

NEW HAVEN HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
Wednesday, June 14, 2023, Regular Meeting, 7:00 PM
Location: Web-Based Meeting via Zoom

Chair Trina Learned calls to order the public hearing at 7:04pm.

In Attendance: Laura Brown (City Plan Director), Fatima Cecunjanin (Staff to the Historic District Commission, Planner II), Trina Learned (Commissioner and Chair), Susan Godshall (Commissioner), Dylan Christopher (Commissioner), Cordalie Benoit (Commissioner), John Herzan (New Haven Preservation Trust)

1. Roll Call

Chair Learned reviews New Haven's Zoom meeting HDC policies and procedures and the point of New Haven's Local Historic Districts and the Historic District Commission (HDC).

2. Public Hearing

2.1 23-06-CA 620 Chapel Street (MBLU: 207 0542 00100) Wooster Square Local Historic District. Owner: Episcopal Church of St. Paul & St. James. Applicant: Brian Fillmore. Seeking approval to construct ADA ramp and new stairway to church undercroft (basement).

Brian Fillmore, 57 Olive Street, New Haven

Mr. Fillmore states that the Episcopal Church of St. Paul & St. James, that sits on the corner of Olive and Chapel Streets, has been a cornerstone for generations in the neighborhood. Not only is it a worship center, but it is also a community center that has pursued a capital campaign in recent years to increase the user-friendliness and sustainability of the building. One of the main goals of the church is to increase access to the undercroft (basement) area of the building, where they hold most of their community activities. The current entrance to the undercroft is through decaying stone steps on the Olive and Chapel corner, which limits access for some people. Mr. Fillmore states that they are seeking approval for a new stairway and ramp down to the undercroft, most of which will be below grade level, with little view from the street, except for the railings. There will be a grass courtyard area and the landscape and hedges will stay the same. The

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project will require excavating parts of the ground for the new doorway and stairs off of Olive Street. Mr. Fillmore states that the stairs will be concrete, they are exploring railing options, and that there will be provisions in the plan for drainage. They are considering tinting the concrete.

Duo Dickinson, 945 Boston Post Road, Madison

Mr. Dickinson states that he is the Architect working on the Episcopal Church of St. Paul & St. James, also that they have met with Chris Wigren from Preservation Connecticut to discuss the best plan for this project. Mr. Dickinson emphasizes Mr. Fillmore's statement that they want to make this new entrance as invisible as possible by reconstructing the existing fence and recessing it, constructing a simple and safe railing system from the inside layer. He states that they also want to make sure that the plants they decide to place in between the ramp and the existing railing will be sustainable, especially throughout the wintertime.

Mr. Fillmore narrates while Ms. Cecunjanin scrolls through the images and documents in the application. Chair Learned asks if the commissioners have any clarifying questions. Chair Learned asks the applicant to clarify the intended material of the panels between the railing and the ramp for the application. Mr. Dickinson states that they have the intentions of using the simplest and most durable material that they can, which would likely be panels of a painted or anodized metal, such as steel or aluminum. Commissioner Christopher asks the applicant if there is any intention to mix materials, as there was mention of clear paneling. Mr. Dickinson responds that there may have been a mistake in mentioning clear panels, explaining that they do not want to use clear panels due to the visual problems that they have. They plan on using materials that are impact resistant and are easy to clean. Mr. Fillmore adds that using clear panels may have been what they envisioned at the beginning of their plans due to them being minimally impactful, but they realized that they are not practical.

Chair Learned opens discussion to public comment.

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John Herzan, 922 State Street, New Haven

Mr. Herzan states that Sarah Tisdale provided the applicant with a list of clarifications regarding dimensions for the project. He would like to know if Ms. Tisdale's input was factored into the application. Mr. Herzan also asks the applicant to repeat the intended material for the metal panels and discuss their durability.

Mr. Dickinson states that all of Ms. Tisdale's input was included in the application. He also states that they want to make the panels as durable as possible, probably consisting of painted or anodized steel or heavy aluminum. These materials will allow for industrial cleaning and recoating, if necessary. Mr. Dickinson states that he believes that the panels will most likely be a dull gray color and will be an extremely stable structure.

Chair Learned asks the commissioners for internal discussion. Commissioner Christopher states that he was expecting to see something more in line with the historic nature of the building, but because it is clearly a new installment, he is okay with the newer material. He believes that in a different circumstance, he would expect something more in line, but in this instance, he appreciates the difference. Commissioner Godshall says that there is a planter on the plan that has not been discussed. She states that if you were heading down the stairs to the undercroft, it would be immediately on the right and asks if that is part of the application, and if so, to clarify what it is composed of. Mr. Dickinson states that the planter is better described as a plant bed or flower bed because the dirt will be continued to the retaining wall. They thought the flower bed would act as a good, passive way to provide separation between the retaining wall and the ground plane, even though it is not required by the building code. There would not be any raised structures, just plantings within the ground. Chair Learned clarifies that the retaining wall acts as the boundary to this application. Commissioner Godshall asks what the material of the retaining wall is. Mr. Dickinson states that the retaining wall will be cast concrete and that he would like to tint it to simulate the brownstone of the building so that it would not stand out.

Commissioner Godshall moves to approve application 23-06-CA 620 Chapel Street to construct ADA ramp and new stairway to church undercroft (basement) as submitted, with the clarification that the railing will not be transparent.

Commissioner Christopher seconds.

All in favor at 7:41pm.

Motion passes.

3. Discussion Items

3.1 Demolition Delays

98 Hazel Street

Ms. Cecunjanin states that 98 Hazel Street is a contributing property to a National Register Historic District and is going through the demolition delay process. She states that the owners have sent notices out, but that they were the wrong ones. Ms. Cecunjanin states that she is working with the owners to rectify the situation and send the appropriate notices to the abutters and parties on the demolition notification list. The owner of the property is Neighborhood Housing Services of New Haven and their reason for demolition is to remove the building in order to build a new residential home. Ms. Cecunjanin clarifies that the ninety days have not started yet because the owners have to complete their noticing requirements. Commissioner Godshall states that this property is a small bungalow that was purchased less than ninety days ago, so they truly bought it with the intent to demolish, which she is uncomfortable with. Commissioner Godshall believes that this is not something that the Commission should encourage in a National Historic District. Chair Learned states that this is not the usual disposition of Neighborhood Housing Services, as they have been a partner in the preservation community and has frequently demonstrated successful rehabilitation of historic properties. Commissioner Christopher shares that the neighboring lot is vacant. Commissioner Godshall adds that Neighborhood Housing Services also owns that lot. Chair Learned states that Neighborhood Housing Service tends to build single-family houses or multi-family houses, and that it has not typically been their strategy to build

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larger developments in New Haven. Commissioner Benoit adds that in her experience with them, Neighborhood Housing Services tends to create multi-family housing very accurate, but that maybe the structure of this small house does not fit for that. Chair Learned states that she finds this application problematic due to the owner's stated reasoning for demolition and adds that she would like to discuss this property further at the Commission's next meeting.

198 River Street

Helen Rosenberg, 212 W. Elm Street, New Haven

Ms. Rosenberg is an Economic Development Officer for the City of New Haven Office of Economic Development. She states that this property is part of the remaining Bigelow Company buildings, and that the city has faced a lot of difficulty in obtaining the funding to properly stabilize and restore it. The building cannot be properly used due to poor conditions and flood zone issues on the first floors. Ms. Rosenberg adds that this property is part of a Municipal Project Development Area, so the proposal for the future would be to build an equivalent sized industrial style building that pays tribute to the former building. Chair Learned asks Ms. Rosenberg if the reason for the demolition is due to the building being structurally unsound and unsalvageable. Ms. Rosenberg responds, stating that the reason for demolition is due to the building being structurally unsound and that is the judgement made by the Demolition Officer for the City of New Haven.

Mr. Herzan states that he is sad to see this structure lose its former identity, as it was a very important area because of its role in the economic development of New Haven and does not want to see it lost but understands the reasoning for the request. Commissioner Godshall applauds the city for going through the ninety-day demolition delay process allowing discussion to occur, rather than a declaration of structural unsoundness, which is how the first half of the buildings in this area were demolished. She states that using this process is a big step forward on behalf of the city.

3.2 Guidelines for Administrative Approvals

Commissioner Godshall states that she wanted to review the administrative approval process for applications, as there are cases where the city staff may make a judgement on whether applications need to come before the Commission, and she is unaware of any guidelines or regulation that must be followed in this process. Commissioner Godshall wanted to look at how the administrative approvals are managed or addressed and the cases in which one is appropriate. Chair Learned states that in her experience on the Commission, there are two conditions where administrative approvals have been made appropriately, in her opinion. The first of these is like-for-like work, where there are no architectural changes or profile changes, etc. The second condition is when the act is explicitly a repair of existing fabric with the exact same materials that are present. Commissioner Godshall states that what triggered her thought about the administrative approval process, was the approval of vinyl windows at 80 Howard Street. She understands that there was a fire in the building and the existing windows were vinyl, so it was a like-for-like replacement, but she is worried about the precedent that it sets for neighbors and others thinking that it is appropriate to install vinyl windows. Chair Learned states that in her opinion, that was a repair in kind, as the vinyl windows predated the creation of the local historic district. Chair Learned believes that the real question is about the confusion within the district about conformity and the concern about requirements when something breaks, along with their standards of modification or repair. She states that this debate is worthy of discussion within the Commission. Commissioner Godshall is worried that this decision will be a pivot point for other City Point residents to seek approval of less than appropriate materials. Chair Learned states that this decision does not exempt others from coming before the Commission and if the result does not turn out to be like-for-like, that there is an enforcement issue. Chair Learned says that this is something that the Commission should discuss more thoroughly in the future and would like to keep it on the agenda for the next meeting.

3.3 79 Lawrence Street

Ms. Cecunjanin introduces 79 Lawrence Street as a contributing property to the Orange Street National Historic District. In November 2022, owner Sunny Anand and contractor Andy Rizzo applied to turn the existing church into six individual dwelling units, with the plan being to remove from the roofline upwards. They went through the ninety-day delay process in November and received the building permits in May. Ms. Cecunjanin states that the city received a notice from the New Haven Preservation Trust recently that it appears the applicant has gone outside of the scope of the demolition request. The city is working on determining the best path forward and understanding what is occurring. Chair Learned states that the Commission spent a great deal of time reviewing the specifications of this application and clarifying the limitations of demolition.

Ms. Cecunjanin shares images that show the current status of the building and displays the concerns brought to the city's attention by the New Haven Preservation Trust. None of the preexisting building except for the foundation remains. Commissioner Godshall states that both the building permit and the ninety-day demolition permit clearly specify the degree of demolition, which the owner disregarded. Commissioner Godshall asks if the city has enforcement measures for intentional disregard of a permit. Chair Learned states that the Commission's role here is to understand and advocate for how the city will respond to the transgression, along with enforcement measures, as the Commission is a stakeholder and the response by the city directly affects how the Commission makes decisions going forward. Ms. Cecunjanin states that they have plans to meet with Corporation Counsel to discuss this issue further and determine next steps. Ms. Brown adds that immediately after the city received the notice from the New Haven Preservation Trust, staff went to conduct a site visit to determine exactly what was happening. Ms. Brown restates Ms. Cecunjanin's statement that they are planning to meet with Corporation Counsel to discuss enforcement actions and if there is any potential action that might be taken.

3.4 Site Plan Reviews

Ms. Cecunjanin states that there are three properties on Hillhouse Avenue that are going through Site Plan Review next week. 2 Hillhouse Avenue includes a comprehensive renovation of the existing building for accessibility and sustainability improvements, including construction of new ADA-compliant entrance at west façade of building. The scope of 24 Hillhouse Avenue is a comprehensive renovation of the existing building involving the construction of an accessible entrance ramp/sloped walkway and code-compliant steps and an associated landing at the Trumbull Street (north) entrance to the building. 37 Hillhouse Avenue is a comprehensive renovation of the existing building and the construction of a four-story addition at the rear of the building. Ms. Cecunjanin states that they are being heard at the City Plan Commission on June 21. 2 Hillhouse Avenue and 37 Hillhouse Avenue are Site Plan Reviews, while 24 Hillhouse Avenue is an Administrative Site Plan Review due to the property's plans being below the threshold for City Plan Commission review.

Mr. Herzan states that he wanted to make sure to note on record that 24 Hillhouse Avenue is a National Historic Landmark and that there is a page highlighting the significance of the property on the New Haven Preservation Trust's website.

4. Minutes

4.1 Approval of April 20, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Godshall notes a correction on page five, replacing "Chair Godshall" with "Chair Learned," replacing "motions" with "moves" on pages seven and nine, and creating a separate paragraph at the last page of the minutes where it refers to including the discussion of administrative approvals in the June meeting. Chair Learned notes that there are several areas in the minutes that create confusion and that the Commission should have the ability to use common language that is architecturally correct, making it clear for readers.

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Approval of April 20, 2023 Meeting Minutes is deferred until the next meeting.

5. New Business

No new business.

Commissioner Godshall moves to adjourn.

Commissioner Christopher seconds.

All in favor at 8:38pm.

Motion passes.

Respectfully submitted by Amelia Mower, recorder.