

Minutes

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

Regular meeting

6:30 p.m. April 3, 2024

Board Meeting Room of Town Hall Annex, 105 E. Corbin St.



Present: Chair Will Senner and members Elizabeth Dicker, G. Miller, Sara Riek and Bruce Spencer

Absent: Vice Chair Mathew Palmer and Member Hannah Peele

Staff: Planner Joseph Hoffheimer

1. Call to order, roll call, and confirmation of quorum

Chair Will Senner called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m. He called the roll and confirmed the presence of a quorum.

2. Commission's mission statement

Senner read the statement.

3. Agenda changes

There were no changes to the agenda.

4. Minutes review and approval

Minutes from regular meeting on March 6, 2024.

Motion: Senner moved approval of the March 6, 2024, minutes as submitted. Member Sara Riek seconded.

Vote: 5-0.

5. Written decisions review and approval

Written decisions from regular meeting on March 6, 2024.

Motion: Senner moved approval of the written decisions from the regular meeting on March 6, 2024, with a correction. Member G. Miller seconded.

Vote: 5-0.

Correction: Add final condition to written decision for 124 W. Union St., to reflect full set of conditions approved in the minutes.

6. New business

A. Certificate of Appropriateness Application: 207 E. Queen St.

Applicant is requesting to replace an existing chain-link fence with a black aluminum picket fence that encloses the back yard. (PIN 9874176601)

It was noted that the agenda incorrectly lists the property as 207 W. Queen St. The correct address is 207 E. Queen St.

Senner opened the public hearing and asked whether there were any conflicts of interest or bias among the commissioners. All commissioners disclosed that they had visited the site in preparation for reviewing the application. No other conflicts of interest were disclosed.

Planner Joseph Hoffheimer was sworn in. Kenneth Garrison, the property owner, was sworn in to speak on behalf of the application.

Hoffheimer introduced the application by presenting the staff report. He noted that the inventory information, application materials, and applicable design standards would be entered into the record as evidence. He provided the staff comments:

- The inventory information is slightly incorrect and does not include the exiting garage on the property.
- The Historic District Commission may approve aluminum fences on a case-by-case basis. Because the compatibility matrix does not allow chain-link fencing, staff view the proposed aluminum fencing as an upgrade over the existing fencing material.
- The commission recently approved a similar backyard aluminum fence at 309 Mitchell St.
- The proposed fence height has changed to 4.5 feet.

Garrison confirmed that the proposed project is to remove the existing chain link fence and replace it with the new fence. He confirmed that the fence line will stay the same. He said that the fence will terminate at existing shrubs, as shown where the fence terminates on the site plan. The shrubs are located in the space on the site plan where the fence does not continue.

There was discussion of whether alternative materials had been considered. Garrison said that aluminum was preferable for its aesthetics, and because the pickets would be small. He said that a wooden picket fence would block the view beyond the fence, while small aluminum pickets would allow the view beyond the fence to be more prominent.

Garrison clarified that the images on p. 28 of the agenda packet are examples from a nearby development in Hillsborough, but are not within the Historic District. He said the proposed fence will be very similar in style to the one shown in the pictures.

Garrison confirmed that the fence will attach to the house on both sides.

There was discussion of the fence's congruity with the district and with the style and vintage of the house. The commissioners agreed that the style was not incongruous with either, especially given that the fence is an upgrade from the existing fence.

Senner closed the public hearing. He summarized the commissioners' discussion saying that there appeared to be no objection or concern that the proposal was incongruous with district and that the fence did not appear to be incongruous considering the style and vintage of the property.

Motion: Miller moved to find as fact that the 207 E. Queen St. application is not incongruous with the overall character of the Historic District and complies with all relevant standards of evaluation based on the commission's discussion of the application and the standards of evaluation in Section 3.12.3 of the Unified Development Ordinance because the plans are consistent with the Historic District Design Standards: Fences and Walls. Member Elizabeth Dicker seconded.

Vote: 5-0.

Motion: Miller moved to approve the application as submitted. Dicker seconded.

Vote: 5-0.

The applicants raised a concern about a previous application that had been brought before the commission. Staff and commissioners reminded the applicants that the commission was only addressing the application that was directly before the commission that night.

7. Old business

A. Certificate of Appropriateness Application: 114 W. Queen St.

Applicant is proposing to add porches to the main house, construct a detached accessory dwelling unit to the northwest of the existing Strudwick kitchen structure, and construct two sheds in the northeast corner of the property (PIN 9874071780).

Senner opened the public hearing and asked whether there were any conflicts of interest or bias among the commissioners. All commissioners disclosed that they had visited the site in preparation for reviewing the application. No other conflicts of interest were disclosed.

Stanford Morris, the property owner, was sworn in to speak on behalf of the application.

Steve Peck, past chair of Burwell School Historic Site and member of the Historic Hillsborough Commission, was sworn in.

Hoffheimer presented the staff report on the continued application. He noted that the inventory information, application materials, and applicable design standards would be entered into the record as evidence. He provided the staff comments:

- The applicant has submitted updated elevations and an updated site plan for the alterations to the existing house. The alterations are indicated by colored arrows in the elevations and blue on the footprint. The most noticeable change from the initial submission is that both screened porches now have screens on all three exterior sides.
- The applicant has submitted example photos from outside the Hillsborough Historic District that show Dutch Colonial houses with front porches that are likely original to those houses. Because the referenced porches are not in the local district and do not appear to be additions, staff have questions about the compatibility of the proposed front porch with the local district's special character.
- Example photos from the local historic district include porches with wainscoting below the screen, flat roofs over porches, shed dormers over doors, and examples of stairs and front porches on West Queen Street. Staff have no concerns about the local examples.
- The narrative for the primary structure includes plans to construct a brick patio around the Strudwick Kitchen. The proposed patio will require approval by the Historic District Commission due to its size.
- The accessory dwelling unit has been redesigned and relocated to the northwest of the Strudwick Kitchen. Because the altered outbuilding still exceeds the required setbacks and no longer adjoins a historic structure, staff do not find the relocation significant enough to justify re-notifying adjacent property owners.
- The size of the revised accessory dwelling unit now exceeds the maximum of 800 square feet currently allowed by the town's Unified Development Ordinance. The Hillsborough Historic

District should not include any existing purpose-built accessory dwelling units of this size or larger, but it may include larger accessory structures. Because the commission only evaluates exterior changes, the commission is allowed to approve the structure as submitted. However, the town's Unified Development Ordinance would have to change before staff can sign off on a building permit for the accessory building. (Staff may separately sign off on the other components of this project).

- The sheds have not changed since the January regular Historic District Commission meeting.
- Staff did not receive any public comments about the application.

There was discussion of the size of the accessory dwelling unit in response to the staff report. It was clarified that the current maximum square footage allowed is 800 square feet. Morris explained that the proposed design is 896 square feet (32 feet x 28 feet), but that he is willing to change the dimensions to 32 feet x 25 feet to meet the maximum square footage. He confirmed that the reduction in size would not change the look of the exterior of the building.

Morris explained that the suggested detachment of the accessory dwelling unit from the Strudwick Kitchen led him to relocate it to utilize the yard more appropriately. The accessory building will be visible from the Burwell School, but he felt it will be well balanced with the sheds and will complement their board and batten style and standing seam roofs.

The commission discussed the site plan for the addition to the main house.

Morris clarified that the two parallel green lines in the rear indicate existing fences and that there will be no new fence there. Hoffheimer added that the fences received minor work approval.

Morris confirmed that Chapel Hill gravel will be used for the path at the front of the house and that the path leading back toward the Burwell School is an existing mulched path.

There was discussion of how the accessory dwelling unit will be accessed. Morris said residents would walk through the grass from the parking area and that there is not plan for a path there at this time.

Morris mentioned that some trees will have to be removed or trimmed to protect the new structures, some of which he confirmed are over two feet in diameter. He said he has discussed the plans with the Tree Board. The commissioners stated that they will need to see a site plan that shows existing trees and their driplines and indicates which trees will be removed and which will remain. They referenced the design standards pertaining to preserving trees and protecting them from removal or disturbance. Senner further explained that the commissioners will need to understand the justification for why structures must be sited in places that require tree removal rather than alternative locations that would protect the trees.

Hoffheimer confirmed that he could provide some examples of site plans with trees and driplines included.

The commissioners suggested that Morris could additionally provide an arborist's letter if any of the trees to be removed are already diseased or damaged.

There was discussion of the fact that the proposed project would result in a property with five structures on it, including the existing main house and Strudwick Kitchen. The commissioners wondered if there are any other examples within the Historic District of properties that have five separate structures.

Morris reminded the commissioners that the lot is one acre, and that there are not many other similarly sized properties in the Historic District. The commissioners agreed that due to the size and configuration of the lot, they did not have concerns about the congruity of the number of structures on the site.

Morris confirmed that the stairs leading up from the front pathway will be brick, and that there will be no railing. He said the total rise would be four or five steps, or about four feet. The commissioners agreed to add brick steps as a condition of approval.

The commissioners reviewed the south elevation of the main house.

There was discussion of the front porch addition. The commissioners struggled to see the congruity of the front porch given the Dutch Colonial style of the house, despite evidence that other houses nearby have front porches. The general consensus was that although examples of Dutch Colonial houses with front porches had been identified outside of the Hillsborough Historic District, most of them appeared to be original to the house, integrated into the original architecture, which gives them a different appearance from a porch added later. Dicker referenced the design standard for porches on p. 57, Number 8, which suggests that it is not appropriate to introduce porches on character-defining elevations.

There was discussion of the width of the proposed front porch roof, which Morris confirmed would be the full width of the front of the house, with the base of the porch set one foot in from the sides of the house. He said it would look seamlessly integrated into the house. The commissioners reminded Morris of the general guidelines of the design standards that additions ought to be congruous yet distinguished from the original structure. Additions should not look so seamless that they portray a false sense of history; the evolution of the structure over time ought to be apparent.

During this discussion it was acknowledged that sometimes the standards seem to conflict with each other, and that different commissioners may have different perspectives on the same issue.

Morris argued that having a front porch would allow his household to become more integrated into the neighborhood because that is where neighbors on the block tend to gather.

There was discussion of the importance of considering a house's vintage and style as factors that contribute to the definition of the character of a house and the congruity of a particular feature. The commissioners reiterated that part of the commission's mission is to preserve the character of the neighborhood and of each individual house.

There was some agreement among the commissioners that a side porch might be less incongruous than a front porch. There was discussion that the side porch, especially when set back from the front line of the structure, would be less impactful on the character-defining elevation. It was also suggested that vegetation could be added as screening for a side porch.

Senner summarized the commissioners' discussion about the porches. He noted that two commissioners were absent, but that among the rest of the group there was fairly consistent concern about adding a front porch. Their opinion on the side porch was split, indicating that it might be possible that a side porch would not be deemed incongruous.

There was discussion of the roof. Morris said that the roofing on the entire main house would be replaced.

Morris mentioned that the cost of reroofing the house would impact the total cost estimate for the project. Hoffheimer noted that the revised cost estimate would need to be communicated to staff.

There was discussion of the south elevation.

The commissioners reiterated that though there was unanimous concern about the incongruity of the front porch, the congruity of the side porch was more justifiable. It was noted that there are many properties in the district with side porch additions that are set back from the front of the house and massed so they are clearly subordinate to the primary structure since the property did not have an existing porch.

There was discussion of whether the proposed low side wall on the screened porch would be consistent with design standards. There was discussion of Design Standard 10 on p. 57, which addresses enclosure of porches. The commissioners discussed the design standard's implied definition of "enclosure." Most commissioners did not consider the proposed work to be enclosure of the porch.

Morris confirmed that the overhang of the east side porch would be set back from the front of the house and would not connect with the front porch.

The commissioners discussed the north elevation.

Morris confirmed that the peak of the existing roof will remain as it is, and that the dormer will not raise the roof. He clarified that the interior space will have low ceilings and will be used as an attic space storage room.

Morris explained that the gap in the drawing of the new second floor balcony was included to show that the feature behind it is a door; in reality the railing is intended to be continuous. He said the railing will be metal with a 3-inch gap between the square spindles. The new fascia board under the railing will be painted wood.

The commissioners requested that Morris provide some sample images and specifications for the railing material. They also requested clarification on what color the materials would be. Hoffheimer clarified that staff have said in the past that colors can be approved as minor works.

There was discussion of the different style of the new windows in the dormer compared to the rest of the house. Morris said the windows would be six-foot by two-foot transom windows that could crack open for ventilation of the attic without allowing rain to enter. He added that the transom windows would be the same as the proposed windows for the sheds and accessory dwelling unit. The commissioners discussed the fact that the transom windows on the dormer are on the rear of the house and not on the character-defining side.

Morris confirmed that the screen door on the new screened porch would match the materials of the porch at the same height, with a solid bottom and screened top.

There was further discussion of the materials of the metal railing on the second floor balcony. Morris clarified that the posts and top would be wood, with metal wire between them.

There was discussion of the east elevation.

The commissioners discussed the stoop roof over the side door and generally agreed that the scaling is similar to what the commission typically approves.

There was discussion of the additional window on the second level and how it affects the symmetry of the existing window over the door. It was noted that the existing elevation does not look particularly symmetrical overall. There was discussion of other windows in the district which are asymmetrical, but on a building of different

vintage and purpose, and in a different part of the district. There was discussion of whether it would be less incongruous if the window were centered between the existing window and the chimney. It was noted that the scaling of the elevation might be inaccurate, causing the spacing of the existing features look more evenly spaced in the drawing and adding to the perceived disruption of the new window. There was discussion of whether it would be less incongruous to move the existing window, but it was noted that that solution would disrupt its symmetry over the door. It was suggested that the new window might look squeezed in, and the commissioners wondered whether the original architect would have built the house with the proposed window placement.

Morris confirmed that the new window will be identical to the other windows and will have full trim around it.

There was discussion of the visibility of the east side of the house from the street and discussion of whether there are other similar houses with windows as tightly arranged.

Dicker referenced the Design Standards for Windows, Number 8 on p. 51, which mentions that it is not appropriate to introduce or eliminate historic windows, that new locations for new windows should be inconspicuous, and that the general size and alignment of windows should be retained on non-character-defining elevations. She said that the horizontal alignment did not seem to be retained in the proposed changes.

Senner summarized the discussion of the window, noting that there is concern among the commissioners about its congruity.

The commissioners reviewed the plan view indicating the locations of additions.

Morris confirmed that the brick patio outside the Strudwick Kitchen would be 10 feet wide, and that the brick would not match the brick of the kitchen. He said that the design had changed to brick from concrete, and that the patio was no longer relevant to the structural integrity of the building as had been discussed in a prior meeting.

There was discussion of whether the elevation of the kitchen would be considered character defining because of the structure's historic nature. It was noted that the kitchen is not visible from the sidewalk or the street. Hoffheimer clarified that the patio was brought before the commission because of its size, and that patios 400 square feet and smaller are eligible for approval through minor works. The commissioners requested that Morris present more visual information about the patio, including a plan of its footprint relative to the structure.

The commissioners requested that Morris provide a materials list for each main project, including paint color, and/or where the color or material will match existing.

Morris confirmed that the fiber cement siding will be smooth side out.

The commissioners discussed the plans for the accessory dwelling unit.

Morris reiterated that three feet will be removed from the plans for the structure. The three feet will be taken from the middle, and columns will still be evenly spaced and not located in front of windows or doors.

There was discussion of the use of brick on the vertical borders of the structure, and Senner questioned whether there is detailing of a similar style within the district. There was discussion of the importance of congruity when the structure is sited in the rear of the property and not visible from the street. It was noted that the property can be seen from North Churton Street and from the Burwell School at certain times of the year. It was noted that the materials are not incongruous, and Senner stated that while that was true, he felt the application of the materials

as an accent border was incongruous. Other commissioners noted that the element would be clearly read as a modern addition reflective of the time we are in and asserted that it did not seem to be incongruous with the rest of the property.

Morris said that the juxtaposition of the siding and brick is consistent with the design of the existing main house. He wanted to tie the structures together and use the accent border as a visual transition between the board and batten sheds, the brick kitchen, and the main house.

Peck expressed support for the project and appreciation for the effort Morris has made to blend the property visually with the Burwell School while also honoring the 1960s character of the house.

Morris confirmed that there are no steps up to the porch of the accessory dwelling unit, which can be accessed from the path in the back of the house.

Discussion returned to the vertical brick accent border on the accessory dwelling unit. It was suggested that the visual transition between structures could be achieved by using brick on the bottom of the structure with siding above it. Senner said he felt that this solution would be less incongruous, though he would see it as even less incongruous if just one of the materials were chosen. Miller and Member Bruce Spencer both also expressed concern about the brick accent.

Senner reminded Morris that the commission would not be voting at this meeting, but suggested he give the subject some consideration and know that it might be a point of discussion next time. He suggested that one way to provide more details about the accent brick would be to have an architectural rendering show the materials and colors to provide justification.

Morris said the columns will be 6-inch x 6-inch posts, made from some pecan trees that had to be removed from the property earlier.

The commissioners discussed the plans for the sheds. They reiterated their desire to see color samples and indications of what color each material would be.

There was discussion of the size and quantity of the sheds and their siting on the lot.

Morris clarified that the doors on the north elevations of the sheds will be set on the diagonal.

Senner summarized the recommendations of the commission, including their requests for an updated site plan to indicate the relationship between new structures and existing trees over 24 inches in diameter and their driplines, including trees to be removed and new trees to be planted; and materials and color specifications for each major element of the proposal.

Morris consented to tabling the application for another month.

Motion:	Miller moved to table the 114 W. Queen St. application until the May 1, 2024, meeting. Senner seconded.
Vote:	5-0.

8. General updates

Hoffheimer announced a one-day Certified Local Government training in Chapel Hill on April 12. Miller expressed interest.

Hoffheimer gave an update that the design standards revisions would be going to the joint public hearing later in April.

Hoffheimer reported that planning staff had settled on keeping the sliding scale for fees as it is and starting the scale at a higher benchmark. The fee will be \$1 per \$1000 in estimated construction costs, with a minimum fee of \$150 for applications that go before the commission and \$25 for minor works. He mentioned that sometime in the future it may be possible to rewrite fees for demolition and major and minor certificates of appropriateness, as was discussed at the previous meeting.

9. Adjournment

Senner adjourned the meeting at 9:15 p.m. without a vote.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joseph Hoffheimer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Joseph" and last name "Hoffheimer" clearly distinguishable.

Joseph Hoffheimer
Planner
Staff support to the Historic District Commission

Approved: May 1, 2024