



Schenectady Historic District Commission

**Meeting Minutes
May 16, 2016**

I. CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Wiles called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM.

Commissioner Wiles noted that because Commissioner Britt was excused he would be chairing the meeting.

II. ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Ben Wiles, Vice Chair; Dr. Dean Bennett; Jackie Craven; David F. Lowry; Mark Meigher; Patricia Yager

EXCUSED: Carrie Britt-Narcavage, Chair

STAFF: Rima Shamieh, Assistant Planner; Ryan Bailey, Assistant Corporation Counsel; Jennifer Mills, Secretary

III. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Commissioner Lowry noted that he would be recusing himself from the discussion and vote on New Applications Item D, 1174 Lowell Road, because he has a personal friendship with the applicants.

IV. ADOPTION OF MEETING MINUTES

Motion by Commissioner Craven, seconded by Commissioner Yager, to adopt the April 18, 2016 Meeting Minutes as submitted.

Motion carried unanimously, with Commissioner Bennett absent for the vote.

Commissioner Wiles noted that he would be changing the agenda slightly in order to consider all of the applications prior to any discussion of other business.

V. NEW BUSINESS – Applications

A. Consideration for approval submitted by Kevin Decker to remove a tree and revisit the landscape plan that was submitted for the November 2015 meeting. The premise is located at 109 Union Street.

Vernon Decker, Kevin Decker's father, appeared before the Commission on his behalf. Mr. Decker explained that the applicant would like to remove a tree on the property. He explained that the tree was severely damaged in a storm last year and that the remaining half of the trunk is rotted and in danger of falling down. He

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stated that he also had submitted information for the Commission's approval regarding the variety of hydrangeas to be planted in the hedge, which was requested in the decision of November 2015, and also was seeking reconsideration of the plum trees being allowed, since the ban on planting plum trees has been lifted.

Commissioner Wiles asked Mr. Decker to identify on the property diagram where the damaged tree is located. Mr. Decker indicated that it is at the back corner of the property. Commissioner Wiles asked if the applicant has any plans to replace the tree. Mr. Decker responded that he does not plan to unless the Commissioners request it, since he will have removed a total of three damaged trees from the property but will be planting four new trees, thus having a net gain of one tree.

Commissioner Wiles asked what type of hydrangeas the applicant had chosen to plant for the hedge. Mr. Decker indicated that they are proposing to plant *Hydrangea Paniculata*, which has the trade name "Limelight". He presented the Commissioners with a detail sheet on the plant with a photograph of what a mature hedge would look like.

Commissioner Wiles asked Mr. Decker to further explain the portion of the application concerning the plum trees. Mr. Decker stated that in light of the recent lifting of the ban on the planting of plum trees the applicant would like the use of this tree, which the Commissioners had not approved in November 2015, to be reconsidered. He noted that in the application packet they had provided information regarding the Governor's lifting of the ban on new plantings. Commissioner Yager noted that she had further researched the issue and spoken with her contact at the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets. She stated that the department is currently seeking funding for a study to analyze the problem, which is still an issue in the southern tier of New York. Commissioner Yager explained that her contact person at the department stated that the planting of plum trees in our area is now considered safe, as long as the trees are not sourced from a quarantined area. Commissioner Yager provided Mr. Decker with the contact information for the department.

Commissioner Craven asked where the plum trees will be located. Mr. Decker explained that they will be planted parallel to the driveway. Commissioner Bennett noted that the trees would have very limited visibility from the street. Mr. Decker agreed. Commissioner Bennett asked if the purpose of the hydrangea hedge is to create a visual buffer for the property. Mr. Decker confirmed that it is.

Motion by Commissioner Wiles, seconded by Commissioner Craven, to approve as submitted the application to complete the landscaping on the property that was originally considered by the Historic District Commission at the November 2015 as summarized below:

1. The failing tree will be removed from the property. The Commissioners concurred that it has been damaged to the point of no longer being viable.

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2. The hydrangea hedge will be composed of Hydrangea Paniculata, trade variety – Proven Winners “Limelight.”
3. The four plum trees which were previously not approved by the Commission at the November 2015 meeting are now approved, due to the change in status of the plum pox in the area.

And 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. Because four new trees will be planted on the site, and a total of three have been removed, there will be a net gain of one new tree on the property.

B. Consideration for approval submitted by the Unitarian Universalist Society to replace two signs and install one new sign. The premises are located at 1221 Wendell Avenue and 1248 Wendell Avenue.

Tom Wheeler of AJ Sign Company appeared before the Commission. Mr. Wheeler explained that the applicants would like to replace the existing wall sign attached to the church building, replace the small monument sign that was removed prior to the reconstruction of the fountains in front of the building, and add a small sign at Waters House, the church education building which is located across Wendell Avenue. He stated that the wall sign will be lit by existing lighting on the building, the monument sign in front of the church will be lit from the ground, and the sign at the education building would also be lit from the ground, if the applicants decide to light it at all.

Commissioner Yager asked Mr. Wheeler where the monument sign on the church property will be located, and if the letters on the building sign will be raised. Mr. Wheeler stated that the monument sign will be to the left of the fountains (when facing the building) near the small landscaped area, and that the letters will be raised approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch. Commissioner Wiles asked if the monument sign will be perpendicular to the building and if it will be the same on both sides, with both sides having changeable panels. Mr. Wheeler stated that it would be. Commissioner Yager noted that the sign should not be placed so as to obstruct the view of drivers exiting the parking area. Mr. Wheeler stated that it would not be in the line of site. Commissioner Craven asked for further details regarding the materials of the monument sign. Mr. Wheeler explained that the sign will have an aluminum base with acrylic letters, and the aluminum portions of the sign will be painted satin white. He stated that the letters on the sign will be attached with

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extremely strong tape and will not be able to be removed and thus easily vandalized.

Commissioner Craven asked Mr. Wheeler if the sign on the building was original to the building or a later addition. The applicant stated that he does not know, but that the sign clearly can be removed. Commissioner Craven asked how the new sign will be attached. Mr. Wheeler explained that it will be screwed to the wall studs and also attached with epoxy. Commissioner Lowry asked if the new wall sign will be the same materials as the existing sign. Mr. Wheeler stated that the new sign will be aluminum with acrylic letters, while the existing sign is all metal, but the difference will not be discernible to the eye.

Commissioner Wiles asked Mr. Wheeler if there is currently a sign at Waters House. Mr. Wheeler responded that there is not. Commissioner Wiles asked Mr. Wheeler why the monument sign is proposed as opposed to a small sign on the building. Mr. Wheeler stated that the sign was designed and placed for visibility reasons, so that it will clearly identify the building from the street. He explained that the lot is heavily treed and the applicants believe that the proposed placement will be as unobtrusive as possible while still helping visitors find the building. Commissioner Wiles stated that he is skeptical that any sign for Waters House is necessary. He explained that the difficulty with putting a sign there is that the sign instantly communicates that the building is not a residence. Commissioner Yager asked Mr. Wheeler if classes are held in the building. Mr. Wheeler confirmed that they are, and thus the applicants feel that the building needs to be clearly identified.

The discussion next returned to the wall sign on the church building. Commissioner Wiles asked Mr. Wheeler if they believe that there is a similar stone treatment behind the wall sign as is on the rest of the wall. Mr. Wheeler stated that he believes that there is. Commissioner Craven noted that she is concerned that the current sign can be removed without damaging the structure and finish behind and surrounding it. Mr. Wheeler stated that most likely there are anchors behind the sign and it can be fairly easily detached from them. Assistant Planner Shamieh asked Mr. Wheeler how the sign can be removed if it is attached with silicone. Mr. Wheeler stated that in that case the practice is to use piano wire to slide behind the sign and sever the joint. Commissioner Yager asked the applicant if it is possible that the new wall sign could be mounted over the existing sign. Mr. Wheeler stated that it most likely could but that it would have to be drilled into the existing sign and it would protrude more from the wall. He noted that he is confident that the new sign can be attached using the existing anchors, or through the use of mortar joints, so as to virtually eliminate the chance of damaging the wall.

Motion by Commissioner Craven, seconded by Commissioner Lowry, to approve as submitted the application to install three signs as summarized below:

1. A monument sign of the materials and dimensions noted on the application will be installed in front of the church.

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2. A wall sign of the dimensions and materials noted in the application will be installed on the church building where the old sign will be removed.
3. A lawn sign of the dimensions, materials, and location noted in the application will be installed at Waters House.

And with the following conditions:

1. Once commenced, the project will be completed within one year.
2. The wall sign will be attached using the existing anchor locations or the mortar joints so as to avoid damaging the façade of the building.

Motion carried unanimously.

Findings:

1. This is a Type II SEQRA.
2. The signs at the church site are being changed at this time due to the change in name of the church.
3. The lawn sign is being added to Waters House to improve visibility and facilitate visitors identifying the building.

The Commissioners briefly discussed an amendment to the previous motion which would remove the lawn sign at Waters House from the approval. Commissioner Wiles stated that the other two signs are replacing existing signs, but the addition of the lawn sign at Waters House is a new sign being introduced. He stated that he could support a small building sign identifying the building but that he has not been convinced that a lawn sign directing visitors to the building is necessary.

Commissioner Wiles added that he believes that the addition of the lawn sign results in the loss of the Waters House property feeling like a residence, and thus interrupts the residential feel of the street. Commissioner Bennett asked what criteria in the guidelines Commissioner Wiles would use to support his position. Commissioner Wiles stated that the sign would be introducing a new element and material to the property. Commissioner Bennett commented that he believes that the sign could be considered a temporary structure, and that he does not feel that a sign on the house would provide adequate visibility. Commissioner Lowry stated that he does not feel that the lawn sign is obtrusive, and that he believes it blends well with the property.

Motion by Commissioner Wiles, seconded by Commissioner Craven, to remove the Waters House sign from the application because it is unnecessary and negatively impacts the residential feel of the property.

Motion did not pass, with Commissioners Wiles and Meigher voting in support of the amendment and Commissioners Bennett, Craven, Lowry, and Yager opposed.

C. Consideration for approval submitted by Jeff and Diane Moore to paint the building. The premise is located at 132 N College Street.

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Jeff Moore appeared before the Commission. He explained that the exterior surfaces of the house are brick, clapboard, and masonry, and that they would like to paint the siding and masonry one uniform color to help it blend better visually. He stated that they are not proposing to paint the brick surface.

Commissioner Wiles asked Mr. Moore what color the trim will be painted. Mr. Moore stated that he would like it to be white. He also explained that they have not yet decided whether to paint the garage door green or white. The Commissioners agreed that they would be willing to leave it up to the applicants as to which color they would like to use. Mr. Moore stated that the doors will be black. Commissioner Meigher asked what material the siding is. Mr. Moore replied that it is wood clapboard.

Motion by Commissioner Bennett, seconded by Commissioner Yager, to approve as submitted the application to paint the house as summarized below:

1. The siding and garage door will be painted Valspar Lincoln Cottage Lattice Green.
2. The masonry walls will be painted Valspar Lincoln Cottage Lattice Green.
3. The front and rear entry doors will be painted black.
4. The window trim will be painted white.

And with the following conditions:

1. Once commenced, the project will be completed within one year.
2. As discussed at the meeting, the applicants may decide whether to paint the garage door and corner trim white or Valspar Lincoln Cottage Lattice Green. Either color is approved.
3. Painting any of the brick is not approved.

Motion carried unanimously.

Findings:

1. This is a Type II SEQRA.

D. Consideration for approval submitted by Michael J. Barron and John R. Allen to install a fence and replace the carriage house roof. The premise is located at 1174 Lowell Road.

Michael J. Barron and John R. Allen appeared before the Commission. Mr. Barron explained that they would like to install new cedar fencing at the rear of their property along the alleyway, where there is currently a four foot high chain link fence. He stated that they wish to install the same cedar fence along the south side of the property, and that the cedar fence is called a “Good Neighbor” fence because it is finished on both sides. Mr. Allen added that along the property line on the south side of the property there is currently a stockade fence. Commissioner Wiles

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asked the applicants if they plan to paint the cedar fence. The applicants responded that would like to let it weather to gray.

Mr. Barron explained that they plan to install the aluminum fence along the west side of the yard to the rear corner of the house, and along the north side of the backyard to the carriage house, with a gate on that side. Commissioner Wiles noted that the picket gate and the current fence at the rear of the property are now only slightly visible from the street, but the new fence will be higher at six feet and thus will be more visible. Commissioner Yager commented that the new fence may be less visible because it is natural wood. Commissioner Craven stated that she believes that the natural cedar fence will be less obtrusive to the eye, thus in keeping with the goal of maintaining broad visual vistas within the realty plot. Commissioner Wiles encouraged the applicants to have a gate on the alleyway that looks like a gate, so as to lessen the impact of the broad six-foot fence stretching impenetrably across the rear of the property.

The discussion next turned to the roof of the carriage house. Mr. Barron explained that the previous owner of the property replaced the roof of the main house seven years ago and that there was a bundle of shingles stored in the basement that they were able to match for the new shingles on the carriage house. He noted that the only difference in the new shingles is that at the time the shingles were put on the house they were a guaranteed thirty-year life shingle, while the newer shingles have a lifetime guarantee. Mr. Allen noted that the color will exactly match the color on the main house roof, as will the new red drip edge.

Motion by Commissioner Wiles, seconded by Commissioner Meigher, to approve as submitted the application to install the fences and replace the roof on the carriage house as summarized below:

1. A six-foot cedar “Good Neighbor” fence with a gate will be installed at the rear of the property along the alleyway. The cedar fence will also be installed along the south side of the rear yard.
2. The black aluminum fence matching the Specrail “Berkshire” design submitted will be installed along the western boundary of the rear yard to the house and from the house to the carriage house on the north side of the backyard. A gate will be installed on the north side to allow access to the backyard area.
3. The roof on the carriage house will be replaced with shingles similar in style and color to the main house. The drip edge will be red.

And with the following condition:

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

Motion carried unanimously, with Commissioner Lowry recusing himself from the vote.

APPROVED

Findings:

1. This is a Type II SEQRA.
2. A large portion of the new fencing to be installed is replacing an existing fence.
3. The shingles on the carriage house will be identical in style and color to those installed on the main house seven years ago.
4. The red drip edge to be installed will match the drip edge on the main house.

VI. OLD BUSINESS – Applications

A. Consideration for approval submitted by Hermes (Bill) Del-Sette III to erect a fence and modify the landscaping. The premise is located at 1156 Stratford Road.

Commissioner Wiles explained that the applicant had requested to be added to the agenda after the original agenda was set and after the meeting materials were disseminated. Commissioner Wiles noted that he agreed to hear the application, but that if the Commissioners felt that they needed more time to consider the proposal the applicant understood that the application may be tabled.

Joy Del-Sette appeared before the Commission. She explained that following the discussion at the April meeting she and her husband decided to modify the proposal to include a fence from the side of the house around the rear to the garage and from the front corner of the garage to the rear of the house. She noted that the existing shrubbery will be extended along the outer perimeter of the fence so as to buffer its visibility from the right of way. Mrs. Del-Sette stated that at the rear of the property they plan to integrate the existing magnolia tree and shrubbery into the new hedge. She noted that the proposal includes two wooden gates in the fence which they would eventually like to replace with more ornate iron gates to match the style of the house, however they believe that the gates will take some time to design and manufacture and they do not wish to wait that long to install the fence.

Commissioner Yager commented that of the two styles of fencing presented she prefers the Pittsfield style. The other Commissioners concurred. Commissioner Craven noted that she is concerned about the style and six-foot height of the proposed fence, as it was her belief that at the last meeting a more open type of fence design had been discussed. She explained that she feels that this fence creates a definite wall-like effect. Commissioner Bennett agreed, stating that he had envisioned that more of a picket-style fence would be used. Ms. Shamieh noted that this proposed fence will definitely leave the house considerably less visible from the road. Mrs. Del-Sette stated that the house sits up fairly high on the property so she does not believe that the height would be a problem, but she noted

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that they would be willing to use a four-foot fence if necessary. Commissioner Wiles stated that the portion of the fence from the rear of the house to the garage is proposed at four feet and he would prefer if the entire fence was that height. Commissioner Craven reviewed a section of the Secretary of the Interior's guidelines regarding fences, which supported her position that a lower fence would be more appropriate. Commissioner Bennett stated that he would also support the use of the lower four-foot fence. Commissioner Wiles noted that he believes that it should be left up to the applicants how they wish to plant the outside of the fence by the driveway portion and at the rear of the yard.

Commissioner Yager asked Mrs. Del-Sette if they plan to stain the fence. Mrs. Del-Sette responded that she would prefer to stain it a deep brown to match the house, but would wait to do so if it is necessary to let the wood dry out. Commissioner Wiles noted that it is usually advisable to wait a year before staining the fence. Commissioner Wiles asked the Commissioners if they were comfortable moving forward with a vote on the application. The Commissioners agreed that they were.

Motion by Commissioner Wiles, seconded by Commissioner Yager, to approve as submitted the application to install the fence and two gates as summarized below:

1. The fence will be a cedar fence, four feet tall, in the Pittsfield style as submitted at the meeting.
2. As per the diagram submitted at the meeting, the fence will extend from the side porch, along the Rugby Road perimeter of the property, and across the back of the lot to the garage, with a second section from the front of the garage to the rear of the house.
3. If the applicant would like to stain the fence it may be stained to match the dark brown color of the trim on the house.
4. There will be two gates in the fence, located according to the placement on the diagram submitted. The gates will be wooden in nature.
5. The proposal extends the shrubbery currently planted along the perimeter to cover the entire Rugby Road and Stratford Road sides of the fence. The applicant will work with the rear neighbor as necessary to decide on the plantings for the rear section of the fence.

And with the following conditions:

1. Once commenced, the project will be completed within one year.
2. If in the future the applicants wish to install new gates of a different style or material they will return to the Commission for further review.

Motion carried unanimously.

Findings:

1. This is a Type II SEQRA.

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2. The final design is the result of a constructive discussion with the applicants at the April and May meetings.
3. The views of the house on the property will be maintained after the installation of the fence.
4. The approved proposal better reflects the goals of the Secretary of the Interior's guidelines than the original proposal submitted for the April 2015 meeting.

Motion carried unanimously.

VII. OTHER BUSINESS

Prior to beginning the consideration of other business Commissioner Wiles noted that at the beginning of the meeting Gloria Kishton of the Schenectady Heritage Foundation had asked if she could address the Commission with a few announcements. At that time he had told her that she could do so during this portion of the meeting, but she chose not to stay. He noted that one of the topics she had mentioned was the Preservation Awards, but she did not mention what the other issue was.

A. Consultation with Tony Ward to discuss the roofing materials and gutters in preparation for an application. The premise is located at 508 Union Street.

Tony Ward appeared before the Commission. He explained that he is in the process of buying this property from the city, and expects to be closing very shortly. He stated that he is ready to submit an application to the Commission for next month but wanted some feedback regarding the materials that the Commission would prefer to see on the roof. Mr. Ward explained that the roof is currently covered with three different materials, metal, asphalt shingles, and old asbestos, and that he would prefer to use one material, preferably a membrane application, on the entire roof. The Commissioners discussed the different materials and agreed that this seemed like the best solution. They also noted that very little of the roof is visible from the street, and then only from a vantage point almost a block away.

Mr. Ward also explained that he will be repairing the windows and brick on the site, and installing new gutters. Commissioner Wiles stated that he would prefer to see copper gutters, as copper would have been the original material used. The other Commissioners concurred. Mr. Ward stated that he believes copper would be difficult to maintain due to people trying to steal it.

Mr. Ward and the Commissioners briefly discussed the history of the building and the interior and exterior features. Mr. Ward stated that he would be submitting his application for consideration at the June meeting.

B. Discussion of Commission decision-making procedures based on information provided by SHPO.

The Commissioners discussed the staff notes disseminated by Ms. Shamieh which summarized recommendations made by Julian Adams at the SHPO training on March 31, 2016 regarding best practices for crafting and writing the Commission decisions.

Ms. Shamieh stated that the goal should be to have the decisions be more clear as to what is approved and why. She explained that when the decision simply states that the application is approved as submitted it becomes more difficult for staff to follow-up and for the applicant to follow the decision without having to look up further information either from referencing back to the original application or the Meeting Minutes. She stated that it would be easier if the decisions clearly state in detail exactly what is approved.

Commissioner Bennett commented that this method would seem to be a very large burden on staff. Commissioner Wiles stated that he believes that there should be a certain framework followed at the meeting as the decisions are made, which has not always been followed consistently in the past. He explained that he believes these steps should encompass the following:

- Determine whether the application is complete and sufficient for consideration for a decision.
- Describe the project.
- Call out any issues that required discussion.
- Explain how the issues were resolved (through conditions, etc.).
- Results of the vote on the decision with any supporting statements that the Commissioners would like to make for the record.

The Commissioners agreed that following guidelines such as these would be helpful in meeting the recommendations of SHPO.

VIII. MISCELLANEOUS

The Commissioners and Assistant Planner Shamieh briefly discussed the question of when to ask applicants to appear before the Commission or rely on staff review in cases where restoration work is in kind and new materials will not be introduced. Ms. Shamieh gave the example of 508 Union Street, where most of the work except for the roof and gutters will be in kind replacement, but still encompasses a very extensive historic restoration project. She stated that she believes that there should be some oversight of the methods of the work being done, even if there are no new materials. Commissioner Wiles stated that he does not believe that it is within the Commission's jurisdiction to coach applicants as to which methods they choose to use. Ms. Shamieh responded that the guidelines followed by the Commission have many references to methods. Commissioner Wiles agreed that methods are an important policy objective

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but argued that there are other ways to enforce that the proper methods are being used. He stated that if the project is not within the purview of the Commission it should be under the oversight of other City departments, who would then judge whether or not the proper methods are used, and enforce that they are. Commissioner Craven noted that a large portion of the process and methods of historic restoration is tied to the materials used, and thus would fall under the purview of the Commission. Ms. Shamieh noted that in that case the brick restoration on 508 Union Street would be under the purview of the Commission. Commissioner Craven agreed, stating that it would be the Commission's responsibility to make sure that the correct mortar and other restoration materials are used.

Commissioner Wiles noted that the Commission's letter to Corporation Counsel was on the Planning Commission agenda for consideration at their May meeting. Ms. Shamieh explained that the Planning Commission was copied on the letter and may make a recommendation in support of the letter to the City Council, as is their option when any changes to the zoning code are considered.

Due to the late hour the Commissioners decided to put off any detailed discussion of the Model Landmarks Preservation Local Law for New York State Municipalities that was disseminated by Assistant Planner Shamieh. Commissioner Bennett asked if Schenectady's code is different than the model. Ms. Shamieh stated that it is very different. Commissioner Craven raised the issue of buildings that are allowed to fall into such a state of disrepair that they are dangerous and need to be taken down. She stated that there is currently a carriage house on Union Street that appears to be likely to fall down at any time. Ms. Shamieh stated that this is a zoning violation and is handled by the Zoning Officer. She stated that as she had previously recommended the Commissioners might want to consider drafting a letter to Jackie Mancini, Director of the Department of Development, regarding enforcement problems. Commissioner Yager noted that on the City website there is now a place to communicate specific property concerns. She stated that she had entered a complaint about a property and city staff followed up and reported the outcome back to her.

Assistant Planner Shamieh noted the Federal and New York State Historic Preservation Tax Credit Programs Workshop on Monday June 20, 2016 and urged the Commissioners to attend if at all possible.

The Commissioners briefly discussed the Zoning Code revisions that addressed local landmarks and how they could affect these structures that do not fall within historic districts, such as City Hall. The Commissioners agreed to continue the discussion at a future meeting.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

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

APPROVED

Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:43 pm.