the required height either. Commissioner Britt stated that since the railing and spindles are not original to the building but are necessary now, she feels that they are acceptable as being compatible with the design of the rest of the building while not exactly replicating what is on the second story porch. Commissioner Yager asked Ms. Shamieh if the Historic District guidelines and decision would override code requirements. Ms. Shamieh stated that she does not believe that to be the case.

Motion by Commissioner Craven, seconded by Commissioner Britt, to approve the application to install new windows and repaint the building as submitted with the following conditions:

1. Once commenced, the project will be completed within one year.
2. The new windows will be two over two pane faux divided light with exterior and interior snap-on muntins. They will be the Pella Enduraclad windows presented or a window of similar style, design, and materials.
3. The red accent color on the building will be a deeper brick-like color, as opposed to a brighter cherry red.

***Motion carried, with Commissioner Craven opposed.***

Commissioner Craven noted that she is opposed to the use of the clad wood windows.

**Findings:**

1. This is a Type II SEQRA.

2. Moving forward, based on durability and the recommendations of SHPO, the Commission will consider allowing the use of clad windows. The majority of the Commissioners agreed that the use of the clad windows will be appropriate in this case, based on those recommendations.

Motion by Commissioner Craven, seconded by Commissioner Britt, to allow the applicant to leave the porch spindles as they have been installed and not require any modification.

*Motion carried unanimously.*

Findings:

1. This is a Type II SEQRA.
2. The first floor porch did not originally have spindles; however at this time they are necessary to meet code requirements. The Commissioners believe that the spindles used are not the best choice from a historic preservation perspective, but spindles matching the second-story porch would not meet code and thus would not be appropriate for this application.

Ms. Shamieh noted that there are ongoing issues with this property regarding porch decking which was not installed according to a September 2013 HDC decision. She explained that she is currently in discussion with other city staff regarding how to proceed with this issue.

**D. Consideration for approval submitted by Hermes (Bill) Del-Sette III to erect a fence and replace a window in the rear of the building with a door. The premise is located at 1156 Stratford Road.**

Hermes Del-Sette III appeared before the Commission. He explained that he would like to install a new side door and fence on the property, because he is concerned for the safety of his grandchildren. The Commissioners briefly discussed the idea of installing the door, expressing concern that it would significantly alter the façade of the building, as it would require not only installing the door but also altering the decorative wood trim. Ms. Shamieh pointed out that installing a door in the existing window opening would most likely not meet the code requirements.

Mr. Del-Sette offered an alternative solution of installing a decorative gate and a fenced walkway which would lead from the bottom of the side porch steps to the fenced side yard. Commissioner Craven noted that she does not believe fences were historically a feature in the Realty Plot, but that she would defer to the opinions of Commissioners Britt and Wiles, both residents of the neighborhood. Commissioner Britt stated that historically fences were not used, with the exception of the pipe fencing along the ravine. She noted that there have been cases where a temporary fence has been installed inside a hedge, in order to allow for children or pets' safety while having a minimal impact on the historic appearance of the

property. Commissioner Wiles commented that he does not feel that fences are appropriate in the neighborhood, but that if it were a temporary fence, or even a wood fence with a limited lifespan, he would feel comfortable considering it. He agreed that a suitable solution would be to install a decorative gate and a temporary fence, and to continue the hedge along the perimeter of the property, so as to minimize the visibility of the fence.

The Commissioners agreed that the applicant should come back with a modified application eliminating the door proposal and showing the new plan with the details of the gate, fencing, and landscaping.

Motion by Commissioner Wiles, seconded by Commissioner Lowry, to table the application for the following reasons:

1. Following a discussion with the Commissioners, the applicant has decided on an alternative proposal which would include a decorative gate, the installation of fencing, and perhaps modified landscaping.
2. The applicant will return to the Commission for consideration of the details of the new proposal.

*Motion carried unanimously.*

**E. Consideration for approval submitted by Thomas Maul to replace the roof on the main building and garage. The premise is located at 1299 Stratford Road.**

Thomas Maul appeared before the Commission. Mr. Maul explained that he proposes to replace the existing shingles on the house and garage with charcoal color architectural shingles. He explained that when he examined a portion of the current roof that had been covered and thus had not faded, it was a similar color to the one proposed. Mr. Maul stated that the copper flashing will remain as it is.

Commissioner Wiles noted that the Commission had required architectural-style shingles in the past, until about two years ago when SHPO stated that in many applications three-tab shingles would draw less attention to the fact that the roof was no longer slate. Commissioner Wiles explained that he would be comfortable allowing the applicant to decide which style of shingles to use, as long as the color matches what is proposed and the copper trim remains. The Commissioners concurred.

Motion by Commissioner Wiles, seconded by Commissioner Craven, to approve the application as submitted with the following conditions:

1. Once commenced, the project will be completed within one year.
2. The applicant may choose to use either three-tab or architectural style shingles, in the color proposed.

*Motion carried unanimously.*

Findings:

1. This is a Type II SEQRA.
2. The roof is currently covered with asphalt shingles in a similar color.
3. Both the garage and house shingles will match in style and color.

**VI. OTHER BUSINESS**

**A. Determine how to proceed with the selection of Chair and Vice Chair**

Ms. Shamieh noted that it is stated in the Commission guidelines that they must elect a Chair and Vice Chair, with term lengths determined by the Commission. She explained that when choosing candidates the Commissioners should not exclusively consider who has served the longest, but also who has the skills to effectively run the meetings and who is available to staff for consultation.

Commissioner Britt also noted that she feels that the Chair should serve as an example to the Commission by being empathetic to the concerns and challenges of the property owners. She explained that while historic preservation is obviously the first priority, there must also be consideration shown to the applicants and their unique circumstances. The discussion amongst the Commissioners leaned toward considering Commissioners Wiles and Britt for either position. Commissioner Wiles noted that he is very interested in the issue of modifying the guidelines of the Commission, and that at this time he does not feel that he could concentrate on those concerns and also be an effective Chair. Commissioner Britt noted that she would consider the position of Chair if Commissioner Wiles were to be Vice Chair.

Motion by Commissioner Craven, seconded by Commissioner Yager, to elect Commissioner Britt Chair and Commissioner Wiles Vice Chair, for a term beginning May 1, 2016 and expiring April 30, 2017, or until their terms as Commissioners expire, whichever comes first.

*Motion carried unanimously.*

**B. Consideration of draft letter to Corporation Counsel regarding zoning code revisions that pertain to the Historic Districts.**

The Commissioners discussed the revised draft letter that Ms. Shamieh had provided them and concluded that they are in favor of sending the letter with one minor revision.

Motion by Commissioner Craven, seconded by Commissioner Britt, to approve the draft with the following revision:

- The line ‘Specifically, the following have been identified:’ will be stricken and replaced with ‘The following is a sample of some of the concerns we currently have:’

*Motion carried unanimously.*

## **VII. MISCELLANEOUS**

Assistant Planner Shamieh noted that the city did not receive the NYSDEC grant for which they had applied.

Ms. Shamieh noted that the city is in the process of drafting a contract to secure a consultant for the Union Triangle and Morris Avenue projects.

The Commissioners discussed the Staff Notes provided by Ms. Shamieh and stated that they are very helpful in considering the applications. Ms. Shamieh stated that while they are a significant amount of work to prepare she will continue providing them as long as they remain helpful.

Ms. Shamieh noted that this month’s packets were distributed to the Commissioners later than usual and apologized for the tardiness. The Commissioners briefly discussed when they would prefer to receive their materials, and the majority opinion was that it is helpful to have two weekends before the meeting to consider the applications and visit the properties.

As mentioned earlier in the meeting, Commissioner Wiles noted that he believes that it would be helpful for staff to compose a document offering alternative materials that applicants might consider in special circumstances, and that would be acceptable under SHPO and HDC guidelines and practices. He suggested a document that would memorialize the developing consensus about materials by first explaining what has been approved to this point and then stating that new materials have been developed that may also be acceptable in certain cases, and providing specific examples of those materials. Ms. Shamieh noted that this idea has been on the staff priority list, but that Article X revisions are the highest priority so a project like this won't get addressed until the revisions are dealt with.

## **VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

Motion by Commissioner Craven, seconded by Commissioner Lowry, to adjourn the meeting.

*Motion carried unanimously.*

The meeting was adjourned at 9:25 pm.