

**TOWN OF GROTON  
HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION  
JANUARY 3, 2006 - 7:00 P.M.  
GROTON SENIOR CENTER – 102 NEWTOWN ROAD**

Members Present: C. Nado, E. Cole, R. Keyes and D. Seager  
Alternates Present: R. Boardman, D. Madden  
Staff: K. Quinn, S. Discordia

Chairman Nado called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

**PUBLIC HEARINGS**

HDC 05-66 – 18-22 West Main Street; Historic Mystic, LLC, owner; Rod Desmarais, applicant; construct new retail/residential building. PIN 261918412081 (continuation)

Rod Desmarais, presented for the owners, Historic Mystic, LLC, for the property at 18-22 West Main Street. Mr. Desmarais displayed drawings and a model of the proposed retail/residential four-story building.

Mr. Desmarais presented some of the materials the Commission had requested at the last meeting. He asked who the voting members are this evening. Chairman Nado requested Keyes recuse herself from voting as she was not present at the last public hearing. Keyes stated she has reviewed the materials and would like to remain seated as a voting member. Chairman Nado stated that Madden would be seated as a voting member for Vaughn and Boardman would remain an alternate.

Mark Comeau went through the materials with the Commission. Mr. Comeau stated that the millwork would be Azec and the doors would be wooden and 7 feet high. Mr. Comeau stated that brick veneer does not mean a thin brick coating. He showed a sample of the brick to be used to the Commission. Mr. Comeau stated the brick is a very close finish to Chelsea Groton Bank at 2 Water Street. Boardman asked what the panel material would be and Mr. Comeau responded Azec. Seager asked if the diamond pattern would continue through the front of the building. Mr. Comeau stated that it wasn't exactly a diamond pattern and it would go around the medallions. Mr. Comeau stated that this is just one option. The Commission stated that they need to see how this design would work on the façade and needed a detailed drawing of it. Mr. Desmarais stated that they would take it out. Chairman Nado stated that the Commission needed these details at the public hearing in order to vote. He suggested they go back to a preliminary phase if they do not have all the details and dimensions.

Mr. Comeau stated that the cornices would be Azec material and have a 12" projection. Mr. Comeau stated that the mortar would not match the color of the brick. Keyes asked if the color of the mortar would be natural and Mr. Comeau stated it would be.

Mr. Comeau went over the window sill detail with the Commission. He stated the windows would have an arched soldier and a molded brick sill. Seager asked what is a brick mold casing. Mr. Comeau responded that it is like an ogee profile and it's similar to the Chelsea Groton

Bank's window casings. Seager asked if the pictures showing white brick were intentional. Mr. Comeau stated all the bricks would be the same color, no white brick.

Mr. Comeau showed the color of the window sashes as a light taupe with 1 and 1/8" profile mutton. He stated it still gives the shadow effect of real mutton windows but provides energy efficiency. Seager asked if these were stock windows and Mr. Comeau stated no, they were being fabricated. Chairman Nado asked if it was aluminum between the windows and Mr. Comeau stated yes.

Mr. Comeau stated that the dumpster enclosure will have V matched paneling with lattice above. Lighting would be storefront display like other stores on West Main Street. In the alcoves and the back overhang would be recessed lighting. The onion light fixture would be put in the back recessed porches. Seager asked for a general view of the building showing where these lights are going to be. Mr. Comeau stated that they would not be using lights in front; just the lighting in the storefront façade and the rest would be recessed. Seager asked where the cage lights would be located and Mr. Comeau stated by the doors. Seager asked if there is lighting for signage. Mr. Desmarais stated that they are not instituting any signage or lighting plan at this time. They are organizing a condo association to deal with those issues.

Mr. Desmarais showed the site plan noting where the dumpster enclosures would be located. Mr. Desmarais stated that the dumpsters would be on 9 x 12 concrete pads. Chairman Nado asked for construction drawings. Seager stated it would help to visualize the enclosures if there were construction drawings. Cole stated that she wanted to know the size of dumpsters and the frequency of pick-up. Seager stated that they couldn't rule on the frequency of pick-up, just the dumpsters.

Mr. Comeau discussed the hand rails with the Commission. He noted that the Stonington side of the wharf does not have a handrail. Mr. Desmarais stated that the Department of Environmental Protection may require a handrail as the deck isn't being used for boating purposes. Staff stated that there aren't any zoning regulations, but DEP may have say over it. Mr. Desmarais asked if the Commission would allow them to continue the hearing so they may bring back more detailed drawings and answer the Commission's questions.

Seager stated that he would prefer the columns holding up the overhang to be rectangular to be consistent with other downtown businesses. The Commission asked for clarification of where the pilings were going to be placed.

Mr. Comeau discussed the cable between the pilings. The newel would be made of Azec with a cable between them. Seager asked for the distance between the newel post and the pilaster and Mr. Comeau stated it was 6 feet.

Mr. Comeau stated that Ipe Brazilian hardwood would be used for the decking. Mr. Comeau stated you wouldn't be able to see the fastenings through the top of the decks.

Simpson wood doors would be used. Mr. Comeau stated these are the same doors that were approved at 23-25 West Main Street and 27-29 West Main Street.

Mr. Comeau showed a drawing of the heating and cooling units that would be on top of the building. Seager stated that he would prefer to see them in a group together instead of seeing 21 units on top of this building. Mr. Comeau stated that there is a company that makes "skirts" to help hide and unify these heating and cooling units. Mr. Desmarais stated they would research it.

Chairman Nado stated that the Commission should not be discussing design issues during a public hearing. These materials should be presented for voting.

Chairman Nado asked what height they would use for these units and Mr. Desmarais stated the 33 ½ " size.

Chairman Nado asked for construction drawings. Mr. Comeau stated that the construction drawings would be 75 pages long and very costly at this stage. Mr. Comeau stated that he brought exterior dimensions. Seager stated that he wanted a set of drawings with dimensions, not renderings.

Chairman Nado called for a 5 minute break.

The Commission and the applicant went over the drawings and the dimensions. Chairman Nado stated that the floor plans show that the windows are different than the artist rendering and model. Mr. Desmarais stated that was true. Chairman Nado stated that if they in fact have to reduce the 4<sup>th</sup> floor to 4 units then they would they have to reduce the porches as well. Mr. Comeau stated they would still have 18 porches.

Seager asked if the sidewalks were worked off of the streetscape project and Mr. Desmarais stated they were done by DiCesare-Bentley and he believed it was from the streetscape project. Seager asked staff if this was true and staff stated they couldn't confirm that at this time.

Mr. Comeau stated that the building remains 45 feet high. He stated it was 10'6" to the second floor and 10'6" to the third floor and 12'6" to the roof. Chairman Nado and Keyes asked where the adjustment to the building would be if the street runs slightly down hill as they didn't see it in the drawings. Seager stated he recalled it was a 2' drop from one end of the proposed building to another. Mr. Comeau stated that the artist's drawings were correct within 3-4 inches. Chairman Nado stated that the building would actually be higher than 45 feet on one end of the building.

Cole asked what the height of the windows from bottom of the sash to top of the window would be and Mr. Comeau stated they would be 5 feet high. Cole asked if they were going to discuss parking and they stated no, they would not be parking on this property.

Keyes stated that the last set of windows look right onto the porches and it looks strange. She didn't like the see-thru effect.

Mr. Comeau stated that part of the arcade, on the eastern side projects outside of the building with a roof and on the western side, the arcade is recessed. Seager submitted 3-dimensional

drawings he had drawn on CADD for the Commission to better illustrate this overhang and recessed arcade on the back of the building. Mr. Comeau stated the recessed part is 8' and the overhang comes out 10'. The overhang will be a flat roof with thin membrane roofing.

Chairman Nado asked the public for comment. Audience responded they wanted to hear the Commission's comments first. Chairman Nado decided to hear the Commission's comments and review the materials presented. Chairman Nado gave the Commission time to review the materials present.

Chairman Nado stated he was concerned that the model and drawings are not correct. The ice cream shop is drawn a foot taller and the proposed building is drawn a foot shorter than what the dimensions state. His concern was the spatial relationship to the other buildings. Mr. Desmarais asked where Chairman Nado got this information and Chairman Nado stated that these dimensions were submitted by architect, Bill Bertsche. Mr. Desmarais asked how would the Chairman know that Bertsche's dimensions are correct and not theirs. Chairman Nado asked the applicant to present the correct figures.

Chairman Nado referred to Tab 17 and the comparison of facades. He stated that the comparisons were not accurate.

Chairman Nado referred to Tab 15 of the handout. He wanted to see comparisons of depth of the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> floors. He stated that if a graph was done for that comparison it would show how much the proposed building actually stands out.

Chairman Nado asked if there were elevator towers and Mr. Desmarais stated no, they would be inside the building.

Chairman Nado asked Mr. Desmarais what he meant by this statement in previous minutes, "If we loose the size we cannot go ahead and build the building and we cannot sell units on the Mystic River without balconies/porches." Mr. Desmarais stated that he needed to have a return on investment and that the balconies were needed to have a marketable value on the units. Mr. Desmarais stated that this is not an 1850's building anymore and that market development demands we build these porches. They can't build this building without the square footage or the decks. Chairman Nado asked if he was claiming hardship and Mr. Desmarais stated they are not.

Chairman Nado asked if they would have any more heating/cooling units than 21. Mr. Desmarais stated that there would be no more than 22 depending on Planning and Zoning requirements and how many units they actually end up with.

Chairman Nado stated he wasn't in favor of using the Azec material. Mr. Desmarais stated that they would use a comparable composite material.

Chairman Nado stated that he would like to see the dumpster enclosure drawn on the plans. Chairman Nado stated that the Ipe Brazilian hardwood for decking would work very well and the Simpson doors would be fine.

Chairman Nado asked about the drop down flood panels required by DEP and will the public see the mechanisms. Mr. Desmarais stated that he would get more clarification from DEP. Mr. Desmarais asked if this detail would stop the Chairman from voting for this project. Mr. Desmarais stated that the two applications that were approved for this site previously did not have this clarification of the drop down panels submitted into the record.

Chairman Nado stated that this proposed building is higher and deeper than any previous building on this site and that using brick on this parcel is totally inappropriate as the two previous buildings were clapboard.

Cole stated she had a problem with the back arcade area. She didn't like the indented area and felt it complicated the building too much. She didn't like the covered arcade part. Cole stated it should appear to be a straight line and be simpler.

Mr. Desmarais stated that the shape of the arcade is dictated by the plot they are allowed to build on. Mr. Desmarais stated that the building that burned down jogged in and out and didn't have a simple straight line. Cole stated that this building is already complicated with so many windows and porches whereas the previous buildings didn't have those aspects. Cole stated she had an issue with the see-thru aspect of the windows.

Seager stated that this brick building didn't fit into the historical aspect of downtown Mystic. He stated that he was able to render 3-dimensional drawings for this building. He stated that this building is deeper than any building that has been on this plot. Seager stated that maybe an awning structure would work in back as awnings were prevalent in the 1800's. Seager showed a drawing of the back of the building he rendered moving the porches to look more appropriate. Seager stated that he would like the banding changed as it emphasizes the width of the building. He also had a problem with the center front façade and wished it to be more symmetric or more asymmetric as it looks like an error. Seager stated he would like to see the posts in the back holding up the roof square, not round.

Keyes stated that she liked this building and thought it was a beautiful building, but she worries about it sitting in the middle of downtown Mystic as it is not appropriate. She had a problem with the see-thru porches. Keyes stated the building would be too big for downtown Mystic.

Madden stated that he had a lot of the same concerns as the rest of the Commission. He read from the HDC guidelines. Madden stated that he didn't think brick was appropriate for downtown. He stated that the height compared to the buildings alongside it, doesn't really fit. His primary concern is the brick and the secondary concern is the height.

Boardman stated that he'd like to see skirting of the units and some other fine tuning. He believed the building, although not perfect, provides a viable solution.

Keyes believes that a building this big needs to be brick, but this building is too big for the downtown area.

Seager stated the building that was there in 1865 was almost as big but wood.

Chairman Nado asked for public comments.

Dave Cornell from Mystic asked the Chairman to tear down that wall.

John Jensen, East Lyme, stated that they are struggling with their downtown Niantic as well. He stated that if we went back to 1850 and asked one of the citizens if they would approve of this building, he believed they would be very happy about it being built.

Bob Cooper, of downtown Mystic, co-chairman of the Merchants Committee read a statement for the Commission. We as the Committee believe that this building would be a wonderful addition to this area. He stated that we've witnessed the decline of tourism in the downtown area since the building burned down.

Peter Springsteel, local architect, stated he was very comfortable with the building at this point. He stated that when he squinted his eyes the building looked good. He stated that he thought brick was absolutely appropriate. He stated that brick was a historic material and downtowns work on variety. Residential neighborhoods had the same density but downtowns would have a variety of ups and downs. He stated that old New England towns developed before regulations therefore you see a variety of heights. He asked when do you stop the history, is it 1950, 1920 or 1900. He encouraged the Commission to look at the big picture as the developers still had a long process to go through.

Joanne Cornell, Mystic, stated she liked the brick building and thought the 4 stories was fine. She didn't think it was perfect, but if we wait until something else comes along then we will never get our Mystic back.

Bill Peterson, North Stonington, stated he was the first secretary in 1976 of the Groton Historic Commission. He read his statement into the record. He stated that wood was the material of choice through history, not brick. He stated that two brick buildings opposite each other would not be historically correct.

Neil Danaher, 6 Park Place, stated that going down the Mystic River now, you see a brick building across from an empty lot. So, he is not seeing brick as a problem here. He stated it deserves a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Helen Murry, 74 Crown Knowl Court, Groton, stated that the Commission is requesting construction plans that would be of great cost to the developers and they keep requesting more details. He stated that 5 years is long enough and let's get on with the solution.

Kathy McCue, storeowner in downtown Mystic, stated her store burnt to the ground and it took her 4 years to get into another retail space in downtown Mystic. She stated that we need the retail development desperately. Ms. McCue stated that she thought it was Seager who stated lets try brick and now he didn't like it.

Keyes stated that she knows that this lot has been empty for 5 years, but she is hoping this building will last 200 years, therefore they are careful on what they vote for in this spot.

Mike Gillan, Mallard Lane, Stonington, stated he wasn't a fan of the 4-story to begin with, but he likes the brick. He was concerned how the building would look to people on Pearl Street, but residents from Pearl Street have commented that they see brick now, and it doesn't bother them. He stated that other people have swayed his vote and he would vote for this proposed building.

Mr. Desmarais stated that this issue of brick vs. wood is from preliminaries on July 19 where they first showed the rendering of brick. He read what Cole stated on July 19, 2005 that she liked the store façade and it was the best design she had seen yet. On November 1, 2005, Seager stated he couldn't imagine a clapboard building that big and brick would be nice. Mr. Desmarais stated that he would be willing to go either way to please the Commission.

Mr. Desmarais asked if he could get a mock vote from the Commission and Chairman Nado stated they could respond as such if they wanted.

Chairman Nado stated that he would not be in favor of this application.

Keyes stated that if they fixed the porches and a few other things she would vote in favor of this application.

Cole stated she was struggling with it, but if they made adjustments to the building like what was discussed tonight, she might be in favor. She is not sure if she finds the building appropriate for Mystic.

Seager stated that the details that they discussed would have to be solved. Seager stated that if he could move the building from brick into wood clapboard he might be more inclined to vote in favor. He stated that he would like to see it reduced in depth, but it wouldn't be the deal breaker.

Madden asked if they could put up balloons to show the proposed height. Mark Comeau stated that it doesn't show a good sense of what massing is. Madden stated he wasn't convinced that this building was the right way to go.

Boardman stated that he is in favor and would support the building with some minor modifications that were discussed tonight.

Mr. Desmarais asked Keyes if she was supportive of the brick, would she be as supportive of a wooden clapboard structure and Keyes stated she would be.

Mr. Desmarais stated that they cannot reduce the depth of the building. He stated that they can work on changing the porch elements and the overhang and use a lighter treatment. Mr. Desmarais stated that they can show the Commission an artists rendering in clapboard of the proposed building.

The following exhibits were presented:

- 4 pictures
- 12 drawings
- 11 material sheets (1 packet)

MOTION: To continue the public hearing for 18-22 West Main Street until the next regularly scheduled meeting on January 17, 2005.

Motion made by Seager, seconded by Cole, so voted unanimously.

Chairman Nado closed the public hearing at 11:06 p.m.

Chairman Nado stated that the next regularly scheduled meeting for January 17, 2005 will be at the Groton Town Hall Annex in Community Room 2.

**DISCUSSION ON ITEMS OF PUBLIC HEARING - None**

### **PRE-APPLICATION HEARINGS**

Mark Comeau showed preliminary drawings to the Commission of a new drawing for the building at 18-22 West Main Street. They presented a drawing of a clapboard building. The Commission and applicants discussed the drawings. Mr. Comeau stated that one of the major changes would be that the windows would be much smaller. The Commission liked the clapboard and asked for more drawings of the back and sides of the building at the next regularly scheduled meeting.

**CORRESPONDENCE - None**

### **MINUTES**

MOTION: To approve the minutes of December 6, 2005 and December 20, 2005

Motion made by Seager, seconded by Madden, so voted unanimously.

**OLD BUSINESS - None**

### **NEW BUSINESS**

Seager stated that he would not be able to attend the Historic District meetings on February 7 and 21, and March 7, 2006

Staff reminded the Commission that elections need to be held at the next meeting.

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**ADJOURNMENT**

Motion to adjourn at 11:20 p.m. made by Seager, seconded by Cole, so voted unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

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Elaine Cole, Secretary