



Schenectady Historic District Commission

**Meeting Minutes
January 24, 2019**

I. CALL TO ORDER

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

II. ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Patricia Yager, Chair; Ben Wiles, Vice Chair; Shaun Andriano; Dr. Dean Bennett; Frank Gilmore; Christopher Marney

STAFF: Avi Epstein, Zoning Officer; Jennifer Mills, Secretary

III. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

IV. ADOPTION OF MEETING MINUTES

Motion by Commissioner Wiles, seconded by Commissioner Andriano, to approve the December 20, 2018 Meeting Minutes as submitted.

Motion carried unanimously.

V. NEW BUSINESS - APPLICATIONS

A. Consideration for approval submitted by Beverly Elander to install a furnace exhaust cap on the west side of the building. The premises are located at 227 Green Street in the Stockade Historic District.

John Medeiros appeared before the Commission on behalf of Ms. Elander.

Mr. Medeiros explained that Ms. Elander is replacing the furnace, which is over forty years old and near the end of its life span, and instead of using a chimney the new furnace only requires a small vent to the exterior of the house. He stated that the photo that was submitted after the initial application shows what the actual equipment will look like. He noted that there is already a small dryer vent on that side of the building which measures approximately 7" x 7", and the new vent will be only slightly larger at 9 inches. Mr. Medeiros explained that the vent will be located approximately forty feet back from the front corner of the house.

Commissioner Yager commented that there is currently a hose reel on that side of the house as well. Commissioner Marney stated that the vent will be almost invisible from the street. Commissioner Wiles asked if the vent cap can be painted.

Mr. Medeiros stated that he believes that it can be. Commissioner Yager explained that the Commission has been asking homeowners in the Stockade who are installing new gas service vents to paint them the same color as the exterior of the building, so they are less noticeable. She stated that it would be helpful if the same could be done in this situation. Mr. Medeiros stated that he would have no objection to painting the vent to match the house, or perhaps choosing a vent in that color if one is available.

Commissioner Gilmore commended that applicant for taking the time to come before the Commission and seek approval when many homeowners would not have bothered to make an application with an issue such as this one. Commissioner Yager asked if Mr. Medeiros could minimize the number of bricks disturbed by the vent installation. Mr. Medeiros stated that he is sure that the installers can be very precise with their cuts. Commissioner Bennett explained that if possible, it would be best to cut into two or three bricks instead of four or six. Mr. Medeiros stated that he did not object to asking the installers to do this.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

RESOLUTION

Motion by Commissioner Wiles, seconded by Commissioner Gilmore, to approve as submitted the application to install a furnace exhaust cap on the west side of the building, with the following condition:

1. The project will be completed within one year.

And with the following findings of fact:

1. This is a Type II SEQRA.
2. The Commission requests that the applicant make her best effort to acquire the cap in the same color as the brick exterior or paint the cap to match the brick.
3. The Commission requests that the applicant make every effort to minimize the number of bricks disturbed by the installation of the equipment.

Motion carried unanimously.

- B. Consideration for approval submitted by Haley Priebe to repair/replace portions of the existing upper and lower roof, repoint the chimney, and install new flashing and a white drip edge. The premises are located at 32 North Ferry Street in the Stockade Historic District.**

Haley Priebe appeared before the Commission.

Ms. Priebe explained that there are several different portions of the roof, all of which require repair or replacement. She stated that the upper pitched portion of the roof, which is currently shingled, must be completely replaced. She presented a sample of the Owens Corning Architectural Shingles in Estate Gray that she would like to use for the upper roof. Ms. Priebe added that the upper flat portion of the roof is in decent shape and only needs to be resealed, but the lower flat roof must be completely replaced. She stated that at this time the roofing contractor has not proposed what type of flashing will be used, because he believes that the current roof must be removed first to determine the current conditions, but she explained that she would prefer an invisible flashing if possible.

Commissioner Yager noted that in the pictures submitted there is a piece of trim on the roofline that is damaged and needs to be replaced. Ms. Priebe stated that she plans to return at a later date with plans for exterior improvements to the building, so the trim might be only temporarily repaired until she does so. She noted that fixing the roof is her first priority so that there is no additional water damage to the interior of the building.

Commissioner Gilmore asked if she had visited the Schenectady County Historical Society to look for old photos of the building. Ms. Priebe stated that she had, and using her phone showed the Commissioners an example of one she had found. She explained that she is hoping to bring the exterior of the building back to look more like it did in the historical photo. Commissioner Marney asked what her eventual plans are for the building. Ms. Priebe stated that she would like to use the ground floor space for a grocery and café, as it has been when it was Arthur's Market, and that there are two residential rental units upstairs that she plans to renovate and eventually rent. Commissioner Wiles asked if she had considered seeking out historic tax credits. Ms. Priebe stated that she is currently investigating the program.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

RESOLUTION

Motion by Commissioner Marney, seconded by Commissioner Andriano, to approve as submitted the application to repair/replace portions of the existing upper and lower roof, repoint the chimney, and install new flashing and a white drip edge, with the following condition:

1. The project will be completed within one year.

And with the following findings of fact:

1. This is a Type II SEQRA.

Motion carried unanimously.

C. Consideration for approval submitted by Andrew Martin to replace damaged asbestos shingles on the 3rd floor cupola and dormer with cement board and repaint the dormer. The premises are located at 852 Union Street in the Union Street Historic District.

Andrew Martin appeared before the Commission.

Mr. Martin stated that he is the property manager and contractor overseeing work on the property. He explained that prior to his tenure there was a small fire on the third floor of the building which damaged the asbestos siding on the third-floor cupola. He stated that all the asbestos siding must be removed, and he is proposing to replace it with a composite siding material, which he presented a sample of. He added that eventually the owners would like to install the new siding on the rest of the building so it will all be the same material.

Commissioner Gilmore asked if Mr. Martin knows what material is under the asbestos siding. Mr. Martin stated that he does not. Mr. Gilmore stated that from the design of the cupola it appears that it was most likely originally sided with individual wood shingles, which most likely can be easily repaired and repainted if they are still under the siding. Mr. Martin stated that he does not believe the owners would object to saving the original wood if possible, as the removal of the asbestos is very expensive and the new siding would most likely cost significantly more than repairing wood shingles, if they are still there.

Commissioner Yager asked what the plan is for the dormer. Mr. Martin stated that at this time they propose to replace the glass in the window and repaint it in kind when the weather allows. He added that he plans to return to the Commission in the spring with plans for the rest of the exterior of the building. Commissioner Yager asked if he would prefer tabling the application. Mr. Martin stated that he would like permission to remove the existing asbestos siding so that he can see what is underneath before he returns to the Commission with an amended proposal. Commissioner Yager expressed her concern that if the siding is removed whatever is underneath will be left exposed to the elements. Mr. Martin stated that the asbestos removal contractor will wrap the surface in plastic so that it is not exposed.

Commissioner Marney noted that the preservation guidelines give some flexibility in this case since it is clear that the asbestos siding was not original to the building, so options to either restore the original siding or use something that resembles the asbestos might both be acceptable. Mr. Martin noted that the composite siding product also comes in shingle styles.

Commissioner Marney asked if Mr. Martin proposes any changes to the third-floor windows on the cupola. Mr. Martin stated that he does not; he explained that it

appears that there were never windows in the openings, and it was always a semi-open porch. Commissioner Yager asked what color Mr. Martin is proposing if the new siding were to be used. Mr. Martin stated that the existing siding is a very faded gray that has several different shades, so he would most likely propose one of the available gray tones. Commissioner Gilmore stated that the building was most likely originally painted with warmer colors, as was most often the case with Victorian shingle-style homes. Commissioner Wiles asked if Mr. Martin is aware of examples of buildings in the City where a composite siding like the one being proposed had been used. Mr. Martin stated that he is not. Commissioner Andriano stated that he would be more inclined to accept a cement board siding material rather than the proposed composite material.

Commissioner Gilmore asked Mr. Martin to take photos of the cupola once the asbestos siding is removed, so that the Commission can see what the existing materials are and what condition they are in. Mr. Martin stated that he would do so.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

RESOLUTION

Motion by Commissioner Marney, seconded by Commissioner Andriano, to approve the removal of the asbestos shingles to allow the applicant to see what material underneath is, with the following conditions:

1. The project will be completed within one year.
2. The applicant will return to the Commission with photos of what is under the existing asbestos shingles.
3. The applicant will not proceed with the installation of any new materials without returning to the Commission for approval of the materials.

And with the following findings of fact:

1. This is a Type II SEQRA.

Motion carried unanimously.

D. Consideration for approval submitted by Robert Woods to install cement board siding on the eastern-facing façade, and PVC trim around the windows. The premises are located at 32 Front Street in the Stockade Historic District.

Robert Woods appeared before the Commission.

Mr. Woods stated that he is seeking permission to install cement board siding on a portion of the eastern façade of the house, some of which has already been installed,

and PVC trim around the windows, which were approved by the Commission in December 2018. He presented samples of the PVC material and reviewed the window drawings included in the application. Mr. Woods stated that because the wall of the house is out of plumb, he believes that this is a unique situation that requires a siding that will not quickly deteriorate due to splashing water, as wood siding would do.

Commissioner Yager presented information she had researched regarding the development and use of novelty siding. She explained that it is also known as Dutch siding and began gaining popularity in the 1880s, but is still produced today in pine, red cedar, and cypress. She added that some of the new woods have been proven to be quite durable. Commissioner Marney referenced the standard that explains that any changes to a property that are historic in their own right should be retained and preserved. He stated that because the novelty siding was most likely installed over 100 years ago, as the applicant states most likely around 1910, it could be argued that it is a significant historic feature of the building.

Mr. Woods stated that the front section of the house was built in 1703, the middle portion in 1840, and the rear portion in 1910. He noted that the front portion of the house never had novelty siding, and that the novelty siding on the rear of the building was extremely deteriorated and repaired numerous times with wood putty and paint. Mr. Woods explained that in 1867 John Teller renovated the house and added the brick and Italianate details to the front façade, while the work on the side façade was done later. He stated that he is very concerned that the side of the house is not plumb and is very susceptible to water damage. He added that he believes that there is some freedom and flexibility with how the standards can be interpreted, and that he has put countless hours of sweat equity into this property and others in the Stockade over the last forty years.

Commissioner Yager stated that the Commission can only consider the property that is in front of them and added that their decisions are not arbitrary. Mr. Woods stated that he believes that what he is proposing is in the best interest of preserving the property. Commissioner Marney stated that the application does not include any visual evidence that the existing siding is irreparable. Commissioner Bennett stated that he has no objection to the cement board siding. Commissioner Wiles stated that in his mind there are several questions that need to be answered regarding the application: first, is the novelty siding an historical feature, second, what will the replacement siding look like on the building, and third, is the cement board siding an acceptable material for this application. Commissioner Wiles stated that in his many years on the Commission he does not remember approving cement board siding, except in one unique case. Commissioner Yager stated that to her recollection the Commission had approved cement board siding in a case where it was not visible from the street and was also susceptible to water damage.

Commissioner Bennett stated that the wood siding would rot in a few years. Mr. Woods stated that new growth wood does not last anywhere near as long as old-growth wood does. Commissioner Gilmore asked if Mr. Woods has considered using cedar siding. Mr. Woods stated that he does not believe it would be a practical alternative in this situation as it is at least three times the cost of the cement board. Commissioner Yager stated that the Commission is not allowed to consider financial concerns. Commissioner Andriano stated that he has reservations about the use of cement board siding in an application where water is a concern, as cement board is not intended for applications like this.

Commissioner Gilmore stated that there have been applications and circumstances where SHPO has supported the use of new materials when it is clear that they would be more durable and would not differ in appearance from the more traditional materials. Mr. Woods stated that he believes that this is an exceptional situation, since the wall is not plumb and is susceptible to more water damage. Commissioner Wiles stated that if the Commission were to approve the cement board it would have to be because this is a unique situation where other more traditional materials are not a viable option. Mr. Woods stated that he believes that the cement board would be a much more suitable alternative than wood siding.

Commissioner Yager referenced the application worksheet and stated that she does not feel that the Commission can justify approving the removal of a material that has been on the house for over 100 years in order to install a new material. Commissioner Gilmore stated that Mr. Woods states that the existing siding is deteriorated to the point that it can no longer be repaired. Commissioner Marney stated that Mr. Woods has stated this but has provided no visual evidence in his application. Commissioner Yager agreed. Commissioner Bennett stated that he is willing to take Mr. Woods statement as enough evidence to justify the removal of the novelty siding.

Mr. Woods stated that the front of the house was originally beadboard plank siding which was covered over in 1910. Commissioner Yager stated that the novelty siding is over 100 years old. Commissioner Bennett stated that it is within the Commission's discretion to determine that the historical point of reference does not have to be 1910, but rather could be 1840. Mr. Woods stated that he believes that the Commissioners are being petty and arbitrary in saying that the novelty siding is the most important historical siding on the house. Commissioner Yager referenced the application worksheet and stated that she cannot find any evidence to allow the approval of the removal of the novelty siding. Mr. Woods stated that houses must change and evolve over time as circumstances and materials change, and he believes that his proposal is reasonable and within the confines of what could be described as historically appropriate.

Zoning Officer Epstein stated that it clear that there is disagreement within the Commission and between the Commissioners and the applicant, and that if the

Commissioners believe that they need more information to come to a decision they should request that information, or alternatively move forward with a motion. Commissioner Gilmore stated that he is not saying that replicating historical features with non-traditional materials is always acceptable, but in this case, he believes that there are compelling unique circumstances. Mr. Epstein stated that whether a layman can tell if a material is traditional is not part of the standards the Commission is held to. Mr. Woods stated that it is not part of the standards, but it would be a significant finding of fact.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

RESOLUTION

Motion by Commissioner Bennett, seconded by Commissioner Gilmore, to approve as submitted the application to install cement board siding on the eastern-facing façade, with the following condition:

1. The project will be completed within one year.

And with the following findings of fact:

1. This is a Type II SEQRA.

Motion failed, with Commissioners Yager, Wiles, and Marney opposed.

VII. OTHER BUSINESS

Commissioner Marney and Andriano stated that there have been no significant developments in their work on the design guidelines project. Commissioner Andriano stated that the Commissioners should continue to forward to them any ideas or concerns they have, and they will present new information for discussion at the February meeting.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Commissioner Wiles, seconded by Commissioner Gilmore, to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:49 pm.