

OXFORD HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

MINUTES

OCTOBER 16, 2009

A special meeting of the Oxford Historic District Commission was called to order by the chairman, George Gaffney, on Friday, October 16, 2009 at 2:00 p.m., in the meeting room of the Oxford Community Services Building.

Other commission members in attendance were Heinrich Schmitz, Dorothy Fenwick, and Jennifer Stanley. Suzanne Litty arrived later in the meeting after the review of permit applications.

Mrs. Stanley recused herself from the commission in order to present the following building permit application:

#09-62 Jennifer and Ted Stanley, 225 S. Morris Street, new handicapped ramp with wrought iron railings, stairs and landing; new doors opening out; existing door jamb and transom window reinstalled to height to match raised vestibule floor (floor height matching height of narthex floor). Mrs. Stanley brought along her architect, Robert Arnouts, who explained Mrs. Stanley's plans to install a handicapped ramp in order to enter into her church building. The plans presented showed a slightly revised plan from what had been originally proposed. The purpose of making the change was to make the ramp more conducive to people coming up to the ramp without cutting corners and to create more of an open area for landscaping with the walkway and ramp itself. The walkway will be slightly sloped and placed on grade. From the end of the walk up to the landing in front of the church, there will be a ramp that is built in a foundation of brick. This will be arranged with a built up grade so as to minimize the amount of actual destruction that is needed for the ramp. Nothing will be taken away from the historic character of the church. Mr. Schmitz asked how the handrail would look. Mr. Arnouts stated that the handrail would be a typical black iron railing and that the handrail itself would be about 1 ½" wide by an inch deep. There would be no ornamentation used on the handrail. Mrs. Stanley noted that her revised plans showed the landing to be about 2' larger from what was previously shown to allow for more wheelchair maneuverability. The front doors would be replaced and be made to swing out. The doors, existing door jamb and transom window, as well as the flooring within the vestibule, would all have to be raised so that the transition from the handicapped ramp into the church would be smooth and flowing. Mrs. Stanley reassured the commission that the new front door would look exactly like the one that is currently on the building other than it would be a little thicker. Mr. Schmitz made a motion to accept the application. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Fenwick and carried.

Mrs. Stanley rejoined the group.

The commission next revisited permit #09-60, belonging to Marsha Lonergan, property owner of 112 E. Strand, to convert an existing screened porch into a year-round garden room using the same roof and footprint, along with the addition of one fixed skylight to the roof. Mr. Gaffney reminded the commission members that at their last meeting on October 5 this permit was

tabled because the applicant did not have a sketch drawn to scale. Complete plans were now shown to be with the application. Mr. Schmitz commented that he thought the fixed skylight would be difficult to see from the street. Mrs. Stanley agreed. Mrs. Fenwick made a motion to approve the application as presented including the stipulation that the skylight is fixed, that there is only one, and that it blend in with its surroundings. She added that the rationale behind her motion was because the skylight is not visible from the street. Mr. Schmitz seconded the motion. The commission again noted that they were approving one skylight of dark material of the same size as shown on the drawing, not to exceed a height of 6". The motion was unanimously carried without further discussion with all in favor.

Old and New Business

Ms. Litty arrived after the review of the permit applications.

Mrs. Fenwick questioned the fixed shutters on the house at 113 S. Morris Street, which is currently undergoing a "makeover" project. She mentioned that she could not find anything in the file about shutters and that the new shutters that have been installed on the house are plastic, fixed directly to the building, and are not hinged. Mr. Schmitz asked if the owners could install the same shutters they had but not hinge them. Mr. Gaffney asked the commission what they wanted to recommended to the town to do about it. Mrs. Fenwick replied that she would recommend that the Administrator/Clerk-Treasurer, Lillian Lord, be asked to send a letter to the owner to see if he could get this builder to appear before the commission to explain what work is going on with the building. She added that it was clear the owner had replaced his existing shutters with new shutters and that the new shutters were not in the guidelines. She added that she would like to see the builder and/or the owner at the commission's next meeting. Mr. Gaffney agreed and asked if Mrs. Lord would send a letter to the owner with a copy to the builder to come to the next meeting to inform the commission is taking place at 113 S. Morris Street, and that the owner and builder be given a copy of the guidelines as they pertain to shutters and proper hardware.

Mr. Schmitz informed the commission that he noticed some new shutters were recently installed on a home next to the one at 208 E. Strand which do not meet the guidelines. The owner also painted the house without coming before the commission. Mr. Schmitz thought the owner should be written to and asked to come before the commission in order to be informed about what needs to be done, and if they agree to do it, that would be fine.

Mr. Schmitz also reported on another shutter issue involving the removal of shutters on homes which have not had their shutters replaced but have retained their shutter hardware. He asked what the committee wanted to do about this issue. Mrs. Fenwick thought the commission should be careful not to require something they may involve a cost or expense issue and that the commission needed to be sensitive to older people living in their houses that may not be able to afford to replace their shutters. Mr. Schmitz commented that from an architectural view, shutters are a very important elements of the streetscape and that is why they are in the guidelines. He added that he was concerned that the removal of shutters was a trend. Mrs. Fenwick suggested sending a letter to those who have removed their shutters encouraging them to replace them was outlined in the guidelines. If they could not afford to do that, the commission would request that they take down their hardware. Mr. Schmitz felt that taking down the hardware was basically removing an historic element. His thought was that if the

current owners could not afford to replace their removed shutters they should continue to keep the hardware in place in the hopes that if they sell their house, the new owners could afford to purchase new shutters.

Mr. Gaffney brought up the issue of the brick wall at 308 Tilghman Street again. He noted that the Commissioners had decided that if the area around the wall is graded up around the wall and is properly screened with plantings such as hedges and trees, they had no problem with it. Mrs. Fenwick asked what purpose the wall served. Mr. Gaffney informed her it was to shield the owner's big air handlers, compressors, and electrical power. He added that he had spoken to Commissioner Kearns about it and that Commissioner Kearns thought the wall probably would not be visible when it was totally completed.

Mr. Gaffney expressed concern that the historic commission needed to get together with the Commissioners and have them agree that all changes or additions on an active permit must be approved by the Historic District Commission or Planning Commission. He added that Commissioner Kearns was of the opinion that the historic commission as a group and the Commissioners have grown apart. Commissioner Kearns suggested that the historic commission have a workshop with the Commissioners to go over the things the commission is trying to accomplish such as skylights and solar panels. The other thing he and Mr. Kearns discussed is the \$400 penalty fee and the need to change the penalties to some other numbers that are more meaningful.

Mrs. Fenwick asked if a workshop could be scheduled in December. Mr. Schmitz suggested putting on the agenda what the commission wants to discuss with the Commissioners. Mrs. Fenwick asked to go on record as saying that she did not "think there is a vacuum" (between the commission and the Commissioners) and thought that Commissioner Kearns was reflecting that he use to serve on the historic commission and that he had kind of drifted apart from the historic commission.

Mr. Gaffney reminded the group about satellite dishes and skylights and to bring their thoughts on the matter to the next meeting along with thoughts about clarifying the use of screening.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Willoughby
Assistant Clerk