

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
Town of Acton
Minutes: 6/29/09



Present: Michaela Moran (MM), Ellie Halsey (EH), Terra Friederichs (TF), Kathy Acerbo-Bachmann (KAB). Member of the Public: Anne Forbes (AF)

Room 126, Acton Town Hall

Meeting called to order by MM 7:35 PM

Issue: What can we do to improve the application process for HDC members, Town Staff and the public?

Suggestions: Have Town Staff scan applications immediately after they are received and stamped, and make available immediately through DocuShare, set up an online flow chart showing deadlines and progress of all applications, assign a specific HDC member to shepherd each application and act as point-of-contact for that applicant. Overall increased Town Staff support for HDC.

Next Steps:

- TF ask Town Manager for staff support/time to scan applications and make available online; explore having Planning Department staff, preferably Kristen Alexander, as in person contact for HDC questions in Town Hall.
- MM ask Mark Hald to set up two DocuShare folders for applications- both in process and complete.

Background:

Members discussed how applications could be tracked on-line for greater efficiency, transparency and ease of use (for the public, town staff, other boards and HDC). TF suggested that the HDC have excel files tracking progress, with online folders for "in process" and "completed" applications, so that at any given moment anyone could see what stage an application is at, and steps of the process. EH noted that she, for her own purposes, keeps track of applications in excel.

AF mentioned one ongoing problem is that HDC members often have not had a chance to review the application until the meeting, sometimes at the Public Hearing. All members agreed that scanning an application and sharing it online would be extremely helpful in order to prepare and track progress. TF agreed to speak to the Town Manager about having one of his staff assist with this. TF noted that the Town Manager had offered some unspecified staff time to assist the HDC, but wanted a list of concrete tasks. HDC members mentioned scanning applications, bulk mailing, and having a Planning Department staff act as point of contact when applicants come to Town Hall would be helpful. AF mentioned that one issue with the public is that there is no one in Town Hall they can go to for HDC questions. KAB agreed that it

would be helpful to have someone on Town staff who could be a contact- she suggested Kristen Alexander in the Planning Dept., and that the Concord HDC, and several other towns, use Planning staff in this role.

TF drafted a flow chart of what that process could look like, with an emphasis on having as much as possible be available on-line through the town website. A possible flow chart/process would be: application received by the clerk, stamped or not stamped as complete. Someone on Town Hall staff scans the application, e-mails it or puts in DocuShare folder. Someone (HDC member or designated staff) reviews it for completeness. All HDC members review once it is on-line prior to the next meeting. TF will ask the Town Manager if the clerk can scan, e-mail, and send to the folder. MM will ask Mark Hald to set up folders. Each scanned document will have the street name in the document name as a way of identifying it. MM asked TF, as a member, to request Town Staff assistance from Steve Ledoux.

MM proposed a process where each HDC acts as primary contact for an application, on a rotating basis. The process could be that the HDC member and the chair first review an application to see whether it is 1) within HDC jurisdiction and 2) complete. If complete, the contact person and chair assign a date, and the contact is then responsible for contacting the applicant and working with them through the process. If the application is not complete, the application is rejected, and contact calls the applicant and explains why it is not complete and what they need, followed up by a written letter. AF noted that the CPC has been using this process successfully- one person is assigned per application. TF noted that the contact member at the CPC is not an advocate of a particular project- they are the shepherd. The contact is neutral- they are there to answer questions and assist with the process, not approval or recommendation.

AF and KAB pointed out that member Scott Kutil (not present at the meeting), had suggested the Town of Concord HDC website as a model for process, Rules & Regulations, etc. For example, applicants must submit a complete application one month in advance; a list of meetings is posted and scheduled one year in advance, with application deadlines noted, etc. Very clear and user-friendly. KAB offered to send a copy to MM for discussion at the next meeting. EH mentioned that having the applications available in advance, and online will be extremely helpful. The first time she was able to see the WAVE application was at the Public Hearing, and on June 15 saw the book of materials.

MM, TF, KAB suggested that the HDC consider not scheduling appointments after 9 PM.

Several members mentioned the Town Clerk's office is inconsistent when stamping applications- i.e., applications stamped and accepted when not complete, parts of an application arriving at a later date, and then being stamped with the earlier date, etc. In addition, some applications that should have been stamped were not- and just added to the HDC box. (Members also noted that applications are also misfiled under

“Historical Commission” and other boxes, and so when checking mail we need to check all boxes.) Members agreed that the Town Clerk would not know if an application is complete or not- they could not/should not have to do that, and that another solution would need to be found- perhaps having applications go through the Planning or Building Departments. TF suggested having one person on the HDC as a “completeness checker.” She felt one person would, after doing this repeatedly, quickly get a sense of what, if anything was missing from a stamped application. That person would also first make sure an application was stamped. MM noted it would be best/most helpful to see an application before it was stamped by the Clerk. The by-laws say the HDC should review first; now it gets stamped regardless. MM pointed out that the date an application is received is extremely important, as it “starts the clock” for a number of deadlines.

AF mentioned it is very important to write as detailed findings as possible.

Public Relations

KAB suggested the HDC do a mass mailing to all owners in the districts with a letter explaining that they were in a historic district and what that means, a copy of the Rules & Regulations, Design Guidelines, etc. EH stated that the HDC needs to do a better job of marketing the commission and changes. She suggested a first step is a very simple postcard to all property owners in the district- the goal is 1) alerting owners that they are in a historic district and 2) referring them to the updated website. EH urged all to keep it simple.

Other business:

Questions for Peter Berry, HDC Selectmen Liaison

MM had several areas she would like clarification from Peter Berry on, including:

- What is the approved process for change? If the HDC wanted to change instructions? Rules and Regulations? For example, what if we wanted to simply use bullets instead of so much text? BOS/Town Counsel to vet first?
- Have the existing HDC Rules & Regulations been vetted by Town Counsel? If so, when?
- Who should notices go to- including Public Hearings- be sent to? Which departments in Town Hall? Need a complete list.
- Clarification on Conflict of Interest Law- Abutters to Abutters within 300 Feet. Within 300 feet from edge of property, regardless of being an abutter or abutter to abutter? What about abutter or abutter to abutter, but more than 300 feet?

WAVE

Application for WAVE complete (application 0906), certificate to be issued by June 30, 2009. MM noted that the full application was received on June 1, 2009. EH shared draft for HDC final approval. MM noted that the parking area behind buildings determined to be non-applicable; Certificate of Non- Applicability had been granted.

MM moved to issued Certificate of Appropriateness (application 0906) for removal of 1960's garage addition to the white barn (address???), finding that it is a non-contributing addition to the district, with the additional finding that the barn at (address???) is to be made tight to the weather to prevent any further deterioration. TF seconded. EH will note in cover letter that the roofs of all buildings currently covered in blue waterproofing materials must be watertight. EH also noted that she will remove all underlining as it appears on the draft.

Application 0917, 77 Nagog Hill Road

Certificate of Non-Applicability because of replacement in kind, approved by all present.

Application 0916, 49 Windsor Ave.

Application incomplete- EH to contact applicant for more details, including location of gutters, and precise location on house, type of gutters, etc. EH to send out abutter list.

Minutes

June 1, 2009 minutes. MM moved to approve as corrected, EH seconded, approved by all present.

MM: Reminder that minutes, applications and certificates all need to get stamped by Clerk during business hours. Please track deadlines.

Meeting adjourned at 11 PM- MM moved, EH seconded.

Minutes respectfully submitted by KAB 7/20/09.

KAB
7/20/09