

TOWN OF AMHERST
Historic District Commission

December 21, 2023

APPROVED

In attendance: Doug Chabinsky – Acting Chair, Martha Chabinsky (remote), Tom Grella – Board of Selectmen Ex-Officio, Tom Quinn, and Nicole Crawford (alternate)
Staff present: Kristan Patenaude (Recording Secretary) (remote)

Doug Chabinsky, Acting Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

Nicole Crawford sat for Chris Buchanan.

PUBLIC HEARINGS:

1. **CASE #: PZ18261-112923 – Jared & Gail Fait (Owners & Applicants); 118 Amherst Street, PIN #: 005-053-000** – Request for approval for the removal of the front porch and replacement with three windows, siding change from shakes to cedar clapboard, and the installation of a mini-split.

Tom Grella recused himself from this item.

Tom Quinn moved that the application is complete and has no regional impact.

Seconded by Nicole Crawford.

Roll Call Vote: Doug Chabinsky – aye, Martha Chabinsky - aye, Nicole Crawford – aye, Tom Quinn – aye. Motion carried 4-0-0.

Doug Chabinsky noted that this is an after the fact approval, which is difficult for the Commission.

Jared Fait explained that the front porch had been leaking through a fluorescent light and there was mold on the ceiling. The enclosed porch was open to the house. In order to fix the issue, he decided to remove the porch and replace it with windows, while redoing the siding with clapboard, as this is an historically appropriate material.

In response to a question from Doug Chabinsky, Jared Fait stated that the windows he installed were vinyl. The rest of the home already has vinyl windows.

Doug Chabinsky noted that it is unfortunate the applicant continued through the process before allowing the Commission to come and view the site.

Tom Quinn noted that he viewed the site and had no questions at this time.

Nicole Crawford stated that she had no questions at this time.

Martha Chabinsky stated that certain items were completed on the site after the applicant was asked to stop. She does not have any specific questions at this time. These items required approval and she would like any future work to require approval prior to construction.

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Doug Chabinsky noted that the maple trees proposed to screen the mini split will not be appropriate. The screening should be done using an appropriate fence or evergreen shrubs to provide year-round screening. Jared Fait noted that a neighbor has a mini split without any screening. Doug Chabinsky stated that some people install mini splits because electricians are not clear that approval is needed from the Commission. The Commission has been asking that these be screened after the fact. Jared Fait noted that any vegetation screened too close to the mini split will likely die due to the cold air that blows on it. Doug Chabinsky stated that a fence may then be a good option, but screening is needed.

Jared Fait asked if he has to abide by the same rules as the rest of the Village. Doug Chabinsky stated that the property is part of the Historic District and must abide by those rules and regulations. Jared Fait stated that he believed there were two phases of the District, contributing and non-contributing. Doug Chabinsky stated that contributing properties are listed on the National Register. Non-contributing properties may not be included or may be newer homes but still must abide by the rules and regulations of the Historic District. This is a non-contributing property, but still an older home with characteristics that should be preserved. The rules and regulations are applied based on the unique application and property at hand.

Jared Fait asked if approval is needed for cedar clapboard replacement, as it is included in the rules and regulations. Doug Chabinsky stated that approval is still needed. Jared Fait stated that this seems redundant. Doug Chabinsky noted that an applicant can encompass multiple items within one application to complete the work within two years.

Jared Fait noted that he recently replaced a mailbox post and asked if that required an application. Doug Chabinsky stated that mailbox posts are not controlled, but there are guidelines in the regulations. The purpose of the regulations is to have mechanical equipment and mailboxes fade into the background as they did not exist historically. The regulations are not strenuous or over restrictive and the Commission has leeway for each unique application. Applicants can have design reviews with the Commission in order to get feedback before submitting a formal application.

FINDINGS:

- 1) Work has already been completed and is generally in keeping with the regulations, with some variance
- 2) Non-contributing property built in 1936
- 3) Highly visible from the public view
- 4) House originally had vinyl windows and the windows installed were also vinyl in a similar style to try to match the existing windows
- 5) Mini split was existing prior to current ownership and requires screening

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**Doug Chabinsky moved to approve the application as submitted, with the change that the mini split needs to be screened with an approved fence per the regulations or with evergreen plants, at the owner's choice. Seconded by Tom Quinn.
Roll Call Vote: Doug Chabinsky – aye, Martha Chabinsky - aye, Nicole Crawford – aye, Tom Quinn – aye. Motion carried 4-0-0.**

Doug Chabinsky requested that the mini split be screened in an appropriate time frame. Jared Fait stated that he would plan to plant something in the area in the spring.

Tom Grella retook his seat on the Commission.

OTHER BUSINESS:

1. Discussion regarding design guidelines and CLG Grant

Doug Chabinsky noted that the Town was not awarded the full amount of the CLG grant applied for. The Town was quoted \$50,000 for the work on the design guidelines and is short approximately \$26,000. He asked if what was quoted is truly what the Commission desires. He stated that he would like the design guidelines to consider things such as massing and what needs to be considered when placing an addition on an historic house. Much of the other information proposed may not be appropriate for Amherst. The Commission could request that the consultant amend the scope of the project. The Commission would then need to ask the Board of Selectmen for \$26,000 to complete the project. Work done through the grant must be completed by September 2024. There could potentially be a request for an extension. Additional grants could be sought from other sources to cover the funding.

Tom Grella stated that the changes made up to now have made the process easier for applicants. Anything more than this may become too technical.

Doug Chabinsky stated that it would be nice for the design guidelines to include examples for items like massing.

Tom Quinn stated that he does not believe taxpayers should be asked for additional funding, but it would be nice to tailor the scope of the work to the grant funding received.

Doug Chabinsky stated that he would like the Commission to review the request for proposals and the consultant's proposed scope. He stated that he does not believe he ever saw the final version of the RFP that went out, as he may not have agreed with some of the items included. Portsmouth and Exeter may be good towns to review for their regulations. He believes the proposed scope lacks helpful information for applicants when coming before the Commission. For example, guidelines for exterior maintenance might be nice to have but may not be what the Town wants.

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Nicole Crawford noted that the next round of grant applications can be submitted in June 2024.

2. Minutes: November 16, 2023

Tom Grella moved to approve the meeting minutes of November 16, 2023, as submitted. Seconded by Doug Chabinsky.

Roll Call Vote: Doug Chabinsky – aye, Martha Chabinsky - aye, Nicole Crawford – abstain, Tom Grella – aye; Tom Quinn – abstain. Motion carried 3-0-2.

4. Any other business:

Doug Chabinsky stated that the Commission previously generated a list of properties with certain compliance items that need to be enforced. The Town's prior Building Inspector sent letters to these properties asking that the items be dealt with. Some of the properties have done so and others have not. It is important to continue to follow through and work with the homeowners to complete these items.

Martha Chabinsky asked if homeowners have yet been made to change their mailboxes. Doug Chabinsky stated that those were some of the items included on the list, but he is unclear if they have been changed. He would like homeowners to be made to comply with the regulations. It will be difficult to have items enforced until a new Building Inspector is hired, but the Commission should review the list of items at its next meeting to discuss next steps.

Doug Chabinsky stated that he would like residents to view the Commission as a help in the process in order to keep the historic charm of the Village that attracted people in the first place.

Tom Grella moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:35pm. Seconded by Doug Chabinsky.

Roll Call Vote: Doug Chabinsky – aye, Martha Chabinsky - aye, Nicole Crawford – aye, Tom Grella – aye; Tom Quinn – aye. Motion carried 5-0-0.

Respectfully submitted,
Kristan Patenaude

Minutes approved: January 18, 2024