

NEW HAVEN HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

Wednesday, September 9, 2020, Regular Meeting, 7:00 PM Location: Web-based meeting via Zoom

Commissioner Trina Learned calls to order the public hearing at 7:01 PM.

In attendance: Trina Learned (Commissioner and Chair), Tom Kimberly (Commissioner and Clerk), Susan Godshall (Commissioner), Doug Royalty (Commissioner), George Knight (Commissioner), Aicha Woods (City Plan), Maya Vardi (City Plan)

Commissioner Learned dedicates a moment of silence in memory of Doris (Deb) Townshend, who served as the Chair of the Historic District Commission for 15 years, one of the founders of the New Haven Preservation Trust,

Continued Public Hearing

1. 20-08-CA Owner: Gena Ruocco Lockery. Seeking a Certificate of Appropriateness for Garage Renovation at 86 Chestnut St., Including Refurbish Windows and Installation of New Windows, Doors, and an Installation of a Fence and a Gate at the adjacent lot at 82 Chestnut Street, Wooster Square Local Historic District.

Gena Lockery, 82-86 Chestnut Street, New Haven

Ms. Lockery says she has a new summary of the proposed work:

Ms. Lockery says that as the first phase of the project, she would like to install the fence, 29 feet by 4 feet opening, at 82 Chestnut St., along the sidewalk. The fence will consist of a 4-foot gate and four fence panels 5 feet 6 inches tall and 8 feet wide; the material is galvanized steel with powder-coated black paint.

Ms. Lockery says that on phase two, she will install wooden windows with four panes of glass and steel doors, all painted black, in the four openings that are now filled with cinder blocks on the left side of the garage at 86 Chestnut St.

The garage façade consists of a steel door, a solid garage door, and a broken window covered with plexiglass. Ms. Lockery proposes to replace it with the same sized window.

Ms. Lockery says she is not proposing any work on the rear of the garage.

Ms. Lockery notes that the Commission determined the last meeting that the garage's right side is not under the HDC jurisdiction as it is not visible from a public way.

Ms. Lockery will focus on the left side of the garage facing 82 Chestnut St. She proposes three full glass doors to allow sunlight in the garage and a window.

In the first space that is closest to Chestnut St.- remain a window at the same size. There is a brick arch above the window, as does the second opening. Ms. Lockery accepted the Commission suggestion and asked approval for installing a single door under the arch and a double door in the third space where there is no arch, and a single door of the same size in the fourth space, which she installed before the HDC review. The wall (left side of the garage) is 12 inches thick, three layers of bricks and cinder blocks. The door will be flush with the interior of the wall, the door and frame are 5 inches thick. Steel lintel supports the brick above the opening, two inches of trim on either side of the door.

Ms. Lockery describes the details of the work method: The contractor will cut from the middle of the space and install a steel lintel for support, remove brick and mortar, the new frame will be screwed into the brick, the holes will be filled with cut brick and expanding foam filler, the gaps around the lintel will be filled with mortar, wooden wedge-shaped spacer, and silicone to waterproof. All wood trim would be painted black giving it a neat, clean appearance.

Ms. Lockery presents diagrams showing the garage's left side- current condition and proposed work, a picture of the wall, and close up photos of the openings. Ms. Lockery notes that the first and second openings were filled with cinder blocks, and the third and fourth openings were filled with brick. The wall is a mix of brick and cinder blocks.

Ms. Lockery presents close up pictures of the openings. In the first opening, a window would be installed, aligned under the archway. In the second space, a single door will be installed under the archway. The third opening does not have an archway, and the wall is a combination of bricks and cinder blocks, a double door would be installed there- 62" by 80". In the fourth opening, a single door was installed, flashed to the inside. The gaps between the new door and the wall will be filled with bricks that have been removed. Ms. Lockery says that the mason will line the bricks to the right side of the door and smooth the edges with mortar and install trim to cover the wood. The side of the building will be repainted.

Ms. Lockery presents a picture of the door as seen from inside the garage and pointing out the solid steel lintel installed above the door. Ms. Lockery also notes that there is a brick arch above the fourth opening that is visible only from the inside and will remain exposed.

Ms. Lockery presents a scaled drawing (floor plan) to clarify why the new window and doors are needed.

On the front of the building, Ms. Lockery asks to replace just the front window. She presents product information of the new windows and doors she proposes to install and the specs for the gate and fence, all presented at the last meeting.

Commissioner Learned expresses concern about the bricks' exposed edges and notes that the new door does not match the existing opening.

Commissioner Godshall notes that on the left side of the door, where it appears to be a row of stacked bricks, the cut did not expose a clean brick face but some gaps and holes. Ms. Lockery that the wall consists of three layers of wall, behind the bricks there is a layer of cinder blocks.

Commissioner Learned mentions parging and asks if this is the intended method to complete the work on the new door. Ms. Lockery replies that she hired the mason working on the Coffee shop at 516 Chapel and that he will implement the same method used there.

Ms. Lockery notes that the current exterior left wall of 86 Chestnut was once the interior wall of the building that existed on 82 Chestnut. The interior wall of her garage was once an exterior wall of that building.

Commissioner Learned says she has two main concerns. The first is the appearance and appropriateness of the proposed work regarding the district's historical context. The second is about the subtraction of historical materials. Commissioner Learned says that the Commission has to ensure that the proposed work will not jeopardize the integrity and the long term viability of the structure and explain that this is why the questions regarding the lintel and the edges of the bricks that are now exposed. Commissioner Learned says that as Chair of the Commission, she is concerned about the misrepresentation of the project at the last meeting. The installation of the door happened before receiving a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Commissioner Learned asks about the plan for handling the gap between the door and the arch's underside. Ms. Lockery explains that a steel lintel will be installed after the mortar above the door will be removed. The lintels are 44 inches, L shaped, and were custom cut for the openings' size. They are slid into the removed mortar space. The lintel covers a row of bricks above the wall.

Commissioner Godshall asks for more details about the finish of the new openings. Ms. Lockery explains that they will stack bricks and use mortar to fill the gaps. Commissioner Godshall asks specifically about the left side of the new opening, noting it appears that there is not enough width to stack bricks. Ms. Lockery explains that the left side will be smoothed with mortar and that the two sides will match.

Commissioner Learned notes that the new opening's depth would be prominently viewable from the street.

Commissioner Godshall asks if the two sides would be symmetrical, given that on the right side, the applicant suggests stacking bricks and on the left side to smooth it with mortar.

Commissioner Learned asks about the lintel's appearance on the exterior. Mrs. Lockery explains that it is flat, under the bricks, the L shape is visible on the interior for additional supports. Commissioner Learned asks if the lintel installed on the interior supports the entire depth of the wall. Ms. Lockery says that another lintel would be inserted on the exterior. Commissioner Learned asks about the support of the exterior wall. Ms. Lockery explains that the interior lintel and the door frame support it. Commissioner Learned notes that the bricks on the outer layer are unsupported, and that this exemplifies the importance of getting a certificate of appropriateness and a building permit, and that the current situation is dangerous.

Commissioner Royalty asks about the shape of the exterior lintel. The applicant explains that it will be flat, covering the full depth and width of the opening, it will not be visible on the exterior.

Commissioners discuss their concern about the building's structural integrity and note that details are missing regarding the method of finishing the recessed masonry in the new openings and what the result is going to look like.

Commissioner Godshall asks about waterproofing the new openings, pointing to concrete blocks that were cut in half. Ms. Lockery says that no water infiltrated the garage despite the storms and rains. Commissioner Learned notes that over time, the erosion that the weather will have on the exposed masonry materials.

Commissioner Godshall says that a rendering of what a pedestrian would see from the sidewalk would be helpful. Commissioner Learned adds that more detailed photographs would be beneficial as well.

Ms. Lockery proposes that after installing the fence across 82 Chestnut St., the left side would be like the right side and not visible from the street. Commissioner Learned notes that the fence is not solid but a see-through fence.

Commissioner Royalty asks about the exterior garage wall's width and highlights that these details are essential for the Commissions' discussion. Commissioner Royalty notes that he supports the project and views it as an enhancement to the neighborhood and believes that the discussed issues can be resolved with further information.

Commissioner Godshall asks about the applicant's plans about painting the building. Ms. Lockery says it is going to be exposed brick.

7:59 Commissioner Learned opens the discussion to public comment.

Katherine Bennett, 190 Wooster St, New Haven

Ms. Bennett notes that she served as clerk of HDC in the past and often found it useful to do a site visit when they discussed complicated projects rather than using photographs. Ms. Bennett says that to her knowledge, the applicant's property is not in the Local Historic District and that she believes that if she had access to the City archives, she could find documents to support this.

Ms. Woods that the district boundary is controlled by the text of the ordinance.

[Meeting recording was stopped due to a technical difficulty for a few minutes]

Commissioner Learned closes public comment.

Commissioner Kimberly suggests that it would be helpful if the mason would make a mock-up or a set of drawings to demonstrate how the edge of the door would interface with the existing bricks, and describe the materials used. Commissioners agree.

Commissioner Learned suggests doing the mock-up on a small portion on the new opening, understanding it is not a legal situation. Therefore, there may be a request of the Commission to redo it or change it. Commissioner Learned asks city staff if the Building Department will allow that. Ms. Woods confirms that there should not be a problem.

Commissioner Godshall asks for a statement from the mason about the stabilization of the bricks on the exterior side of the new opening.

Commissioners ask for clarification about the issuance of the conditional Certificate approved in the last meeting. Ms. Vardi notes that the Certificate was not issued

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Commissioner Learned and Kimberly ask about the timeframe for the application. Ms. Vardi says that according to the COVID-19 emergency orders, there is an extension of 90 days.

Commissioners discuss the terms of the conditional approval.

Commissioner Learned says that the Commission will grant full approval for two of the three application components: the fencing and the work on the building, except the work on the south wall. The Commission would like to see a mock-up and more detailed information about the lintel placement, headers, and how the exposed masonry would be finished and waterproofed.

Commissioner Learned asks the applicant if she agrees to the continuance of the application's discussion on the next regular meeting. Ms. Lockery agrees.

Discussion

2. 190-198 River St.- Damage due to Tropical Storm

Ms. Woods updates the Commission that the City got an assessment form Preservation CT and preliminary design for stabilization and demolition estimates. At this point, we have all the information for rendering a decision of a path forward. City staff is exploring with FEMA what might be reimbursable and looking at other funding sources with SHPO and Preservation CT. Ms. Woods says that she thinks the City has a good basis for moving forward with a stabilization plan if funding could be secured.

Ms. Woods highlights City's partners' efforts (SHPO, Preservation CT and the New Haven Preservation Trust) in gathering the information. The team is supporting city staff in following a due diligence process and exploring all alternatives to demolition.

Commissioner Godshall notes that the emergency demolition protocol's main points:

consultation and research, has held off demolition thus far.

Ms. Woods says that City staff learned a lot from this process, but the funding is a big obstacle.

Commissioner Learned expresses her appreciation to those who played a part in outlining protocols and procedures to prevent historic resources' demolition without exhausting all other alternatives.

Commissioner Godshall mentioned that SHPO estimated that FEMA would not be able to provide information before September 2020. Ms. Woods feels that the demolition should be delayed as much as possible and hopeful that the funding details could be sorted out promptly.

3. Status of properties in Local Historic Districts

- 597-601 Chapel

Ms. Woods says City Plan staff held a meeting with the building department and LCI and collected all the information on any enforcement action that has been done and potential next steps. In some cases, the City can foreclose on a property if there are liens levied on it. The outcome will be more successful if there is a concrete plan for that asset; currently, courts are not processing foreclosures. The state code determines the Building Department and LCI enforcement action, so there are some limitations. There is a meeting scheduled with the owner to understand their plans and intentions better.

Commissioner Godshall asks for clarification about the notice of unsafe building that the Building Department sent the owner. City staff says that it means the owner must secure the building, so people will not access it.

Commissioner Royalty asks staff to clarify why the owner got permits for 597 Chapel while accumulating fines on 601 Chapel. Commissioner Royalty also asks about windows that were installed on 597 Chapel and are visible from a public way, without HDC approval. Ms. Woods replies that the permit application is specific to the property and that, to her knowledge, the Building Department treats each property separately. Regarding the new windows on 597 Chapel, City staff notes that the owner applied for a window replacement permit from the Building Department. It was put on hold until they receive a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Commission. The owner did not apply for the HDC.

Commissioner Royalty notes that animals are entering the building; it is accessible to people and deteriorates quickly. Ms. Woods details the next steps: Contacting the owner within a week, to get clarification from the owners, and examining more aggressive action if the owner is not responsive.

- 342 Greene

City staff reports that this application was discussed twice on HDC; in June and July 2019. The Commission asked for additional information, and in August, the application was withdrawn. Staff reached out to the owner to ask if they are planning to reapply and offer support and assistance. The applicant did not respond thus far. No further work was done.

- 250 Greene

Commissioner Royalty says that during a site visit, he informally talked with a person who worked on the site and might have been the site manager. He said that the windows installed on 250 Greene are temporary. He was aware that they are historically inappropriate and said that they could not get the windows in time and that the building will be occupied soon; thus, they installed temporary windows.

The Commission expressed concerns about the timeframe of replacing the temporary windows to the ones approved by the Commission, and regarding the lack of communication with city staff on the part of the owner.

City staff will research the installation of the temporary windows and why the Building Department permitted it and will reach out to the owner for further clarification.

Commissioner Learned says that cases like these are putting the Commission in a difficult position where the results are different than what was approved. It highlights the importance of thorough documentation as part of the application approval process.

Commissioner Godshall asks city staff to research what tools the Commission might use to ask for removing the windows.

4. Walter Camp House

City staff reports that this caught fire last year, the roof and third floor were damaged, and the owner placed a tarp to protect the building. The tarp has not been well maintained and is torn, the Building Department contacted the owner, and they will replace the tarp.

Commissioner Learned asks if the fire damage made the building unsalvageable. Ms. Woods says that there was an intention to renovate the building, but currently, the building's condition is not good, without a roof, and it is concerning with winter coming on. City staff will follow up with the owner to better understand what the plans are.

5. 730 George

The Commission will not take that action on this item.

New Business

6. Approval of Draft Meeting Minutes- 08/12/2020

Tabled to next month.

Commissioner Godshall moves to adjourn the meeting.

Commissioner Royalty seconds.

All in favor 9:02 PM

Respectfully submitted by Maya Vardi, staff to the Historic District Commission.