

**City of Keene**  
**New Hampshire**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Wednesday, January 17, 2024**

**4:30 PM**

**Council Chambers,  
City Hall**

**Members Present:**

Sophia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair  
Hope Benik, Vice Chair  
Anthony Ferrantello  
Councilor Catherine Workman  
Russ Fleming, Alternate  
Peter Poanessa, Alternate

**Staff Present:**

Evan Clements, Planner

**Members Not Present:**

David Bergeron, Alternate

**1) Call to Order – Roll Call**

Chair Sophia Cunha-Vasconcelos called the meeting to order at 4:34 PM and roll call ensued.

**2) 2024 Elections**

Russ Fleming made a motion to elect Sophia Cunha-Vasconcelos as Chair which was duly seconded by Anthony Ferrantello. The motion carried unanimously. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos motioned to elect Hope Benik as Vice Chair, which was seconded by Mr. Fleming and the motion carried unanimously.

**3) Approval of October 18, 2023 Minutes**

Mr. Ferrantello made a motion to approve the October 18, 2023 minutes which was duly seconded by Peter Poanessa and the motion carried unanimously.

**4) Advice and Comment**

Peter Hansel, Kerry Ford, Dave Birchenough, and Michael McDonald, members from St. James Episcopal Church (44 West Street) were present at the meeting to seek input regarding the installation of a rooftop mounted solar system on the south-facing roof of the building. The Church is a primary resource in the downtown core district.

Mr. Hansel provided the Commission with packets that included pictures of the Church. The Church considered installing a solar system for many years but had been halted due to the slate roof, in which solar panels cannot be installed. The Church hoped to replace current slate roof with either asphalt shingles or a synthetic roof that looks similar to slate. Mr. Hansel is a member of the City of Keene's Energy and Climate Committee who made a pledge in 2019 to transition away from fossil fuels. The Church was trying to convert from a fossil fuel heating system to an electric heat pump, which would make the electric requirements for the building higher than they had been in the past.

Mr. Ferrantello questioned if the 60 solar panels that would bring electricity to the basement and common room would provide excess energy and whether they would store it in batteries or reverse meter it. Mr. Hansel stated that they would work with Revision Energy to make sure that the size array recommended would match the needs of the Church, although storage hadn't yet been discussed at the time of the meeting. They hoped to funnel any excess energy to the rectory via net metering, in which they would receive credit for usage at the rectory to their account. Although the buildings are not in the same location, they could be combined on the same Eversource invoice.

Mr. Kerry stated that they would receive a 30% nonprofit rebate, a 10% low income district rebate, and a state rebate which would all reduce the initial cost.

Mr. Birchenough stated that it was estimated that the entire Jonathan Daniels roof would produce about 28,000 kilowatt hours (kWh) annually. In the previous five years, the low electrical usage for the Church (during the initial arrival of COVID) was 18,277 kWh and, later, the high was 30,152 kWh. If the Church began to provide more services, it was believed that the 60 solar panels wouldn't produce enough energy, in which they could also install solar panels on the rectory to provide additional energy for the Church.

Mr. Clements discussed the rules regarding slate roofs in the Historic District. The first clause in the Historic District Regulations states that "each building or structure shall be recognized as a physical and cultural record of its time, place, and use. As such, the historic character of a building or structure shall be retained and preserved." He continued, "...slate roofs should be retained whenever economically feasible." Mr. Clements interpreted the rules to state that the slate shall be retained unless the alternative is the total deterioration of the roof, in which case the Commission could consider an alternative. Before removal of the slate roof, the Church should obtain a written estimate from a roofing contractor. The rules also stated that renewable energy systems should be installed in a location and manner that is least visible and obtrusive, and in such a way that causes the least impact to the historic integrity and character of the Historic District. The Church would have to seek a waiver and create an argument for why the waiver from the rules should be granted.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos summarized that although the roof isn't visible under the solar panels, there were still spaces visible and, therefore, all replacements should consist of the same

material. Speaking on the condition of the slate roof, the Church had found slate falling from the roof onto the sidewalk underneath, which was a safety hazard to the public. Two roofers hired by the Church stated that the roof wasn't in a condition to fail but the slate would continue to slide off of the roof due to its age. The Church would like to use the in-tact slate from the south side of the building to replace damaged slate on the rest of the roof. Mr. Ferrantello asked the Church members to obtain documented proof of the deterioration of the roof by experienced roofing professionals in order to support their case that replacing it would be economically burdensome. Mr. Ford stated that it was estimated that over the lifespan of the solar panels (roughly 25 years,) it was estimated to generate \$115,000.00. Without replacing the slate, it was estimated that roughly 30 slates would fall off during that same time period. These repairs would cost around \$10,000 each year to have a professional with a crane come to replace the fallen slate. He argued that these circumstances would be economically burdensome to the Church.

Mr. Fleming suggested that before the Church spent time to obtain waivers, the Commission should first decide if the location for the solar collectors is favorable. Mr. Clements discussed the least and most favorable locations listed within the rules, with the most favorable being the rear side of the property not facing public right of way, and the least favorable being on facades or roofs facing the public right of way. Every side of the Church faces a public right of way, although the south side would be least visible.

Revision Energy, the solar consultant hired by the Church, advised a removal of an unused chimney on the building as it cast a shadow that would reduce the solar capability of the roof. Mr. Clements read, "Defining chimneys shall not be removed unless determined to be a safety hazard by the building and health official or their designee, and repair constitutes an economic hardship... details of the chimney, such as corbelling step bases, terracotta chimney pots, paneled sides shall not be altered." The Church would need to provide an argument to obtain a waiver for that section as well. Mr. Hansel stated that the chimney is a common brick chimney and, therefore, he would not consider it a "character defining chimney" as the rules state. Mr. Ferrantello rebutted that the age of the chimney develops a significance of its own.

Chair Workman stated that she would feel more comfortable advising the Church once they obtained reports from Revision Energy and an engineer. She suggested they specifically look at the regulations and make an argument about the safety of the old slate roof, why solar panels cannot be installed on slate roofs, and what other materials can be used as well as their cost.

**5) Staff Updates**

**A) CLG Grant – Property Inventory of the Historic District Expansion**

Mr. Clements stated that the property inventory of the Historic District expansion that was conducted in 2011 had been finalized and signed by the Governor and Council. He would reach out to the consultant that helped create the grant application to ensure she still had the capacity to do the project. They would then come up with a contract and agreement and have the consultant

join a meeting and tell the public that they were doing the project. The Commission would use the completed inventory forms to rank the properties, as they were currently unranked.

**B) Heritage Commission Joint Meeting**

Mr. Clements proposed a joint meeting with the Heritage Commission on March 13, 2024 to which there were no objections.

**6) New Business**

None presented.

**7) Upcoming Dates of Interest**

The next meeting will be held on February 21, 2024 at 4:30 PM.

**8) Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at 5:37 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Melissa Danneker, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,  
Evan J. Clements, AICP - Planner