

Historic District Commission

August 22, 2019

Minutes

Chairman William Blackwelder called the meeting of the Historic District Commission to order at 6:00 p.m. on Thursday, August 22, 2019 at City Hall in the Council Chamber.

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

Absent: Commissioners Jerry Tucker and Andi Eddlemon

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

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 July 25, 2019 Agenda. Commissioner Hauer seconded the motion and the motion unanimously passed (5-0).

ITEM 1c. Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Ruhlman made the motion to approve the July 25, 2019 minutes. Commissioner Starr seconded the motion and the motion unanimously passed (5-0).

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. Howard.

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

ITEM 2. Public Hearing – Certificate of Appropriateness (File # 9305)

- Brian Lowe
- 509 S York Street
- Install a privacy fence on left side of property in side and 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. The application requesting a COA for the fence was applied before the fence was installed; however, the fence was installed before the application was approved and a COA issued. Ms. Wallis displayed the front view photo of the house and the property location map. She continued with key elements of the design. Ms. Wallis displayed the fence design and location of the fence, as well as, the Unified Development Ordinance definition of the side yard. She distributed copies of photos provided by the applicant and read some of the captions on the photos. Ms. Wallis finished her presentation with excerpts from the Design Guidelines as presented in the agenda.

Commissioner Starr asked if there was an existing fence and who has the invisible fence. Ms. Wallis referred the existing fence question to the applicant and she replied that the invisible fence is in the applicant's front yard for the dog. Brief clarification occurred on the invisible fence and control box location.

Commissioner Hauer inquired about the COA application and the fence installed prior to having it presented to the Historic District Commission.

Mr. Brian Lowe, 509 S. York Street of Gastonia, NC was recognized. Mr. Lowe stated the previous fence was wire fencing with vines intertwined and unappealing; thus, several years ago they decided to remove it. Mr. Lowe stated that the COA application was submitted prior to the installation of the fence. He stated that he misunderstood what Planning staff was authorized to approve. He provided reasons for the urgency of a fence, location of the new fence, as well as explained trying to have it as decorative as possible with the fence.

Historic District Commission

August 22, 2019

Minutes

Commissioner Starr asked if his plan was to paint or stain the fence. Mr. Lowe replied that the installation of the fence was a couple weeks ago and he will stain the fence a walnut or pecan color near the end of October. Brief discussion occurred on the fence material.

Mr. Thompson talked about how the ordinance defines the rear yard, and rear wall of the house, and he shared his opinion of what was logical.

Brief discussion ensued on the scale of the fence in relation to the house as appropriate. Mr. Thompson commented on the fence having little to no streetscape impact in his estimation. Chairperson Blackwelder commented on how the fence will blend better after staining.

Brief discussion ensued regarding the owner of the dog who lives a couple houses down from the applicant.

Mr. Lowe reiterated his misunderstanding and apologized.

The Commissioners asked no further questions.

Mr. William Elmore, 225 W Fourth Ave of Gastonia, NC was recognized. Mr. Elmore stated he misinterpreted the parcel location. He commented on the notification timeframe, as well as the wording on the request. He asked if an applicant would be forced to remove a fence prior to a public hearing. He thanked the Commissioners for their time and suggested making corrections to the mailing timeliness and language on the notices.

Mr. Thompson explained adhering to a pre-established required schedule per the Unified Development Ordinance and state legislation for mailings. The language on notices are written in a consistent format. Brief discussion ensued on the language on the notice and timeliness of the mailings. Mr. Thompson commented on situations that take place prior to the issuance of a COA are then presented to the Historic District Commission. He also commented on the possible results by the Commission. Discussion continued on the timeliness of the notification letter.

Commissioner Ruhlman made a motion to approve the request as presented and Commissioner Simon seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved (5-0).

ITEM 3. Other Business

Mr. Thompson updated the Commission on enhancement opportunities with York-Chester neighborhood representatives with available foundation money and City departmental funding. Opportunities suggested were branding to raise profiles and marketing. General endorsement from the Commission was encouraged to allow staff to proceed. Discussion ensued on concerns and clarification. The foundation money available is solely for improvements in the Historic District, such as decorative sign posts for street signs. The two entities would not be legally tied and dues from the York-Chester Neighborhood Association would not be involved. Some Commissioners stated that they were in favor of raising the profile and having some collaborative effort. The Commissioners want to be careful and attentive moving forward, moreover no one voiced being in opposition. Staff will continue to research and clarify details. Mr. Thompson also commented on the recently established web domain www.gastoniahistoricdistricts.com.

The Commissioners requested changing the eligibility requirement for citizens wanting to serve on the Historic District Commission to reside, as a primary residence, in the Historic District. The reasons include; preservation of the history of the community, ability to provide professional knowledge, advisory board, and vested interests.

Subcommittee Meeting Tonight, if Needed:

No subcommittee meeting needed

ITEM 4. Adjournment

There being no other business, Chairman Blackwelder adjourned the meeting at 6:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Chrystal Howard, Secretary

William Blackwelder, Chairman