

City of South Portland

Name of Body: Arts & Historic Preservation Committee
Minutes for Meeting of: July 6, 2016
Meeting Begins: 7:30 AM
Meeting Location: Crowther Room
The Opportunity Alliance
50 Lydia Lane

Members Present

Jessica Skwire Routhier, Chair
Scott Whitaker, Vice Chair
Adrian Dowling, Secretary *pro tempore*
Kathryn DePhilippo
Hannah Holmes
Amanda Larson
Liz Salamone
Alessa Wylie

Staff Present

Tex Haeuser, Dir. of Planning & Development

Members Absent

Aimée Turner, Secretary

Minutes

Jessica Skwire Routhier opened the meeting at 7:40 AM and welcomed all in attendance.

Jessica introduced Alessa Wylie as a new member of the committee, representing Greater Portland Landmarks and replacing former GPL representative Jane Batzell. The rest of the committee also introduced themselves.

Jessica announced that she may need to step down as chair of the committee at some point in the near future, but she would like to remain a regular committee member.

Agenda Item 1

Review of minutes from the June 1, 2016 meeting.

Kathryn DiPhilippo motioned to approve the minutes, seconded by Liz Salamone. The minutes were approved 7-0 (Aimée Turner absent; Hannah Holmes and Alessa Wylie abstained due to not having been sworn in yet).

Agenda Item 2

Discussion: Committee purpose, process, and development of operational / strategic plan.

Jessica: An important topic of this discussion should be the vetting process in which the committee reviews development/redevelopment projects in the city. The committee meets once a month and has a very limited amount of time to work. The committee must be strategic in how it chooses which projects to get involved with.

Kathy: The committee has been too reactive and is becoming a design review board. The city needs a design review board but that should not be the purpose of this committee. The chair has a monumental task in deciding which projects to bring to the committee. The committee should be proactive, and should focus more on the arts and on preservation of truly historic sites. The committee should choose projects in which the committee can make a real difference in the city. The committee should inventory existing art, and should come up with a list of sites where potential new art projects could go. The committee should inventory and prioritize important or endangered historic sites.

Amanda Larson: The city doesn't have design standards in place at this time. This committee is the first line of defense. There is no other committee that can help the Planning Department with these tasks. Perhaps there should be a subcommittee or a separate committee for some tasks, because one hour a month isn't enough time for this committee to do everything.

Tex Haeuser: The committee has direct and clear responsibility to provide design input and participate in the outcome of design relative to city projects. For private projects within the city, the committee has only a jawboning ability, but that ability should be utilized whenever appropriate. The Riverbrook Apartments proposal in Brick Hill [Agenda Item #3] is an example of that. Design review shouldn't be the main focus, but there also shouldn't be a separate design review board. If the city can get good design standards, the committee can advocate for those standards.

Scott Whitaker: The committee should give input to developers. Even if committee recommendations have no bite, small incremental steps over the long term can make a big impact. The committee is new but it has made progress. The committee needs to be flexible and may occasionally need to meet for more than one hour.

Jessica: The committee must come to a mutual understanding of when the committee gets involved in projects. The Planning Board sends everything — hundreds of pages — to the chair and the chair has to make a unilateral decision about which projects to bring to the committee. There needs to be a clearer set of parameters regarding which projects should be brought to the committee. That would simplify and speed up the whole process. Is there a better process than the chair making those decisions?

Scott: The Planning Board is the end user of the committee's advice. The committee needs to engage with the Planning Board and get feedback from them.

Tex: The committee could do a workshop with the Planning Board sometime this fall regarding the committee's role and how the committee vets projects.

Kathy: The current way of vetting projects is not sustainable. An inventory of the city's historic properties could help simplify the vetting process.

Jessica: The committee has talked about, and struggled with, the definition of historic. The federal guideline is 50 years but it's not clear whether that would be useful in South Portland, e.g., do we have to be involved every time a house built in 1960 is renovated?

Amanda: This would be a good topic of discussion with Julie Larry, Director of Advocacy at Greater Portland Landmarks. The 50-year guideline makes the process clean and clear.

Kathy: The 50-year rule would be very difficult and time consuming to use in South Portland because of the post-World War II housing boom and the enormous number of houses built during that period.

Amanda: The committee doesn't have to review every 50 year old house but the list could be used as a guide.

Scott: The committee must triage what it's looking at. The federal guideline is clean and is used by the industry. The committee should look at things that are permanent, e.g., additions onto a structure, not things like windows or siding.

Liz: For vetting, the committee should look at multiple factors such as age and location. The workshop with the Planning Board would be very helpful.

Jessica: Having the chair vet projects isn't terribly difficult in terms of the time and labor involved, but there is a question of whether or not it's appropriate for the chair to be making those decisions.

Scott: Perhaps the Planning Board should do the vetting, since they are the end user of the committee's product.

Tex: The Planning Board will be looking to this committee for recommendations. There is also opportunity for committee involvement in streetscape design in the Mill Creek and Waterman Drive areas.

Liz: How does public art get installed in South Portland? What is the process?

Tex: There is no official process.

Jessica: That is one of the reasons why this committee was established. Eventually the committee will have to spend some time working on that subject.

Scott: Could two subcommittees be formed — one for art and the other for historic preservation? Could additional non-voting members be brought into those subcommittees, to advise the main committee?

Tex: Yes. The subcommittees would need to take good notes and incorporate those into the main committee's minutes.

Agenda Item 3

Discussion: Proposed apartment development near State Reform School historic district.

Jessica: The project is just outside the bounds of the historic district. The committee's task is to think about the character of the historic district and its relationship to the new development, e.g., what will be visible from within the district and vice versa, and whether the district and the project will be

harmonious or not. There have been some concerns about the appearance of the initial Riverbrook apartment building designs.

Tex: Risbara [the builder] is coming up with new designs to address some of the concerns that have been expressed about the appearance of the buildings, but those new designs have not been shared with the city yet.

Scott: There are two schools of thought when trying to integrate new construction with historic structures: make the new construction so different that the historic buildings stand out, or make the new construction blend in with the old. Neither philosophy is right or wrong.

Jessica: Unrelated to the Riverbrook project but relevant to Brick Hill generally is the proposal for a bus shelter on Brickhill Avenue near Heron Cove Drive. That proposal came before the committee a while back and was stalled because the original proposed location for the shelter was within the federal historic district, and Maine Historic Preservation rejected it. The new proposed location is outside the district.

A photo of the proposed shelter design was shared with the committee.

Adrian Dowling: This shelter design looks better than many of the other bus shelters in the city, including the one in Redbank which is currently the closest sheltered bus stop to Brick Hill.

Agenda Item 4

Walking tour of State Reform School historic district.

The committee left The Opportunity Alliance and walked to the adjacent undeveloped lot where the Riverbrook apartment complex is proposed.

Adrian gave the committee an explanation of which buildings and parcels make up the historic district and some of the history behind them.

Committee members observed the area of the undeveloped lot nearest to Cottage #5, also known as the Arthur Gould School, one of the existing structures in the historic district. The committee also observed Cottage #4 and Jordan Park, noting the view of the proposed project's lot from within that area of the historic district.

Scott identified several architectural features of Cottage #4 that could potentially be incorporated into the Riverbrook apartment building designs.

Agenda Item 5

Other business.

None.

Meeting adjourned at 9:10 AM.