

Kenneth J. Hopkins  
Mayor

Steven Torregrossa  
Chairman



Eric Army

Jillian Finkle

Laura Kline

Michael Landry

Amy Ricci

Brent Wiegand

## HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

Cranston City Hall  
869 Park Avenue, Cranston, Rhode Island 02910

### MINUTES 6:00 PM, THURSDAY, April 7, 2022 CRANSTON CITY HALL – 3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM

#### 1. Call to Order

Chairman Steve Torregrossa called the Historic District Commission meeting to order at 6:07 p.m. in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor conference room at Cranston City Hall. Chairman Torregrossa welcomed Jillian Finkle and Brent Wiegand to the Commission as new members.

The following members were in attendance for the meeting: Co-Chairman Eric Army, Jillian Finkle, Laura Kline, Amy Ricci, and Brent Wiegand.

The following Planning Department members were in attendance: Doug McLean, Principal Planner; and Alex Berardo, Planning Technician.

#### 2. Review of Previous Administrative Approvals for Certificate of Appropriateness

(no vote taken)

Application of BHM Properties, LLC to repair existing chimney at 4 Wilbur Avenue, Cranston, RI, AP 18, Lot 474, located in the Oak Lawn Village Local Historic District.

*This project was administratively approved due to length of time between the application submittal and the next available HDC meeting.*

Mr. McLean reminded the Commission that the previous owner of this property installed vinyl windows without HDC approval, was given a Notice of Violation, and ultimately a lien was placed against the property. The current owner, BHM Properties, LLC, assumed the lien and was informed prior to purchase that the Commission did not plan to release the lien until the vinyl windows were replaced with period-appropriate windows. The owner agreed to resolve the window situation, but she said the roof needed more urgent attention. Mr. McLean and Mr. Torregrossa then accepted her applications for a roof repair and for a chimney repair.

Mr. McLean then said that the applicant emailed multiple people in City Hall to remind them that her application would receive automatic approval because the Commission had not scheduled a meeting to provide comments and feedback within the required timeframe (which Mr. McLean believed to be 45 or 50 days). Mr. McLean said he asked if she would reconsider her approach once the HDC scheduled a meeting date, but she said she was worried about losing her contractor and felt more comfortable with securing automatic approval so the work could commence sooner. Mr. McLean said he was unsure how the Building Department would handle her application and whether they would seek legal counsel prior to approving her application.

Mr. McLean said in this case, it might have been best for the Commission to begin by considering whether it wanted any additional information from the applicant. The applicant did not provide extensive detail on the chimney work besides noting that "period-appropriate bricks" would be used, and had the Commission scheduled a meeting during the review period, it could have asked for drawings, statements regarding the appropriateness of design and materials, justification for replacement as opposed to rebuilding, etc. Mr.

McLean suggested that going forward, the Commission should review applications and schedule meetings sooner rather than later, since the countdown for providing comments begins as soon as the applicant submits their application. He said that the Commission's review constitutes a full phase of planning before an application reaches the building permit phase, and in this case the value that the Commission could have added to the process was missed.

Application of BHM Properties, LLC to re-shingle existing roof with in-kind shingles at 4 Wilbur Avenue, Cranston, RI, AP 18, Lot 474, located in the Oak Lawn Village Local Historic District.  
*This project was administratively approved because the HDC provides Planning Staff with such authority for all roof shingle applications.*

Application of Larry Matano to re-shingle existing roof with in-kind shingles at 200 Wilbur Avenue, Cranston, RI, AP 18, Lot 474, located in the Oak Lawn Village Local Historic District.  
*This project was administratively approved because the HDC provides Planning Staff with such authority for all roof shingle applications.*

Mr. McLean then reviewed two applications for roof re-shingling, one submitted by the same applicant who applied for the chimney repair discussed previously, and another submitted by Larry Matano. He noted that the Commission has granted Planning Staff authority to approve roof shingle projects administratively, so there was little to say about the specific applications. Instead, he asked the Commission to review the language in a standard Certificate of Appropriateness with him to see if they liked the language as it is currently written, or if they believe anything should be changed.

Mr. Army felt that "asphalt in kind" was not specific enough to explain which type of shingles are proposed to be used. He recommended that language prompting applicants to specify whether the asphalt shingles are 3-tab (preferred) or architectural (allowable only if the previous shingles were architectural) be added. He asked if information regarding the color of shingles should be requested as well. Ms. Kline expressed uncertainty as to whether color of materials fell under the Commission's purview, but Mr. Army believed they could ask if it were linked to a material (i.e. "white cedar").

Mr. Army also asked if the existing language referenced gutters in any way, but Mr. McLean said no. Mr. Army recommended adding a line to say that gutters could be replaced "when matching the material and form of the previous gutters." Chairman Torregrossa said that some houses do still have wooden gutters, but the Commission has allowed homeowners to replace wooden gutters with aluminum in instances when the wooden gutters were rotted beyond repair.

Ms. Kline suggested adding language to prompt applicants to confirm their plans do not alter the exterior appearance of the roof as viewed from the street, but Mr. McLean pointed to some existing specifications that largely accomplish this concept. Chairman Torregrossa said the phrase "in kind *and style*" could help to reinforce the idea.

Mr. McLean then asked for the Commission's thoughts on roof penetrations. He asked if ridge vents would require review; Chairman Torregrossa said they could be handled administratively. Mr. McLean then asked if roof vents should be mentioned in the updated language; Mr. Army felt the Commission should only address them if an applicant seeks to locate one in a bad area. Mr. McLean asked if that reasoning stood for other types of roof penetrations, and the Chairman and Co-Chairman agreed that it did – they felt roof penetrations alone were not concerning enough to cause an entire meeting to be convened, but they would be addressed if a meeting were already scheduled to be held.

### **3. Commission Feedback on DRAFT Comprehensive Plan Update – Historic Preservation Element**

Mr. McLean reported that a draft of the new Historic Preservation element of the City's new Comprehensive Plan would be completed in a few weeks' time, and in the meantime he invited the Commission to offer input on the list of topics that PAL (the consultant hired to prepare the element) intended to address.

Mr. Army said he saw little political will for creating new historic districts in Pawtuxet Village and Edgewood. He wondered if the Commission could be an educational asset in helping people understand the value of historic districts and try to change the current political situation in that way. He also asked if any surveys currently exist of the City's older industrial properties. Mr. McLean said he hopes that PAL's work on the Historic Preservation element would raise potentially-eligible properties and districts to the Commission's attention. Mr. Army asked if the Commission should make funds available in its budget for district surveys, but Mr. McLean said the Commission's annual \$2,000 budget does not roll over year-to-year; Ms. Kline added that funding for surveys usually comes from CLG.

On a related note, Mr. McLean said that the City Council recently added the Nathan Wescott House, which had been owned by the federal government, to what was once a one-house local historic district in order to better protect it. He said the property's new owner is wondering what he can do with it; although the house is unique and has historic value, the interior is in disrepair.

The Commission agreed to submit any additional comments to Mr. McLean by email and only convene an additional meeting on the matter (once PAL's draft is complete) only if they feel it is necessary.

#### **4. Commission Expenditures**

Mr. McLean reminded the Commission that they had discussed purchasing a computer using the HDC's budget last fall and presented a proposal for an iPad Air, including an Apple Pencil, an Apple Magic Keyboard, and a USB AV multi-port adapter, for a total of \$1,176.00. He said the iPad and associated equipment could be used to give applicants feedback in a physical form and in real-time, and whatever feedback document(s) that are produced during the meeting could be printed directly afterwards and count as valid feedback from the Commission. He also noted that the iPad would be conducive to providing visual feedback, which is sometimes better for the type of information the Commission is trying to convey. He also noted that the iPad could be available for Planning Department use when the HDC wasn't using it, and he noted that the proposal had been vetted through the City's procurement office.

Mr. Army asked when the Commission's budget resets; Mr. McLean said the new fiscal year begins in July, but the City will stop allowing large new expenditures at any point now.

Upon motion made by Mr. Army, and seconded by Mr. Wiegand, the Historic District Commission unanimously approved the disbursement of up to \$1,300.00 on the purchase of the iPad Air, pencil, keyboard, and adapter.

#### **5. Next Meeting**

The date of the next Historic District Commission meeting is to be determined.

#### **6. Adjourn**

Chairman Torregrossa adjourned the meeting at 7:43 p.m.