

CHATHAM BOROUGH HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

September 19, 2023

7:30 p.m.

Chairman James Greener called this Regular Meeting of the Chatham Borough Historic Preservation Commission to order at 7:30 p.m. This meeting was held in the Council Chambers, Upper Level, Chatham Municipal Building. All legal notices have been posted for this meeting.

Names	Present	Absent
James Greener, Chrmn.	X	
Council Member Dempsey	X	
Council Member Frank Truilo		Recused
Lynn Magrane	X	
Karen Franklin	X	
H.H. Montague		X
Justin Strickland	X	
Brigid McMenamin		<b>Abstained</b>
Derrick Bell	X	
Liz Holler, Recording Secretary	X	

Also in attendance:

Vanessa Nienhouse, Borough Clerk & Administrative Secretary to the Zoning Board of Adjustment and Planning Board

Motion to Adopt Meeting Minutes

Mrs. Magrane made a motion to approve the minutes of the June 20, 2023 HPC meeting. Mr. Strickland seconded the motion. A voice vote was taken. The June 20, 2023 HPC minutes were approved.

Discussion Items

Danny Realty, LLC (Exxon)

185 Main Street

Application # ZB 23-010

Steven Tombalakian, Esq. introduced himself as the attorney for Danny Realty, LLC. He introduced James E. Henry, of Dynamic Engineering, who has prepared tonight's plans.

Attorney Tombalakian recalled 10 months ago Exxon had presented an application to the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) proposing different signage on this site. The application was put on the shelf because another opportunity came up. The auto repair owner decided to retire. The applicant is proposing to turn the building into another type business.

At this point, Chrmn. Greener explained the function of the HPC. HPC has to decide if applications being proposed for buildings in the town's Historic District are following the Historic Guidelines.

Chrmn. Greener reminded those attending tonight's meeting that the HPC's responsibility is to focus on the proposed design of a building. They do not review traffic, parking, business hours, etc. The HPC will consider whether the proposed design adheres to the Historic Guidelines of the Borough's Historic District. After the HPC has listened to all the information submitted tonight by the applicant's representatives, the Commission will make a motion on whether or not they are favorable towards the application or not. The HPC Chairman will then send a report to the Zoning Board of Adjustment giving the views of the HPC on the application. Chrmn. Greener emphasized that the HPC serves only as an advisory committee.

Attorney Tombalakian stated that even though it is a Zoning Board matter, he would like to put an end to a rumor that is going around the Borough. The proposed business will not be operating 24 hours a day.

Chrmn. Greener invited Mr. Henry to give his presentation.

Mr. Henry stated that Danny Realty had submitted site plans dated April 13, 2023. Revised site plans that had been submitted to the Borough on July 6, 2023. The proposal is to convert the existing building into a convenience store.

Mr. Henry reviewed the proposed improvements that will be made to the site:

- 1) The two existing driveways on the site, on the Main Street side, will remain
- 2) Regarding the existing driveway on Hillside Ave., a slight shift will be made; however, it will remain in the general existing location
- 3) The existing building will be squared off to maintain the setbacks.
- 4) A small existing alcove will be enclosed, making the building then 2,400 sq. ft.
- 5) The existing westerly parking area will remain.
- 6) Five new parking spaces will be added to the easterly side of the property. These spaces will provide parking along Hillside Ave.
- 7) Additional sidewalks will be installed along the outside

Mr. Henry noted that the architectural plans submitted show the new façade improvements. An effort was made to model the façade improvements to imitate the façade of Dunkin Donuts.

Mr. Henry invited comments from the HPC members if they felt the architecture should change.

Mr. Henry pointed out that the existing canopy on the site will not be modified. The two existing signs will be combined into one sign. The one sign will have price points on one side. The Exxon sign will be on the other side. A nice decorative brick will be outside the sign in keeping with the colonial architecture of Chatham. A grey capstone will be installed under the sign. The Exxon sign will be made much smaller than what it is today. The Exxon sign will measure 3 ½ feet by 3 feet. The Tiger Mart sign will measure 3 ½ feet by 3 feet. The plans are proposing that the Hillside Ave. signs be externally illuminated.

Mr. Henry explained the two existing signs are internally illuminated. The applicant would like these signs externally illuminated which is consistent with the Historic District Guidelines. He would like this sign to fit in with the rest of the community.

Mr. Henry stated that the applicant is asking for a deviation for the price points. LED price points are being proposed. Many modern gas stations use LED price points. One advantage is that the wind does not knock LRD lights down.

Mr. Harvey described the conditions of the existing building. There is brick existing on the front of the building that doesn't appear to meet many of the architectural standards of the Borough. The auto repair shop operates at the perimeter of the building.

Mr. Henry stated that a modern but colonial-looking roof will be constructed. Nice glass doors will be installed at the front of the building. The signage on the building will be externally illuminated and will meet the requirements of the town. A fake gabled roof will be constructed to allow for the HVAC to be screened. The current HVAC is not presently screened at all. The gable will make the building appear more colonial. Currently Mr. Henry felt the existing building does not meet many historical standards. He welcomed comments from the HPC.

Mr. Strickland reiterated the concerns the HPC had about the Tiger Mart sign and the LED lighting. He felt LED lighting is not very historical looking. Mr. Strickland was concerned that other local businesses, particularly the other gas stations, will be asking for LED lighting.

Mr. Strickland was disappointed that Exxon had not followed up with the HPC on their earlier sign application. He asked if the applicant would be open to take another look at the proposed signage.

Mr. Henry pointed out that Tiger Mart was never part of the earlier application. Any suggestion the HPC has on the previous Exxon sign would need corporate approval. Mr. Henry felt the recently proposed Exxon sign will be the most minimum size proposed by the applicant. However, Mr. Henry believed that the recently proposed Exxon sign will be the most minimum-sized sign proposed by the applicant.

Mr. Henry stated, however, that he will forward the HPC's comments on the signage to his client and Exxon corporate.

Attorney Tombalakian noted that his client has put a great deal of thought into a replacement for the LED lights. However, he felt the LED lights are the most attractive for signs today.

Mr. Henry stated that the LED price points are only 9 inches high. The alternative would be a LED board, which the Borough would probably not want. The LED signage would be clearer for a motorist to see when driving by, especially at night. No signs are being proposed for the side street.

Mrs. Magrane asked if Tiger Mart is affiliated with Exxon, or is it a chain store.

Mr. Henry explained that Tigre Mart is the convenience store associated with Exxon.

Mr. Strickland asked why Tiger Mart had been added to this application.

Mr. Henry explained that Tiger Mart was added in because the auto repair operator decided to retire. His client could not find another auto repair operator, so he decided to turn the building into a convenience store.

Chrmn. Greener suggested moving on to discuss the building itself.

Chrmn. Greener asked Mr. Henry if he had been aware of the Borough's Historic Guidelines before the improvement for the building had been designed.

Mr. Henry answered yes. He showed the copy of the Guidelines that he had on hand.

Chrmn. Greener asked who actually prepared the drawings.

Mr. Henry answered KSD Architects.

Chrmn. Greener asked if they were aware of the Borough Guidelines.

Mr. Henry answered yes.

Chrmn. Greener pointed out that vinyl siding is being proposed. That's one type of siding material not encouraged by the Design Guidelines. Chrmn. Greener pointed out that some proposals, like the gabled roof is a good idea. However, the execution of the design is flat.

Chrmn. Greener discussed the gable's metal skirt with Mr. Henry.

Chrmn. Greener confirmed with Mr. Henry that the vinyl siding goes all the way down to grade. Nothing else seems to exist between the pavement and the bottom of the siding.

Mr. Henry pointed out that the applicant could add stones or a brick base between the pavement and the siding. He felt the applicant would prefer a stone base if that's acceptable to the HPC. Is there a preferred color for the stone base?

Chrmn. Greener felt that would be an open subject to discuss later on. He suggested the applicant's architect walk along Main Street and get a feel of the building materials of other Main Street structures.

Chrmn. Greener brought up the face of the proposed sign applied to the vinyl. Could a better proposal be considered for this situation?

Chrmn. Greener pointed out the light fixture on Elevation 1. Will this be a flood light or a decorative item? Also, can more detail be given on the proposed awning?

Mr. Henry explained that the light fixture on Elevation 1 will be down facing and will illuminate the sides of the building.

Chrmn. Greener asked for more information on the functionality of that particular lighting. He asked if there will be lighting installed at the front of the door.

Mr. Henry answered no, illumination for the front door will come through the building itself.

Chrmn. Greener asked if the front door will depend on the ambient lighting from the nearby canopy.

Mr. Henry referred Chrmn. Greener to the lighting plan. He explained the low level lighting being proposed is out of consideration for the neighbors.

Chrmn. Greener pointed out that the HPC is concerned about how the structure will be seen from the street. He felt that the north and east elevations should be major concerns. He asked for comments from the other Commissioners.

Mrs. Franklin referred to the eastern elevation. She felt that the proposed roof needed more of a pitch, otherwise the building would appear squat.

Mr. Strickland asked what material will be used for the awning.

Mr. Henry believed it would be vinyl.

Chrmn. Greener asked that the applicant to please avoid using any material that is shiny and plastic-looking. Please no “water-fall” awnings. Do not install illumination under the awning.

Council Member Dempsey confirmed with Mr. Henry that the existing canopy over the gas pumps will not change.

Council Member Dempsey felt that the applicant has a real opportunity to improve what currently exists on the site. She recommended looking at other materials for the awning.

Chrmn. Greener informed Mr. Henry that the Borough Sign Committee takes into consideration the views of the HPC on proposed signage.

Chairman Greener pointed out that he is an architect himself and understands the challenges of working with corporate objectives. However, he asked that the applicant be reminded that this site is in a historic district. Larger businesses are usually willing to work things like this out.

Chrmn. Greener pointed out that the digital signage is not a necessity. A digital sign has nothing to do with the traffic and may not be a safety issue. Chrmn. Greener felt that a non-internally illuminated price sign could be done for a price-quote system.

Chrmn. Greener asked Mr. Henry to take another look at the price sign. He pointed out that only 3 prices are advertised each day.

Chrmn. Greener invited comments from the public.

Brigid McMEnamin, 133 Center Ave., pointed out that the Zoning Board will be looking at certain key Zoning purposes of the Master Plan goals that relate to historic preservation and State and local laws of historic preservation. Mrs. McMEnamin reviewed the ways she believed the proposed plans conflicted with the Historic Guidelines. Mrs. McMEnamin felt that the proposed materials will affect the entire site in every aspect.

Mrs. McMEnamin noted that the subject site is directly across the street from the Dusenberry Home, which **she believes to be** the only Borough structure listed on the National Register of Historic Sites. Mrs. McMEnamin felt that the whole proposal looks like some you would see on the highway.

Mrs. McMEnamin expressed her concerns with the landscaping plans which call for many trees to be removed from the property.

Mrs. McMEnamin also had concerns about the excessive lighting that may result if these plans were approved.

Summing up, Mrs. McMEnamin felt that the proposed plans for this site would be very inconsistent with the aesthetics of the Historic District. She recommended HPC advise the Zoning Board of Adjustment to deny the applicant's requested variances.

Joyce Martinsen, 64 North Hillside Ave., agreed with Mrs. McMEnamin's comments. Mrs. Martinsen has lived in the Borough for 30 years. She noted that the existing gas station, even though it is in the Historic District, has been a long-established business in town. Mrs. Martinsen felt that if the gas station were to close, something fitting and attractive would then take its place in downtown Chatham. Mrs. Martinsen brought up that Chatham was named one of the top 8 beautiful small towns to live in. Please, let us keep it that way. She believed that a convenience store, like Tiger Mart, will no fit well on Main Street.

Stacey Scerbo, North Hillside Ave., felt that the applicant's witnesses that have spoken tonight seem to refer to it as they would a highway. Chatham's Main Street is a widely used community roadway, traveled by all age groups. Mrs. Scerbo is against the Tiger Mart proposal. However, the new owner of this site will now have a chance to bring the proposed business up to Chatham's standards.

Mrs. Scerbo agreed with the HPC's comments on the proposed LED lighting. She urged the HPC to enforce the rules and goals for Chatham's Historic District.

There were no further comments from the public.

Chrmn. Greener informed Mr. Henry and Attorney Tombalakian that they are welcome to return to the HPC with plans more in keeping with the Historic District. The HPC would be happy to work with Danny Realty to maintain these standards for the Historic District.

Mr. Strickland made a motion to recommend that the Danny Realty LLC application, as it stands now, not be recommended by the HPC due to the numerous deficiencies being proposed to the Historic District standards. No actions have been made to change these deficiencies, so the HPC will not recommend this application to the Zoning Board of Adjustment. Mrs. Franklin seconded the motion. A voice vote was taken. All Commissioners present voted aye.

Council Member Dempsey commented that the design being presented is an improvement to what exists now; however, it doesn't go far enough. She asked that an addendum be added to the motion to encourage the applicant to return with more details on the design.

Chrmn. Greener agreed with Council Member Dempsey's comments. The HPC would welcome a return of the applicant. The applicant and the HPC could work on improving the property.

#### HPC Flag Award

Chrmn. Greener noted that work will begin again on obtaining the HPC Flags. He explained the HPC Flag Award Program to Mrs. Nienhouse. He believed there was probably some money in the HPC budget to finance these flags.

Chrmn. Greener noted that Brian Dempsey has created 4 beautiful flag designs for the HPC. Only the hardware to install the flags is needed.

Council Member Dempsey reported that the HPC plaque at the Borough Hall entranceway should be updated. Last year's Flag Award winner has not been posted.

Mrs. Nienhouse said she will check into the HPC budget for the purchase of the 5 flags. She advised the HPC that the flags should be ordered through the Borough for tax reasons.

At 8:34 the meeting adjourned.

The next Chatham Borough Historic Preservation Commission meeting will be held on Tuesday, October 17, 2023, 7:30 p.m. The meeting location to be announced.

Respectfully submitted:

Liz Holler  
Minutes Clerk

