



**Minutes
Historic Preservation Committee
Regular Meeting**

Friday, April 1, 2022 – 7:30AM

Hybrid Meeting: Hamlin Conference Room (496 Ocean Street) & via Zoom

Present: Doreen Gay, Evan Coffey, Robert Blackwood, Robert McKeagney, Andy Hoffman, Jessie Brakenwagen, Isabelle Oechsle (Community Planner / Staff Liaison)

1. Call to Order:

In the absence of an elected chair, Isabelle Oechsle called the meeting to order at 7:33AM.

2. Introductions:

The Committee introduced themselves to each other and to the members of the public participating remotely.

3. Adoption of Minutes of Previous Meeting – March 4, 2022:

Robert McKeagney moved to accept the minutes as drafted. Jessie Brakenwagen seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

4. Nomination & Election of Chair:

Jessie noted that Doreen Gay had previously served as Chair of the joint Arts & Historic Preservation Committee (the previous iteration of this Committee) and asked her if she would be interested in serving again. Doreen responded that she would be interested in serving as Chair, if nominated. **Jessie Brakenwagen moved to nominate Doreen Gay as Chair. Evan Coffey seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.**

5. Review & Comment: Demolition Permit for 96 Clifford Street:

David and Kathy Rauscher (applicants) as well as Kathy DePhilippo (South Portland Historical Society) participated in this discussion remotely, via Zoom.

Isabelle Oechsle provided an overview of this item, which is an opportunity for the Committee to comment on a demolition permit for a single-family home at 96 Clifford Street, which is a part of the Sylvan Site development that the previous iteration of the Committee (then called the Arts & Historic Preservation Committee) discussed as part of their efforts to add the area to the South Portland Inventory of Archeological and Historic Resources (“the Inventory”). This area has a specific historical context which all of the properties within the development contribute to. While all of the homes were constructed in varying architectural styles, the use of similar materials and the neighborhood context is historic. Additionally, Isabelle noted that this home in particular is in a prominent place at the end of Adelbert Street and so heavily contributes to the historic context of Sylvan Site.

Isabelle noted that the Committee is constrained by the limited authority provided to them in the relevant ordinance section (Chapter 5). Isabelle explained that the Committee’s role in this case is to discuss the demolition permit application with the applicants and provide a recommendation to the City Council regarding whether or not to add the property to the Inventory. However, the Committee does not have the authority to

deny the demolition permit. Similarly, Isabelle explained that inclusion of the property on the Inventory by City Council Order would also not prevent demolition of the property.

The Committee turned to the applicants, David and Kathy Rauscher, for additional information and context. The applicants explained that they purchased the property with the intent of rehabilitating it as their home, but found that it was “beyond repair” once they were provided access to the property. They explained that it was not their first choice to demolish the property, but that it would be cost prohibitive for them to rehabilitate the existing structure.

Jessie Brakenwagen asked if the applicants had a structural engineer’s report that they could share with the Committee to corroborate their reasoning for demolition. The applicants responded that they did have a structural engineer walk through the structure, but did not have a formal report to share.

Doreen Gay noted that she is friends with a neighbor of 96 Clifford Street and has seen the property first-hand. She stated that it is in severe disrepair and had been neglected for many years by previous owners for a variety of reasons. Doreen noted that while she did not wish to see the property demolished, she believed that the applicants would be stewards of the history of the property and hoped that they would reconstruct the property in keeping with its historic character.

Discussion occurred surrounding the Committee’s role in this case. Isabelle Oechsle clarified the options available to the Committee and how they should go about forming a recommendation.

Further discussion occurred on the Committee’s role in preventing future losses of historic properties from occurring.

Milan Nevajda, Planning Director, joined the meeting in-person at 8:17AM.

Jessie Brakenwagen asked if the applicants would be open to making the property available to members of the Committee and the Historical Society to take photos and document the structure. The applicants agreed to this request, but asked that it be completed as soon as possible.

Jessie Brakenwagen moved to recommend a formal historical documentation of the property through photographic and written evidence. Evan Coffey seconded. Discussion occurred on the motion. Jessie clarified that she was requesting both interior and exterior documentation of the structure for the records of the City, South Portland Historical Society, and Greater Portland Landmarks. **Robert McKeagney moved to amend the motion on the table to add additional recommendation that the applicants attempt to reconstruct the house consistent with the character of the surrounding neighborhood, Sylvan Site. Jessie Brakenwagen seconded the amendment. The amendment to the motion passed unanimously. The original motion, with amendment, also passed unanimously.**

Jessie Brakenwagen moved to recommend 96 Clifford Street as an addition to the South Portland Inventory of Archeological and Historic Places. Evan Coffey seconded. Discussion occurred on the motion. Jessie noted that she believed that her motion would show the City Council that the Committee was serious about their stated duty of protecting historic properties in South Portland. Planning Director Milan Nevajda noted that the City Council had previously discussed the potential addition of all of the properties within Sylvan Site to the Inventory at a workshop, but that the consensus of the Council at that time was that additional work needed to be done regarding the past history of Indigenous people who may have lived on or utilized that property, and that research has not yet been completed. Doreen noted that the previous iteration of the Committee had asked Council for funding to be able to pay a consultant to complete this research, but the Council has never funded this request. Jessie responded that the Council seems to be conflating two separate, though equally important issues: that of Indigenous history and architectural history. She stated that the properties within Sylvan Site are architecturally significant, and are at risk of being destroyed while the Council sends the Committee on a “fool’s errand.” Jessie asked Isabelle for staff’s opinion on if the Council might be open to adding 96 Clifford to the Inventory now, without the context of Indigenous history. Isabelle Oechsle responded that, in her opinion, the Committee’s time would be better spent on providing the Council the

research that they are asking for rather than attempting to force the issue without the requested research, even if the Committee believes it may not be possible to respond to the Council's request. Doreen Gay called for a vote on the motion on the table. **The motion failed unanimously.**

6. Comprehensive Plan Discussion

As the meeting was only scheduled to go until 9:00AM, Isabelle Oechsle suggested that a motion to continue the meeting to hear the remaining agenda items might be in order. **Jessie Brakenwagen moved to continue the meeting. Robert Blackwood seconded.** The Committee asked Milan Nevajda about the urgency of the Comprehensive Plan item, to which Milan responded that failure to take up this item today would not result in a significant delay of the Planning Division's goal of getting a Request for Proposals (RFP) out for a consultant to work on development of a new Comprehensive Plan. However, Milan noted that it would be helpful if the Committee were to schedule a special meeting on this item for later this month to have time to digest the provided audit documents of the 2012 Comp Plan in detail. Doreen Gay called for a vote on the motion. **All in favor.**

Jessie Brakenwagen move that the Committee table the Comprehensive Plan Discussion item to a special meeting in about two weeks at an agreed upon time. Robert McKeagney seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Milan Nevajda left the meeting at 9:12AM.

7. Establishment of Permanent Meeting Time:

The Committee discussed scheduling of a special meeting, noting that the special meeting time would be their new regular meeting time. Isabelle Oechsle noted that one of the absent members, Michael Taylor, had previously communicated with her that he could only attend night meetings. The Committee decided to schedule a special meeting to hear the Comprehensive Plan item for April 11th at 5:30PM, and decided without objection that their permanent meeting time going forward would be the second Monday of every month at 5:30PM.

8. Adjournment:

The meeting adjourned without objection at 9:43PM.