

Historic District Commission

January 23, 2025

Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Hauer called the meeting of the Historic District Commission to order at 6:00 p.m. on Thursday, January 23rd, 2024, at City Hall in the Council Chamber, 181 S. South Street of Gastonia, NC.

Present: Vice-Chair Carol Hauer and Commissioners, Jeff Trepel, Josh Hauser, Marty Murphy, and Kaitlyn Peeler

Absent: Commissioner Blair Propert and Chair Andi Eddlemon

Staff present: Charles Graham, Sushil Nepal, Maddy, Gates, Jalen Nash, and Rebeca Mintz

ITEM 1a. Roll Call / Sound Check

Vice-Chair Hauer opened the meeting, conducted a roll call, and declared a quorum.

ITEM 1b: Approval of December 12th, 2024 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Trepel stated that there were a few instances in the minutes where Commissioner Hauer's and Commissioner Hauser's names were mixed up, likely due to the one-letter difference. Additionally, he noted a second correction in the third item, just above item four, where the minutes incorrectly stated that three commissioners seconded the motion when it should have indicated only one. He mentioned that he had highlighted the corrections and would provide them to Mr. Nash for revision.

With no further discussion, Commissioner Hauer invited a motion. Commissioner Trepel moved to approve the December 12, 2024, meeting minutes as revised, seconded by Commissioner Peeler. The motion was unanimously approved.

ITEM 2. Public Hearing – Certificate of Appropriateness (File # PLCA202400586)

- Kathryn Oosterhuis
- 521 W. Third Avenue
- Requesting approval for after-the-fact work, including a black-painted privacy fence in the side and rear yards, as well as black-painted window trim.

Commissioner Hauer opened the public hearing and recognized Jalen Nash, Planner, for the staff's presentation. The Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) application was presented. Mr. Nash presented the property's zoning map and stated the property is zoned RS-8 and is surrounded by residential land uses.

Mr. Nash presented the Staff Report, stating that this is an after-the-fact approval request that has been before the Commission twice, maybe three times prior to this meeting, with there being an email correspondence he could not find a record of. He explained that the initial request included painting the white trim black (including the windows, columns, entryway, and portico), removing stucco from the side and rear of the house to replace it with grey vinyl shaker shingles, and installing a Cascade Standard-Duty 4 ft. H x 6 ft. W black aluminum pre-assembled fence. He noted that the request to install a 4 ft. black aluminum fence in the front and side yards was approved, contingent on adding a black aluminum gate at the front walkway, while the remaining requests were denied.

Mr. Nash further stated that a second request for the subject property, reviewed on August 24, 2023, sought after-the-fact approval to paint the storm door and surrounding trim black and install a new wooden privacy fence in the side and rear yards, painted black. This request was denied, consistent with the letter provided to Ms. Oosterhuis following the initial July 30, 2020, subcommittee meeting.

Commissioner Peeler asked Mr. Nash if the windows were different from the August 24th meeting, as she believed she was present at that meeting and noted that the windows appeared to have changed since then.

Commissioner Trepel stated that the window trim had been painted black, which may explain the difference if she was referring to the before photo with white trim. Discussion continued among the board regarding the windows.

Commissioner Hauer asked Mr. Nash to confirm that none of the completed changes had been approved, except for the 4 ft. black aluminum fence, which had not been installed. Mr. Nash confirmed that was correct.

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With there being no other questions for Mr. Nash, Commissioner Hauer asked if there was anyone signed up to speak on behalf of this application. Commissioner Hauer recognized the applicant, Kathryn Oosterhuis, at 521 W. Third Avenue, Gastonia, NC.

Commissioner Hauer asked Ms. Oosterhuis if she had any additional comments.

Ms. Oosterhuis stated that she is in the process of restoring the property to match the board's request from the last meeting she attended. She recalled that during that meeting, there was a discussion about different paint colors, and she had the option to work with a subcommittee to get the colors approved. However, she stated that she spent three months trying to find suitable paint colors but was not satisfied with any of them.

Commissioner Trepel asked Ms. Oosterhuis whether she was considering paint colors for the window trim, storm door trim, privacy fence, or all of them. Ms. Oosterhuis responded that she was primarily looking at options for the window and storm door trim but ultimately decided to go with white, as requested at the previous meeting. She added that changing the fence entirely would be difficult due to its location but stated she was open to painting it white if requested.

Commissioner Hauer asked if anyone had any additional questions for Ms. Oosterhuis.

Ms. Oosterhuis stated that she wanted to add a comment regarding the July 30, 2020, application and the installation of a wooden privacy fence instead of the approved aluminum fence. She explained that she had discussed the privacy fence with the coordinator at the time, Kim Wallis, who had stated that a privacy fence would be acceptable as long as it was placed around the back of the home. Based on that conversation, she did not submit a request for the privacy fence after the initial application. Ms. Oosterhuis noted that while she had a verbal discussion about this matter, she was unsure if any emails were documenting the conversation.

Commissioner Trepel stated that if he understood correctly—though he was not sure that he did—the request on August 24, 2023, included the installation of a black wooden privacy fence, which was denied, but the fence was installed anyway.

Ms. Oosterhuis responded that the after-the-fact concern was not that she had failed to apply for the fence, but rather that the issue, as she understood it, was that the fence was painted black. Commissioner Trepel then asked Mr. Nash if he could clarify.

Mr. Nash stated that while those present at the August meeting might not recall, he was fairly certain that he had found an email correspondence at the time with Kim Wallis, the former administrator of the COA applications. He explained that Ms. Oosterhuis had applied for the privacy fence, but not for it to be painted black. Therefore, the fence itself was approved, but not its black color.

Commissioner Hauer asked Mr. Nash if the privacy fence met the Design Standards regarding placement, height, and other requirements.

Mr. Nash responded that yes, a privacy fence of this height is allowed in the side and rear yards.

Ms. Oosterhuis added that the placement of the fence in the front mirrors the fence that was there before—a fence that had been damaged when a tree fell on the left side of the property and when her neighbor ran into the other side with the iron gate that was left in the yard when she purchased the house. She stated that the new fence is aligned with the previous fence.

Commissioner Trepel stated that he was fine with the fence's location but felt it looked unfinished, similar to another fence application that night. He expressed concern about the increasing number of stockade-style fences, which he believed the Commission should address.

Ms. Oosterhuis responded that, based on her research on fences that complement her home's architectural style, she could add trim, such as lattice, especially in the front, to make it more appropriate.

Commissioner Hauser agreed that such an addition could improve the fence. Commissioner Trepel also agreed but reiterated that it looked unfinished at the top and bottom. He added that while he wasn't fond of the black paint, he was unsure how much it mattered.

The board discussed the concern that the fence and house trim would not match if the trim were restored to white. Commissioner Hauser then asked if the fence was currently painted black. Ms. Oosterhuis confirmed that only the front was black, as she initially intended to coordinate it with the

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trim. She added that if the black color on the fence was denied, her intention would be to paint it white to match the rest of the house. Commissioner Hauer asked the board for their opinions on the color scheme, and a discussion followed.

Commissioner Trepel asked Ms. Oosterhuis whether she had installed new windows or if the grids had been removed.

Ms. Oosterhuis responded that the windows still had their original grids, but they were now covered by screens, which is why they were not visible. She added that the black shutters would be reinstalled to maintain consistency.

A discussion followed regarding the color scheme with the reinstallation of black shutters. Commissioner Hauer then asked if the shutters were originally black. Ms. Oosterhuis replied that she believed so, but in the before picture, they appeared quite faded.

Commissioner Hauer asked the board if anyone was prepared to make a motion.

Commissioner Hauser stated that he was unsure how to phrase the motion since the COA request was for black window trim, which would be returned to white. Mr. Graham clarified that although the request specified a color, as long as the color and finish details were outlined in the motion, it would be sufficient.

With no further discussion, Commissioner Hauser moved to approve the application with the condition that trim be added to the top and bottom of the fence and that the window trim be painted white instead of black. Commissioner Peeler seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

ITEM 3. Public Hearing – Certificate of Appropriateness (File # PLCA202400603)

- Michele Stephens
- 401 and 405 S. York Street
- Requesting approval for after-the-fact work, including the installation of a wooden privacy fence.

Commissioner Hauer opened the public hearing and recognized Jalen Nash, Planner, for the purpose of the staff's presentation. The Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) application was presented.

Mr. Nash stated that the property is zoned OLC-CD and is surrounded by a mix of office and light commercial zoning. He presented two previous applications that came before the board last fall, at the August 22, 2024, meeting and the October 24, 2024, meeting. He stated that this application has essentially come before the board to receive recommendations, implement those changes, and ensure compliance with the Design Standards for approval.

Commissioner Hauer asked the board if there were any questions for Mr. Nash.

Commissioner Trepel asked if the added toe board and top railing to the fence being presented are what is being requested. Mr. Nash responded, "Yes." Commissioner Trepel stated that the addition would significantly improve the appearance of the fence.

Commissioner Peeler asked Mr. Nash whether the fence was wood or metal-framed. Mr. Nash responded, "Wood."

With no further questions for Mr. Nash, Commissioner Hauer recognized the applicant, Michele Stephens, at 405 S. York Street.

Commissioner Hauser asked Ms. Stephens if the added trim would be painted black. Ms. Stephens responded that it was brown, but she was waiting for the wood to age before applying a stain.

Commissioner Peeler asked Ms. Stephens if the decorative caps would remain. Ms. Stephens responded, "Yes."

Commissioner Trepel asked Ms. Stephens if the added framing would continue along the entire fence. Ms. Stephens responded, "Yes."

Commissioner Hauser asked Ms. Stephens if the fence panels would remain unstained. Ms. Stephens responded that she would like to leave them natural, but if they do not age attractively, she will do

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something to improve their appearance. She stated that the boards being added should provide some contrast.

With no further questions for Ms. Stephens, Commissioner Hauser moved to approve the application as submitted. Commissioner Trepel seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion was unanimously approved.

ITEM 4. Other Business

Mr. Nash stated that a subcommittee meeting is needed. Commissioner Trepel commented that he wanted the Planning Staff to track the progress at 521 W. Third Avenue, as the after-the-fact violation has been under review for half a decade.

ITEM 5. Adjournment

With there being no further discussion, Vice-Chair Hauer adjourned the January 23rd, 2025 meeting of the HDC at 6:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Carol Hauer, Vice-Chair
Historic District Commission

Jalen Nash – CZO, Planner
Planning Department