

**HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION  
MINUTES OF APRIL 15, 2020**  
Held Remotely Via Zoom And Telephone Access

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Minutes of the regular meeting of the Historic District Commission ("HDC") held Wednesday, April 15, 2020. Chairman John Henke called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

**1) ROLLCALL**

**Present:** Chairman John Henke; Vice-Chairman Keith Deyer; Board Members Gigi Debbrecht, Natalia Dukas, Patricia Lang, Michael Willoughby

**Absent:** Board Member Doug Burley; Alternate Member Kevin Filthaut

**Administration:** Nicholas Dupuis, City Planner  
Laura Eichenhorn, Transcriptionist

Chairman Henke thanked everyone for joining the virtual meeting and reviewed protocol for virtual meetings.

**04-29-20**

**2) Approval Of Minutes**

**Motion by Mr. Deyer**

**Seconded by Ms. Debbrecht to approve the HDC Minutes of March 4, 2020 as submitted.**

**Motion carried, 6-0.**

VOICE VOTE

Yeas: Deyer, Debbrecht, Dukas, Henke, Lang, Willoughby

Nays: None

**04-30-20**

**3) Courtesy Review**

None.

**04-31-20**

**4) Historic Design Review**

**A. 743 W. Frank – King-Argus House**

City Planner Dupuis reviewed the item.

Kabir and Amrita Mendiratta, owners, and Mike Mladenoff, contractor, spoke on behalf of the application. Both the Mendirattas and Mr. Mladenoff emphasized their desire to maintain the historic aspects of the home as much as possible.

Chairman Henke said he would have an easier time voting to approve the request if the Medirattas were asking to install an additional window over the kitchen sink instead of asking to remove the original historic window. He said he was concerned specifically with how the proposed work would potentially conflict with the ninth requirement set out by the Secretary Of The Interior's Standards For Rehabilitation And Guidelines For Rehabilitating Historic Buildings, which requires that "New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment."

Chairman Henke said that, even though he had concerns, he was inclined to let Ms. Debbrecht and Mr. Willoughby somewhat guide his decision regarding this home given Ms. Debbrecht's familiarity with the home and Mr. Willoughby's architectural knowledge.

Mr. Mendiratta explained that while adding a second window had been considered in order to avoid removing the historic window, doing so would cause the kitchen to lose symmetry and all the appliances that were going to go on that wall would have to be located elsewhere. Mr. Mendiratta noted that could necessitate adding on to the home to make up for the lost space, which he said both he and his wife do not want. He concluded that the request is a functional and not an aesthetic issue, and that if there had been a way to avoid the request and to preserve the historic window he and his wife would have much preferred that option.

Historic homes are allowed to have additions in the rear of the home which do away with the entire rear elevation, Mr. Willoughby noted. He continued that if that is permissible, then removing one historic window in the rear of a home should also be permissible. In terms of the plans presented, Mr. Willoughby said he liked that the muntin bars in the new window preserve the historic aesthetic by having the same spacing as the muntin bars in the historic window. He said that since much of the rear of the home is already non-historic due to previous changes, he saw no issue with allowing this change to be made.

Ms. Debbrecht said she largely agreed with Mr. Willoughby's comments. She said that while before she saw the plans she had been hesitant about the removal of the historic window, she was more persuaded after reviewing what was being proposed. She said she was unable to think of a way ultimately to make the kitchen functional while leaving the present historic window in place.

Mr. Willoughby noted that historic homes are preserved through the maintenance done by the owners. He cautioned that if the City makes updating historic homes too difficult for owners to achieve fewer people might be inclined to want to live in, and maintain, historic homes. He said the HDC should thus encourage people to make historic homes livable for current times while also maintaining as much of the historic aspects as possible, especially in the front of the homes.

Ms. Dukas commented that she appreciated the applicants' letter attached to their application, and said she felt that they sincerely want to maintain the historic character of the home as much as possible. Given these facts, Ms. Dukas said she would like to see the Committee meet the

applicants in the middle as much as possible regarding the requested changes. She said she had no personal issue with removing the window on the back of the home. Ms. Dukas noted that granting this change would make the King-Argus house liveable for a family that is passionate about historic preservation, and that having historical-preservationist owners in the home long-term would benefit both the maintenance of the home and the community.

Ms. Lang said she agreed with previous HDC members' comments. She noted that the historic window would not be functional in the home and that she did not want to keep owners of historic homes from updating, maintaining, and making their homes liveable.

Mr. Deyer said that he thinks some previous changes made to the home should not have been approved, but that he had no problem with the currently proposed changes.

**Motion by Mr. Deyer**

**Seconded by Ms. Debbrecht to approve the Historic Design Review application and issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for 743 W. Frank. The work as proposed meets The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation standard numbers 1, 2 and 9.**

Chairman Henke said his main concern is a kind of modification-creep that happens with some historical homes after one certificate of appropriateness is granted. He said sometimes after residents are permitted smaller changes they pursue more and more significant changes and the HDC has difficulty limiting those after the first. He explained that he wanted to have it on the record that a change to this window is being allowed because it was an issue of functionality, in the rear of the home, which has already been modified. He specified that the granting of this change should not be interpreted to automatically pave the way for more significant potential future changes to the home should the desire arise. Chairman Henke said his concern was not the intentions of the Mendirattas, but rather the general experience the HDC has had in granting these allowances.

**Motion carried, 6-0.**

VOICE VOTE

Yeas: Deyer, Willoughby, Debbrecht, Dukas, Henke, Lang

Nays: None

**04-32-20**

**5) Sign Review**

None.

**04-33-20**

**6) Study Session**

A. The Birmingham Plan (2040)

City Planner Dupuis said he would be consolidating HDC members' comments into a memorandum to be submitted to the Planning Board. He said he was still open to receiving any comments the HDC members wanted to submit. He said he would share the memorandum with the HDC members for feedback before submitting it to the Planning Board.

Mr. Willoughby said he had some suggestions he would email to City Planner Dupuis for addition to the memorandum.

Chairman Henke said he would like the City Commission and the HDC to plan a meeting for the future in order to discuss general guidance from the Commission to the HDC and joint approaches to major upcoming projects.

Ms. Dukas and Ms. Debbrecht agreed.

Chairman Henke said it would be good for the HDC to have a discussion regarding what they would like to convey to the City Commission in advance of such a meeting.

Ms. Lang agreed as well.

In reply to Chairman Henke, City Planner Dupuis said he would make a preliminary HDC discussion on the issue a future HDC agenda item.

**04-34-20**

## **7) Miscellaneous Business and Communication**

### **A. Pre-Application Discussions**

### **B. Staff Reports**

- 1. Administrative Sign Approvals**
- 2. Administrative Approvals**
- 3. Action List 2020**
- 4. Historical Preservation Collaboration Matrix**
- 5. National Preservation Month**

**04-35-20**

## **ADJOURNMENT**

### **Motion by Mr. Willoughby**

**Seconded by Ms. Lang to adjourn the HDC meeting of April 15, 2020 at 7:53 p.m.**

**Motion carried, 6-0.**

### **VOICE VOTE**

Yeas: Willoughby, Lang, Debbrecht, Dukas, Deyer, Henke

Nays: None

Nicholas Dupuis  
City Planner

APPROVED