

Historic District Commission

May 28, 2020

Minutes

Chairman William Blackwelder called the meeting of the Historic District Commission to order at 6:00 p.m. on Thursday, May 28, 2020 via Conference Call.

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

Absent: None

Staff present: Charles Graham, Assistant City Attorney; Joe Gates, Zoning Administrator; Kim Wallis, Planner; and Chrystal Howard, Secretary

ITEM 1a. Roll Call / Sound Check

Chairman Blackwelder opened the meeting, conducted roll call and declared a quorum.

ITEM 1b. Approval of Minutes

Chairperson Blackwelder made a motion to approve the April 23, 2020 minutes. Commissioner Eddlemon seconded the motion and the motion passed (7-0).

Chairman Blackwelder provided an explanation for public hearings on Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) applications and order of business.

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. Howard.

ITEM 2. Public Hearing – Certificate of Appropriateness (File # 9504)

- Pi R Squared/John Russell
- 515 W. Sixth Avenue
- Requests removal of the remains of an old garage, removal of side landing and installation of new stairway, installation of new windows

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 as provided in the agenda. Ms. Wallis displayed the zoning map and a front view photo of the house. She continued with the findings and key elements also provided in the agenda. Ms. Wallis displayed before and after pictures of the front view of house, garage, staircase, and new windows. Ms. Wallis finished her presentation with excerpts from the Design Guidelines and noted demolition and porch guidelines not included in the agenda. Regarding demolition, the Commission may delay the effective date of an approved certificate of appropriateness for demolition ...of a building or structure in a HD district up to three hundred sixty-five days from the date of approval. Should the building have no particular significance or value toward maintaining the character of the district, the Commission shall waive all or part of such period and authorize earlier demolition or removal (UDO, Chapter 7, 7.6.2 K.1 Historic District Overlay). Nothing shall be construed to prevent ...the construction, reconstruction, alteration, restoration, moving or demolition of any such feature which the building inspector or similar official shall certify is required by the public safety because of an unsafe or dangerous condition (NC Enabling Legislation for Historic Preservation Commissions: Section 160A-400.13. Certain changes not prohibited). All salvageable building materials should be removed. Then the structure should be quickly and thoroughly cleared. The site should then be planted or otherwise maintained until it is reused (*Design Guidelines, pg 15*). Regarding Porches, retain porches, porte cocheres, porch features and steps which are appropriate to the building and its development. Repair or replace deteriorated porch details to match the original where possible (*Design Guidelines, pg 10*).

Commissioner Starr asked if the owner was unaware of having to get approval before starting work and Ms. Wallis referred this question to the applicant and property owner.

Attorney John Russell, 301 S. York Street of Gastonia, NC and Norman Baucom, Principal/Managing Partner of Pi R Squared LLC and owner of the property, were recognized. Mr. Russell began by thanking the Commission for conducting a virtual public hearing and allowing them the opportunity to present. Mr. Russell stated there was confusion and the

Historic District Commission

May 28, 2020

Minutes

applicant did not realize the work they were doing required a COA. The main reason was because this was a rehabilitation project with a lot of maintenance and renovation. All the work stayed within the existing footprint, no addition done, or changes to the exterior features. Commissioner Starr commended them on their vast improvements and Commissioner Eddlemon and Chairperson Blackwelder agreed. Mr. Baucom briefly explained the interior. He continued with a brief explanation on exterior work of the driveway and entryway. He named the general contractor and contractor for the windows. He continued that everyone tried to be cognizant of the neighborhood and historic features. Commissioner Starr reiterated his improvement comment and shared that the work was appropriate in his opinion.

Chairperson Blackwelder asked if this will remain a triplex. Mr. Russell replied that there are actually four existing units that has been approved by the City of Gastonia with the rezoning hearing.

Brief discussion occurred on concreting over existing deteriorating concrete and gravestones of pets.

Commissioner Tucker asked if the structure of the garage listed in the inventory list was a separate contributing structure in addition to the main unit. Ms. Wallis replied that the garage was contributing to the Historic District in the inventory and separately listed.

Commissioner Starr made a motion to close the public hearing and approve the request as presented and Chairperson Blackwelder seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved (7-0).

ITEM 3. Public Hearing – Certificate of Appropriateness (File # 9505)

- First ARP/John Connor
- 317 S. Chester Street
- Requests a revision to formerly approved landscaping plan

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 displayed the zoning map. Ms. Wallis provided the property description and displayed a front view photo of the church. She continued with the findings and key elements as provided in the agenda. Ms. Wallis displayed and explained the original site/landscaping plan and a revised plan of the zoning inspection identified areas of change. Areas of requested revision were indicated and Ms. Wallis displayed and described each change request. She finished her presentation with excerpts from the Design Guidelines.

Commissioner Eddlemon inquired about not having the additional shrubs at this time. Ms. Wallis referred this question to the applicant. Mr. John Conner, 1008 Ramsgate Drive of Gastonia, NC, was recognized. Mr. Conner stated he is Chairman of the Building Committee for First ARP church. Mr. Conner explained change requests, such as removing shrubs in front of a tree, shrubs added to block off parking spaces, and shrubs near utility poles. Mr. Conner stated 194 shrubs and 42 new trees have been planted. Commissioner Eddlemon asked how many trees were removed. Mr. Connor replied that he was unsure of the exact number, but it may be twelve. Each tree removed with approval has a report completed by an arborist, and he shared how the grading upset tree roots.

Ms. Wallis recognized Mr. Joe Gates, Zoning Administrator, if Commissioners had any questions regarding the zoning process. No question was asked.

Commissioner Starr shared that the addition and everything done was beautiful and he was impressed. He asked what the reason was for not doing what was proposed and approved regarding the variety of shrubbery along Second Avenue. Mr. Connor explained who the landscaper was for their project and that all the shrubbery came Stowe Nursery who recommended different shrubbery that would be aesthetically appealing while providing some openness and not complete privacy. Mr. Conner commented that Stowe Nursery offered to bring up the five varieties and show how they would not be aesthetically appealing on the property. The building committee agreed that Stowe Nursery created a better plan that fits their property than the existing plan. Commissioner Starr commented that a variety of some types would have added more interest, mentioned siting an example of a church in Charlotte, achieving the boundary of the

Historic District Commission

May 28, 2020

Minutes

parking area, and understanding the concern of security. Commissioner Starr suggested adding something, such as a variety of shrubbery in a grouping, at the house on the corner of Third Avenue and Hanna Street, to soften and finish this area. Mr. Connor stated this was an excellent suggestion and that it couldn't be done until Fall. He continued that the plan is to have the lot regraded and plant new grass. Mr. Connor explained exceeding the church's budget for this project and challenges with COVID-19. He noted that he provided Ms. Wallis with copies of invoices.

Brief discussion ensued on the relationship between Stowe Nursery and Carlton Rouse. Mr. Connor stated Leanne Stowe and Carlton Rouse worked together to come up with the plan of the shrubs and location of shrubs. Ms. Stowe visits the site and makes recommendations. Mr. Connor briefly mentioned the church has more plantings to install, more towards the interior portion of the property than the perimeter. Mr. Gates, Zoning Administrator explained that the Historic District Commission approved a site specific plan that the zoning inspectors based their inspection on and have to go by. He explained the process for receiving a final approval and the applicant having to be in compliance the site specific approved plan. As a result, a revision to the plan is necessary in order to receive a final approval. Mr. Gates briefly explained the ratio of parking spaces to shrubs as calculated in Chapter 10 of the Unified Development Ordinance per Commissioner Simon's request. Mr. Gates noted that the church provided more canopy, understory and shrubs than the minimum ordinance requirement. However, the church also has to meet their site specific plan approved by the Historic District Commission. The key items of conflict are location and species.

Commissioner Simon commented that the work done looks beautiful and shared a concern with area D. Thinking of variety of shrubbery, Commissioner Simon suggested a shrubbery or low hanging bushes should be in the center of each of the panels for two reasons; break up the sight line and privacy/security barrier for the nearby playground.

Commissioner Eddlemon was in agreement with Commissioners' Starr and Simon. Adding shrubbery, whether it is flowery or not, on the corner at the house to soften this area was necessary. She liked the idea of adding some type of shrub or vine by the playground to soften the wall and provide some safety. She also agreed that the variety of shrubs originally proposed gives dimension, depth and character and prefers this look versus the proposed. Mr. Connor stated that he will confer with Ms. Stowe and Mr. Rouse to figure out what is best to soften the bungalow lot and will submit. Regarding shrubs in front of the columns, Mr. Connor commented that it was an excellent suggestion.

Commissioner Tucker was in agreement with Commissioners Starr, Simon and Eddlemon have stated. He commented that he was not sure how the variety shrubbery would not be pleasing to look at, the suggestion about the fence was a good idea because it will accentuate the pillars, shielding the parking with something was a great suggestion, and lastly he commended the church for their large investment in this project.

Chairperson Blackwelder complimented and appreciated all the work done and making the area beautiful. Commissioner Starr reiterated the items discussed to enhance to a greater degree. Chairperson Blackwelder commented that adding character and color adds a lot to landscaping and visual interest.

After brief discussion and clarification, Chairperson Blackwelder made a motion to approve the church's revisions to allow the applicant to get their CO while including a condition that the applicant come back with a plan to include some of the Commissioner's suggested ideas and Commissioner Simon seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved (7-0).

ITEM 4. Other Business

No other business occurred.

ITEM 5. Adjournment

There being no other business, Chairman Blackwelder adjourned the meeting at 7:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Chrystal Howard, Secretary

William Blackwelder, Chairman