

Minutes

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

Regular meeting

6:30 p.m. Sept. 3, 2025

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



Present: Chair Will Senner, Vice Chair Hannah Peele and members G. Miller, Sara Riek, Bill Warren and Daniel Widis

Staff: Planner Joseph Hoffheimer and Town Attorney Bob Hornik

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

Chair Will Senner called the meeting to order at 6:30 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 Aug. 6, 2025.

Motion: Member G. Miller moved to approve the minutes from the regular meeting on Aug. 6, 2025, as submitted. Senner seconded.

Vote: 6-0. Abstained: Vice Chair Hannah Peele.

5. Written decision review and approval

Written decision from regular meeting on Aug. 6, 2025.

Motion: Miller moved to approve the written decision from the regular meeting on Aug. 6, 2025, as submitted. Senner seconded.

Vote: 6-0.

6. Old business

- A. Certificate of Appropriateness Application: 311 W. Orange St.
New construction house (PIN 9864883297).

Senner reopened the public hearing. He asked if there were any conflicts of interest or bias among the commissioners. Peele, who was absent at the previous meeting, confirmed that she had no conflicts of interest or bias related to the application.

Uriah Dortch was sworn in to speak on behalf of the application.

Planner Joseph 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:

- This application is being continued from the August Historic District Commission meeting. At that meeting, the commission requested the following additional information from the applicant:
 - Confirmation of materials for the walk between the driveway and the house.
 - Confirmation of garage door materials.
 - Rationale for the driveway location and if the driveway can fit between the 24-inch elm and 40-inch oak without removing either one.
 - Whether the house will include the screened porch. (If the applicant later chooses not to build it, that is usually just a staff-level approval).
 - Additional supporting evidence showing that the architectural style and design are congruent with the local historic district (this can be done by providing photo documentation of similar buildings in the district). Namely, the commission wanted to see justification for the following design elements:
 - The curve and pitch of the roof
 - The prominence of the garage
 - The difference in material between the brick front façade and the lap siding for the rest of the house
 - Explanation for how the house and driveway minimize disruption to the site in terms of trees and grading.
 - A grading plan and elevations drawn to reflect the slope of the site.
 - Some similar projects have not had this requirement, but the language on the application form is vague; it requires a landscaping plan but doesn't specify the level of detail.
- Staff have communicated the items listed above to the applicant, and the applicant is aware of the requests. As of Aug. 28, 2025, staff had not received any additional submittal documents.
- On Sept. 3, 2025, the applicant provided a response that addressed most of the concerns brought up at the last meeting, and other items of requested information can be confirmed verbally through the applicant's attendance at this meeting.

Dortch opened the discussion by saying that the house's placement in the middle of the lot was influenced by the need for a septic field on the far western side. It was clarified that town sewer is not currently required for this lot, and because it is farther than 100 feet from an existing sewer line, septic is allowed but is not required. Dortch said the topography drops 30 feet from west to east, and they wanted to keep the house as close as possible to the septic field.

There was discussion of the choice to use septic for the lot. The commissioners referenced the design standards for New Construction of Primary Residential Buildings, which state that new construction should minimize site disturbance and preserve the overall character and features of the site. It was observed that the plans involve significant disturbance to the site. Dortch explained that speed was the primary rationale for choosing septic, since the town had estimated that the engineering required to extend the sewer line and provide a hook-up would take over a year. Dortch said his client was told septic was allowed on the site, so they decided to move forward with septic.

Dortch showed the site plan with the septic field and a 5-foot buffer between it and the house. He showed the creek to the east and explained that the footprint of the house was constrained by these elements.

There was further discussion of the site, and commissioners expressed disappointment in the disturbance required to install septic. There was discussion of whether the proposed plan for septic is incongruous with the historic district or just sub-optimal in congruity.

Dortch acknowledged that moving the house east would allow for fewer large trees to be removed, but that the current site is as far east as it can be without running into the stream buffer. He said the current site is the least steep hill on the property and will require the least amount of grading, which will minimize erosion.

It was noted that the elevations show consistent elevation reveal around the home. Dortch clarified there will be between eight and 10 feet of foundation reveal. He said the foundation will be solid brick with a white PVC crawlspace door on the side. Dortch said the foundation will be crawlspace, not slab-on-grade. He said the far western side of the foundation will have at least one foot of brick exposed to meet code requirements.

Dortch added that the intent is to not have to grade the site, but instead to just remove the trees and leave the topography as it is. Dortch said the driveway as it is sited in the plans is almost level with grade. He said that to push the driveway further east to avoid removing trees would require extensive grading and backfill. The commissioners expressed appreciation for the applicants' intent to respect and maintain the existing topography.

There was discussion of the removal of several mature trees. Dortch proposed asking the septic installer if the trees along the side of the septic field could remain.

Dortch confirmed that the elm southeast of the screened porch could be protected throughout construction, as the porch will be built with posts and not full foundation walls. He confirmed that a tree protection fence can be installed.

The commissioners returned to the topic of the crawlspace and informed Dortch that PVC is not an allowed material for the crawlspace door. Dortch confirmed that a compatible material can be used instead. The commissioners reminded Dortch that any changes to the plans would need to be communicated to staff.

There was discussion of the siting of the driveway. Dortch said the driveway will be 20 feet wide to accommodate two cars. There was discussion of whether the driveway could be narrowed to retain one of the trees. Dortch explained that the driveway would need to flare at the end, which would put concrete over the tree's roots if the driveway were straight. He added that if the driveway were moved from its proposed location, the site would need to be cut and filled to make it level enough to reach the garage. Miller said he thought one tree could be saved if the driveway were narrowed slightly and shifted within its proposed footprint to get around the tree. It was noted that construction vehicles would need access to the site through the driveway location. Miller said he doubted that there was no way to preserve one of the trees. Dortch said if the tree were preserved, he did not see any way to protect the root system. There was discussion of alternative options for driveway material that would allow for more drainage. There was further discussion of the trees' driplines and the impact the driveway installation will have on the root system. Miller expressed concern that removing the trees that are visible from the street changes the character of the site and said he is concerned about the incongruity of the removal of trees from the driveway area without seeing a grading plan. He said he believes there are alternatives that would be not incongruous.

There was discussion of the 40-inch and 49-inch trees, which Hoffheimer said are under the jurisdiction of the town and would require review by the Public Space and Sustainability Division and potentially the Tree Board in order to be removed. Senner mentioned that because those larger trees are preserved, he is more amenable to the proposed driveway approach.

Dortch provided photos of houses in the historic district that have front-facing garages, facades with brick and siding, and steep roof pitches. The commissioners referenced the design standards which indicate that new construction should reflect but not duplicate other buildings in the district and should be of a style that is compatible and that can stand on its own for a house of 2025.

The commissioners raised their concern that the forward-facing garage takes up a significant portion of the front of the home, and that the garage's front placement makes it a more prominent feature. The commissioners pointed out that most front-facing garages in the district are set back from the front facade of the building.

Dortch showed pictures of houses with a combination of brick and siding, and others with steeply pitched roofs.

The commissioners further discussed the prominence of the garage, remarking that garages are traditionally set back from the front facade and that this one feels incongruous with the historic district, and especially with the adjacent streetscape. They mentioned that it feels incongruous with both new and historic homes in the district.

There was discussion of the curved style of the roof forms. In reference to the narrative included in the application, the commissioners reminded the applicant that it is important to design in a way that is compatible with other homes in the district while not trying to replicate styles from the past. Dortch acknowledged that he has not seen any curved roofs in the historic district, but that he was trying to follow architectural standards of historic homes in order to make the home fit in with the district. The commissioners encouraged the applicant to use current architectural styles while using materials and design elements that are congruent. Member Daniel Widis explained that it was difficult for him to understand the logic behind what the proposed design is drawing from or in dialogue with within the district. Member Bill Warren said the house might seem congruent with some historic districts, but that it seems incongruous with the character of this particular historic district. Senner, Warren, and Widis expressed that they would like to see clear logic and justification for the design decisions and how they are reinterpretations that fit with the existing attributes of the district rather than direct reproductions .

Peele noted that the commission has accepted proposals in the past that do not look like many other houses in the district, but that the difference is that they use modern styles rather than replicating historic ones. She said she was less concerned with the proposed reinterpretation of historic design styles than with the prominence of the garage.

Dortch confirmed that the garage door will be painted steel with windows along the top.

The commissioners reviewed the front elevation.

There was consensus from commissioners that since this is new brick on new construction, there is not a concern with the brick being painted.

There was further discussion of the commissioners' concerns about the prominence of the garage. There was discussion of whether the garage could be a side-entry garage. Dortch said he agreed it would be less prominent if it had an entrance on the side, but that it would not be possible due to the location of the septic field. There was discussion of adjusting the massing to make the garage less prominent, both visually and physically. Dortch said they had considered that, but that it did not fit with the design they were trying to accomplish.

The commissioners reviewed the left elevation. Dortch said he had found many similar roof pitches in houses around the district. He added that new construction houses that have similar, if not steeper, roofs have been approved in the past 10 years.

The commissioners reviewed the rear and right elevations. There was discussion of the overall height of the roof relative to adjacent houses. Dortch said he tried to keep the setbacks consistent with neighboring houses on the street. It was noted that the surrounding houses are smaller, but that this house is set back from the street. It was mentioned that the house at 320 B W. Orange St. is taller than this one, and is also significantly set back from the street. There was discussion of the trees in front of the house which will likely mask the massing.

Dortch confirmed the siding will be Hardie plank with the smooth side out.

There was no public testimony.

Senner closed the public hearing.

Senner summarized the commissioners' discussion, saying they had addressed a number of elements of concern, including the massing, the roof pitch, the curved element in the roof, the siting of the house in general, the disruption of mature trees, and the addition of the septic field that disrupts the mature trees. He said the commissioners generally found these elements to be sub-optimal, but that the overall question was whether the work is incongruous with the district. Senner said the one element that stood out to him most is the prominence of the garage.

Member Sara Riek said her concern was with the total package of the proposed work. She said in her view the sum of all of the sub-optimal parts made it incongruous as a whole. Miller agreed that the whole package does not fit with how he views congruity with the district. Warren agreed that incongruity arose from the totality of the sub-optimal pieces, adding that the most incongruous elements in his opinion were the removal of trees and the prominence of the front-facing garage.

There was discussion of the commission's recent decision on the 114 W. Queen St. application, which also had many different elements that the commissioners found to be sub-optimal, and which aspects were denied.

Widis raised the point that the site presents many constraints that lead to some of these sub-optimal elements. He said he found the prominent garage to be incongruous since there are no similarly prominent garages in the district. Senner and Peele agreed that they found the garage to be incongruous. Miller observed that with a straight driveway that goes directly into the garage, it will be even more visible from the street.

There was discussion about the reapplication process in case the proposal was denied. Dortch said he would prefer to continue the application to a future meeting.

Motion: Senner moved to continue the 311 W. Orange St. application until the Oct. 1, 2025, regular meeting. Miller seconded.
 Vote: 6-0.

7. New business

- A. Certificate of Appropriateness Application: 208 S. Cameron St.
 West-facing addition in existing courtyard area (PIN 9874153612).

Senner opened the public hearing. He asked if there were any conflicts of interest or bias among the commissioners. None were disclosed. All commissioners disclosed that they had visited the site in preparation for reviewing the application.

Hoffheimer was sworn in. Angel Barnes and Drew Wilgus were sworn in to speak on behalf of the application. Michael Reeves, a neighbor, was sworn in to provide public comment.

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:

- Any unspecified materials still need to be confirmed. Materials need to be spelled out.
- Accessibility and Life Safety were included as relevant standards, though staff do not believe the railings are included for ADA purposes.
- Other standards for Exterior Walls, Windows, Doors, and Roofs may be relevant but are oriented more toward historic structures. This was built in 1985.
- Staff had concerns about the gabled parapet (including the false louvre) and how it obstructs the existing gables on what could be considered a character-defining elevation. It doesn't face the street, but it is very visible from public view if you enter from the rear. Staff are unaware of any similar additions in the local historic district, but the applicant has cited the old jail annex as an example. From what is in the inventory, the annex was built in 1996, but records from the Historic District Commission's discussion at that time have been lost.

Wilgus introduced the application by explaining that the applicants would like to expand the boardroom so the building is bisected, and to build more storage space for voting equipment. He said these plans would enclose the courtyard. He said the air conditioning units would be moved to the roof and would be screened. He added that the applicants would prefer to have a roll-up door on the side of the building that faces the parking lot, the elevation that is most visible to the public, for loading and unloading equipment. Wilgus said they tried to match the existing structure as best they could by matching all materials and salvaging existing windows, which have simulated divided lites and are in good shape. He said they would also preserve and reuse as much as possible and repair what can be repaired, including window trim and casings.

Wilgus said the railings for the ramp will match the existing wrought iron railings and will be compliant with handrail standards. He said that the ramp is included as part of the design as an optional element, but is not required by code. He said that if it remains within budget, the ramp will be constructed, and if it is not within the budget, the railing on that side would continue straight to match the other side.

Wilgus said the new pavers for the walkway will be brick, which is the material of the existing walkway.

Wilgus said the small change in plane at the connection between the new and existing building is an inset to provide a shadow line and create a distinction between the old and new. He said it will be the same Flemish bond, and that the custom brick contractor matched the brick as best he could.

The commissioners reviewed the rear elevation. Wilgus said the parapet was meant to provide screening for the air conditioning units behind it, and that it was challenging to recreate the same pitch as the flanking gables in a way that would effectively screen the units behind it without being disproportionately tall.

The commissioners expressed concern with the shallow depth of the parapet, which they said made it feel like it was creating artificial conditions, similar to a movie set or a big box store. They wondered if there could be less impactful ways to accomplish the screening and whether a straight parapet might be more congruous with the district. They also expressed concern with the artificial louvre.

Widis said he struggled with the differentiation between old and new, and was concerned that the gasket between the two was not a large enough separation. He wondered if a different type of material might create a stronger delineation.

There was discussion of the visibility of the HVAC units with their location on top of one story. Wilgus supposed that they would be visible from River Park in the winter. Widis raised the point that the thinness of the parapet might be more of a visual draw than the HVAC units themselves, especially since it is more apparent from the side than straight-on. The commissioners pointed out that the parapet reads as false because the windows can be seen behind it.

There was discussion of the potential for a different parapet detail to make the new addition more distinct from the old structure. It was observed that the parapet obscures the windows, elements contributing to the character-defining elevation. There was discussion of what elements would be visible from the street. Wilgus said the HVAC units are 6 feet tall, and that it would be hard to screen the equipment without obscuring the windows. He showed a photo of the equipment. He said that they are not opposed to a flat parapet, but that having enough height to include the covered awning over the doorway would be ideal. There was discussion of whether the parapet would look thin in reality or whether it just appeared thin in the rendering.

It was observed that a flat parapet might help differentiate the addition as newer than the existing building. Widis reiterated that differences in material could help support the differentiation.

The commissioners reviewed the front elevation. Wilgus confirmed that the plan is to reuse the existing door but may need to add new hardware. The commissioners reminded the applicant to let staff know if anything changes, including if they need to replace any hardware, so staff can review the materials for compatibility.

Wilgus clarified that the awning looks not centered over the door in the elevation view because the downspout appears to be part of the column, but that it will be centered in reality.

Wilgus confirmed that the linework on the flat roof section between the gabled parapet and the existing building is set back from the front facade. He added that the main gabled parapet has a capstone, which introduces a new material to the center section. He said a parge coat or limestone might exist at the top of the chimneys. Wilgus said the roofing is primarily edge metal over wood fascia, which is what the materials would be for the flat sections.

Wilgus said the material on the exposed elevation of the awning will be Hardie panel, smooth side out.

Wilgus said the steel overhead coiling door would be a bronze color.

Wilgus said the side of the step would be brick all the way to the top, with a brick curve. He said the loading dock ramp will be all concrete. He confirmed that there will be a light on the addition at the ramp, for ADA purposes, and that he would send the cut sheet to Hoffheimer.

Wilgus said the trim on the windows would be wood.

Wilgus said the louvre in the peak of the parapet was added to visually break up the wall. He said they struggled with having no water table at the floor level.

Reeves provided public comment on the application. He said he lives at 211 S. Cameron St., directly facing the property in question. He provided comments about the use of the structure and expressed concern that the plans intend to remove the character-defining terrace space. He added that the ramp does not seem necessary since the building is accessible from the front. He added that he would like to see screening included for the ramp on the south elevation.

Arthur Axelbank, co-owner of 210 S. Cameron St. was sworn in to provide public comment. He raised questions about the purpose of the expansion, the timeline for construction, noise of construction, and flooding risk. Hoffheimer directed the speaker to the next week's Board of Adjustment meeting to address concerns about the flooding risk.

The commissioners discussed the landscaping plan for the west elevation. Wilgus confirmed that there is room for landscaping in front of the ramp.

Miller raised the question of whether the west-facing facade is a character-defining elevation. He observed that it does not face the street, but that the terrace could be considered a character-defining element. He said that in addition to removing the terrace, the addition also obscures the character-defining windows. He explained that he finds it incongruous to construct an element that clearly hides the original intention of the design of the building. He said he would find an addition with a lower parapet to still be incongruous, but maybe less so, but he would need to see the design.

Widis said in his opinion the addition repeats too much of the existing design and reads as one large volume. He said more material definition might provide some differentiation between old and new.

There was general agreement that the ramp material and continuing the material to the foundation was consistent with the design standards for new additions.

Riek added that the proposed design blends in almost too seamlessly. She mentioned she would be interested in a design that keeps the windows more prominent since the south elevation is a character-defining facade.

Senner expressed that his main concern is that the parapet reads as artificial, and that the design standards discourage creating artificial elements. There was discussion of alternatives that might be found to be less incongruous. Wilgus proposed changing the design to a lower, flat parapet, and more traditional screening material for the HVAC units. He showed a rendering of the HVAC units. It was noted that sometimes trying to hide equipment ends up drawing more attention to it. However, it was also observed

that adding HVAC units to the view of the facade is a change to the existing view of the building. There was further discussion of the visibility of the HVAC units from public areas. The commissioners encouraged the applicants to explore alternative ways to optimize the parapet and sight lines of the mechanical equipment.

Wilgus said the two gabled windows on each side of the building are wood. It was observed that they are currently boarded up. Wilgus clarified that they provide roof access, and that one of them is a louvre, but that they have been compromised. He said they would remain in their existing condition.

Senner noted that the applicant agreed to screening the ramp.

Motion: Senner moved to continue the 208 S. Cameron St. application to the Oct. 1, 2025, regular meeting. Miller seconded.

Vote: 6-0.

7. General updates

Miller and Warren agreed to participate in upcoming Certified Local Government trainings.

Hoffheimer reminded the commissioners that officers will be elected at the October regular meeting.

Hoffheimer said he would share information about the process for designating local landmarks.

Hoffheimer said the parking study will be presented to the Board of Commissioners next Monday, which will include information on the Orange County facilities plan, which will affect the historic district.

Hoffheimer said new artworks from the Uproar Art Festival are being acquired by the Town of Hillsborough, but they qualify as ordinary maintenance so will not come before the commission.

8. Adjournment

Senner adjourned the meeting at 8:45 p.m. without a vote.

Respectfully submitted,



Joseph Hoffheimer

Planner

Staff support to the Historic District Commission

Approved: October 1, 2025