

Historic District Commission

May 23, 2019

Minutes

Chairman William Blackwelder called the meeting of the Historic District Commission to order at 6:01 p.m. on Thursday, May 23, 2019 at City Hall in the Council Chamber.

Present: Commissioners Jerry Tucker, Andi Eddlemon, William Blackwelder (Chair), Ed Starr, Carol Hauer and Clark Simon

Absent: Commissioner Dick Ruhlman

Staff present: Charles Graham, Assistant City Attorney; Kim Wallis, Planner; Chrystal Howard, Secretary; and Jason Thompson, AICP, Planning Director

Mr. Thompson briefly introduced Assistant City Manager, Mr. Quentin McPhatter.

ITEM 1a. Roll Call / Sound Check

Chairman Blackwelder opened the meeting and declared a quorum.

ITEM 1b. Adoption of the Agenda

Commissioner Starr made the motion to adopt the May 23, 2019 Agenda. Commissioner Eddlemon seconded the motion and the motion unanimously passed (6-0).

ITEM 1c. Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Hauer made the motion to approve the March 28, 2019 minutes. Chairman Blackwelder seconded the motion and the motion unanimously passed (6-0).

Chairman Blackwelder stated because of the quasi-judicial format of the hearings, persons wishing to speak and offer evidence are required by North Carolina law to be sworn in or affirmed, and asked all speakers to come forward. Speakers were sworn in by Ms. Chrystal Howard.

ITEM 2. Public Hearing – Certificate of Appropriateness (File # 9246)

- Abigail McLaurin
- 502 W Sixth Avenue
- Installation of new accessory building in rear yard

Chairman Blackwelder opened the public hearing recognizing Ms. Kim Wallis, Planner for the purpose of staff presentation.

Ms. Wallis stated the applicant's name, subject location, and the Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) request. She provided the property description and findings as presented in the agenda. Ms. Wallis displayed the property location map and front view photo of the house. Ms. Wallis read the key elements of the design as presented in the agenda and displayed building plans, the site plan, elevations, and a street view photo of the property. Ms. Wallis finished her presentation with excerpts from the Design Guidelines as presented in the agenda. Ms. Wallis displayed drawings provided by the applicant of future landscaping ideas, colors of barn door and the barn door.

Commissioner Starr stated this was a great presentation. He wished all auxiliary buildings were as appropriate and looked as good. Commissioner Tucker thanked the homeowner for the professional drawings. Commissioner Ferguson agreed with the Commissioners.

Chairman Blackwelder recognized Ms. Abigail McLaurin, 502 W. Sixth Avenue of Gastonia, NC. Ms. McLaurin asked the Commissioners if they had any comments or questions. Ms. McLaurin explained how the family was involved in the design of the project, and that this building would become her art studio. Ms. McLaurin stated that she is an artist and teacher.

Commissioner Hauer stated she liked the landscaping drawings along with the building.

Commissioner Tucker made a motion to approve the request as presented and Commissioner Starr seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved (6-0).

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ITEM 3. Other Business

Mr. Thompson inquired about concerns of the Commission members regarding enforcement and feedback received from property owners. Mr. Thompson asked the Commissioners about their experiences, so that staff can help with solutions. Some Commissioners shared their experiences and concerns. One concern was the lack of enforcement on noncompliance situations. Another concern was the basic lack of respect for the Historic District Commission through verbal communication and social media. Another concern was the feeling of, “what are you going to do about it” negative feedback. Being mindful of preservation and keeping the feeling of a Historic District neighborhood, the Commissioners asked what they can do. Mr. Thompson commented that in these cases the concerns are about something that has recently changed and not existing situations. Mr. Thompson explained the administrative, subcommittee, and full Commission approval levels and interpretations. Mr. Thompson commented that code enforcement items are complaint driven and emphasized on the importance of informing staff of non-compliance. He continued that the steps to achieve compliance begins with staff research and a letter to the resident. Additional steps that may take place are; a notice of violation mailed, fines, and lastly the city determining whether to pursue legal action. The building permit process will include review with the zoning department. Attorney Graham explained civil penalties allowed by the statute and remedies, such as fines, sue to collect the penalty as a debt, or sue for injunctive relief. He commented on cost benefit analysis based on staff resources to pursue. Staff would make the decision on whether to move forward with fines based on time regulations. Staff reiterated the importance of informing staff on non-compliance issues. Mr. Thompson suggested the following:

- Review the Design Guidelines periodically
- Review and change the level of approval if needed
- CityView: Staff will soon be using a portal based software City View that provides flexibility and efficiencies from internal operations and logistics perspective. As a result, it will become easier and less time consuming from staff perspective. Using a mobile device, a picture can be taken and a preformatted violation letter can be created from the site location
- Notify and follow-up with staff on any type of issue
- Continue to use proper steps to achieve compliance

Suggestions mentioned:

- Letters from the Commission to be included with a letter from staff or violation letter
- Notify and follow-up with staff on non-compliance situations
- Review the Design Guidelines periodically
- Promote public information campaigning
- Use the automated system generating violation letters
- Revive the Neighborhood Association
- Create a video thanking residents of their updates, give positive recognitions and talk about the Historic District and other local foundations, explain benefits of living in a Historic District, explain advantages of preservation, explain the purpose of the Commission, and to educate
- Schedule a public information meeting in the Historic District
- Have an annual picnic and or annual meeting
- Bi-annual flyer of the Commission’s updates with overall benefits to the district
- Before and After photos uploaded to the website to enhance the Commission’s image
- Commission to find ways to improve their image as a team beginning
- Marketing and Communication Department may be a possibility to receive help with getting the right messages out to the public
- Acknowledge successes within the community

Brief discussion ensued on abandoned properties that may not necessarily be in non-compliance and the actions that can be taken through Minimum Housing, nuisance enforcement, state building code authority, and Prevention of Demolition by Neglect. Mr. Thompson asked the Commission to forward any properties like this to staff’s attention and they will forward to the appropriate department.

Brief discussion ensued on volunteer work to beautify private properties.

After further discussion, staff will ponder all the concerns and suggestions presented and come back to the Commission within the next two months with ways to move forward with the ideas.

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Commissioner Starr shared articles about the history of his brother, Mike Starr, and his involvement with the Historic Preservation in Atlanta and Georgia Cities Foundation (GCF).

The Assistant City Manager, Mr. McPhatter shared a brief background of his work history and family.

Subcommittee Meeting Tonight, if Needed:

No subcommittee meeting tonight.

ITEM 4. Adjournment

There being no other business, Chairman Blackwelder adjourned the meeting at 7:36 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Chrystal Howard, Secretary

William Blackwelder, Chairman