



**CITY OF PLAINFIELD
HISTORIC PRESERVATION
COMMISSION**

515 WATCHUNG AVENUE, ROOM 202
PLAINFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07060
Phone: (908) 753-3391



Adrian O. Mapp, Mayor

**William H. Michelson, Chairman
Lawrence T. Quirk, Vice Chairman**

**MEETING MINUTES – PLAINFIELD HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
FEBRUARY 25, 2020 – CITY HALL 1ST FLOOR LIBRARY, 515 WATCHUNG AVENUE**

Call to Order and Public Notice

Chairman Michelson called the meeting to order at 7:35 P.M. and in conformance with the Open Public Meetings Act read aloud the following: “In compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act, this is a regularly scheduled meeting of the Plainfield Historic Preservation Commission. Adequate notice of this meeting has been given in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, the annual meeting schedule was published in the Courier-News, and copies of the meeting schedule are posted in the offices of the City Clerk and Planning Division. I ask that everyone including Commission members please turn their cell phones to silence or vibrate and not take or send any electronic messages during this meeting.”

Roll Call Attendance

2020 Plainfield Historic Preservation Commission Name, Class Designation (Term Ends)	1/28/20	2/25/20	3/24/20	4/28/20	5/26/20	6/23/20	7/28/20	8/25/20	9/22/20	10/27/20	11/24/20	12/22/20
Mario Camino , Class A (12/31/2020)	X	ab										
John Favazzo , Class A (12/31/2021)	X	X										
William T. Garrett , Class B (12/31/2023)	ab	X										
Sandra Gurshman , Class B (12/31/2022)	X	X										
William H. Michelson , Class B (12/31/2022)	X	X										
Lawrence T. Quirk , Class A (12/31/2021)	X	X										
Gary F. Schneider , Class C (12/31/2023)	X	X										
Reginald Thomas , Class A (12/31/2022)	ab	X										
Member 9 (vacant- unexpired term ends 12/31/2020)	na	na										
Gail Smith Alexander , Alternate Member 1 (12/31/2020)	X	X										
Alternate 2 (vacant- unexpired term ends 12/31/2020)	na	na										

Also Present – HPC Consultant Barton Ross, HPC Secretary April M. Stefel and Ruben Perez, Esq., Board Counsel

Presentation of Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Schneider made a motion to accept the January 28, 2020, executive session and regular meeting minutes as presented; Commissioner Garrett seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by voice vote.

Order of Business

Chairman Michelson adjusted the order of the agenda to allow the less complicated HPC 2020-01 Certificate of Appropriateness sign/awning application to proceed first.

New Business

- **Hearing #2: Certificate of Appropriateness HPC 2020-01. Applicant Xavier Ruiz Casares; Owner Oscar Arboleda, 122 North Avenue. Block 314, Lot 5. North Avenue Historic District**

Applicant seeks to fabricate a commercial awning 14 ft. wide x 40 in. high, with a 32-inch projection. This will be welded with 1 inch wide galvanized square steel, material brown "Sunbrella" with painted letters. No additional structural changes to façade.

Chairman Michelson called the applicant to the table. Chairman Michelson determined from the Affidavit of Service that proper notice had been served on nearby owners, and that the Commission has jurisdiction to hear the application. Due to a language issue, the applicant was represented by the sign/awning manufacturer, Carlos Ruiz Paredes, 12 Washington Avenue, Plainfield. Mr. Paredes explained that the applicant is proposing a coffee shop named Ponche Suizo, specializing in making a traditional Ecuadorian drink.

Chairman Michelson asked the applicant to explain the project to the Commission. Mr. Paredes proposes to fabricate a commercial awning 14 ft. wide x 40 inches high, with a 32-inch projection. This will be welded with 1 inch wide galvanized square steel, material brown "Sunbrella", with painted graphics and letters. The awning is not retractable but has a welded frame. Barton Ross indicated that the design and attachment of this application is identical to those found on all "Main Street" locations.

Vice-Chairman Quirk asked Mr. Paredes if what is proposed for the sign/awning is what was presented in the packet sent to Commission members. Mr. Paredes stated that it was, and the Vice-Chairman entered the graphic into evidence as Exhibit A-1. Barton Ross asked if the roll down gate will remain. The Applicant indicated it would. Mr. Ross informed the Commission that the mounting fittings will **not** be mounted onto the existing cast iron pilasters, but onto the adjacent masonry material.

Chairman Michelson asked if there was any public member who wished to speak; no one did.

A Motion was made by Vice-Chairman Quirk, and seconded by Commissioner Schneider, to grant a Certificate of Appropriateness as follows:

- To install an exterior stationary awning on the front façade of 122 North Avenue, made of "Sunbrella" fabric in a brown color with yellow lettering (painted), of a shape and dimension exactly as shown on Exhibit A-1.
- The fonts, color and placement of the letters will be as marked on Exhibit A-1.
- The installation will not change the adjacent ornament (cast iron pilaster) of the building.

A voice vote was taken and the motion was unanimously approved.

The scheduled opening for the business is March 6th, 2020.

Old Business

Memorialization: *Certificate of Appropriateness HPC 2019-22. David and Cheryl Buckman; 1127 Watchung Avenue. Block 638, Lot 9. Putnam Watchung Historic District.*

Chairman Michelson explained the Certificate of Appropriateness (CA), and his written Decision on zoning issues, as they relate to the variances required for a home occupation. This had originated as an Application for a variance to “mixed use”, but that was dealt with at the last meeting, and the Application was deemed amended. Commissioner Thomas spoke to the handicap ramp, and criticized the lack of detail. Commissioners reiterated that vegetation would be screening the ramp, however, Commissioner Thomas stated again that more detail would be required for the ramp (handrail/balustrade). Chairman Michelson indicated that the Applicant is undecided about a ramp at this time, but would be willing to present to the Commission a more detailed plan, if and when the ramp is to be constructed.

Ms. Stefel explained that plant material on a residence, whether specimen or historic, is identified by the Plainfield Shade Tree Commission. While the Applicant indicated that the existing deciduous vegetation would remain, and essentially screen from view the proposed ramp, there is no mechanism to enforce this. Chairman Michelson disagreed that it is unenforceable. There were no additional questions or comments from the Commission. The Chairman called for public comment.

Gerry Heydt, 915 Madison Avenue, spoke about the vegetation screening the proposed ramp. She indicated that vegetative screening, as a means to block sight lines, could potentially cause an undesired precedent for other Applications. Commissioner Thomas agreed. Commissioner Favazzo indicated he approved the ramp, and stated that trees or vegetation made no difference in his estimation.

A Motion was made by Vice-Chairman Quirk to adopt and memorialize the written Decision and Recommendations to the Zoning Board of Adjustment for HPC 2019-22, and grant the Certificate of Appropriateness, and was seconded by Commissioner Smith-Alexander.

A roll call vote was taken, and the motion was unanimously approved. Both Commissioners Thomas and Garrett were “not voting” due to absence last month, and Commissioner Schneider had recused himself.

- **Hearing #1: Certificate of Appropriateness, HPC 2019-21. Applicant & Owner: Ahrre Maros, 916 Madison Avenue. Block 759, Lot 4. Van Wyck Brooks Historic District. (carried from December 17, 2019 and January 28, 2020 meetings)**

Application was made for a CA approving the after-the-fact enclosure of an existing side porch, extending along the north side to the rear of the house, construction of a brick foundation for same, and removal of a “Bilco” door to relocate basement access. Also proposed is the addition of a replica of the former side porch, to be added in front of the addition. Chairman Michelson explained that both the after-the-fact addition and the proposed new addition require Zoning Board approval, due to insufficient space, violating the bulk requirements.

Mr. Maros came to the table to discuss the Application as revised. He now presented 13 items (cut sheets) for the Commission to review, including a new mahogany door for the proposed side entrance porch.

For the sake of clarity, Vice-Chairman Quirk marked this new packet with the cut sheets, photos and other materials into evidence as Exhibits C (packet) and D (presentation board). Mr. Maros talked about the paint colors and the cut sheets for the balustrades and railing. Chairman Michelson stated that the Commission does not regulate color.

Chairman Michelson stated that there are two issues that need to be addressed. The first, is to grant HPC approval on certain particular features of the Application, and second, whether to grant the application at all based on the need for a "C variance" for additional sideyard intrusion due to insufficient lot size.

Vice-Chairman Quirk asked the Applicant about the dimensions of the former landing but he could not definitively answer the question. Mr. Maros guessed it to be 4' x 4'. He further indicated that the former open porch was modest in mass and proportion. It was also open and airy. He compared it to the new addition, and stated it was out of proportion, emphasized by the extended large roof length (28 feet) and a massive foundation. Windows will also be lost from the public view that reduce the visual scale. Vice-Chairman Quirk also indicated that this was an addition done without permits, and that Mr. Maros could have repaired the old existing open-style skirted entry porch.

Mr. Maros indicated that he was just trying to upgrade, limit air leakage, and have a mud room for entering the kitchen. Vice-Chairman Quirk did not agree, and indicated that the evolution of what Mr. Maros did is no excuse, even if it was an effort to improve his property.

Commissioner Thomas told the Applicant that the mass of the new addition is out of scale. The overall mass is too large. He suggested that additional windows need to be added, making the addition appear lighter. Chairman Michelson and Vice-Chairman Quirk spoke about the zoning in VWB I being 18,750 ft. minimum lot size. Setbacks also do not meet the existing zoning. A variance is still required. Mr. Maros stated that he did not increase the house size. The Commissioners disagreed. While the new projection would not extend further into the existing sideyard setback, it does lengthen what is already a non-conforming bulk issue, toward the front of the property.

Commissioner Smith-Alexander stated that she did not visit the site and was unsure if the new addition could be seen. Vice-Chairman Quirk answered her with a definitive yes, that in fact the addition was highly visible, based on the lot configuration. Commissioner Smith-Alexander suggested more windows are needed.

Commissioner Thomas stated that the mahogany door proposed for the addition should not be more decoratively dominant than the front entry door. Chairman Michelson then explained to the Applicant the necessary variances regarding lot coverage and setbacks. Chairman Schneider spoke to inconsistencies in the Application. The Applicant has not applied for a demolition permit. Ms. Stefel indicated that no permits were issued for this Application, neither demolition, construction or zoning. Further concerns about the foundation of the new addition, and possible non-compliance with the Building Code, were still undetermined because no site inspection for this has been made and no permits have been issued, therefore, the Vice-Chairman and Commissioner Schneider indicated that they would not approve the Application.

After additional discussions, Commissioner Thomas indicated that the aesthetic of the addition has not been met. Chairman Michelson said there was a danger that the side addition would look better than the front of the house, making it look unbalanced. Mr. Perez stated that the Application must be acted on as presented. The Commissioners agreed that a CA cannot be granted at this time, based on the aesthetics

of what the Applicant has presented. There were no additional questions or comments from the Commission, and the Chairman called for public comment.

Gerry Heydt, 915 Madison Avenue, who lives directly across from the site, indicated that she was confused by the interchangeable use of the term “porch” and “addition” throughout the HPC hearings on this Application. She indicated that porches in this locale do not have solid foundations, but stand upon a combination of piers and lattice enclosures.

Ms. Heydt said that she is not happy with the proposed addition. She stated that the architecture of the residence is substantial and dignified, and that the addition would appear as an “add on”, incompatible with the existing house. She also wondered if a car door could open in the adjacent driveway.

She said that one could see through the former porch with its glass door and window, and the addition cannot. She is not happy with the overall appearance, and stated that other neighbors within the 200’ radius are also not in favor of the new addition as already constructed. Ms. Heydt further stated that neighbors could not attend tonight’s meeting due to work commitments, age or illness. Chairman Michelson noted that the Commission cannot accept that kind of hearsay evidence.

Additional comments from Commissioner Favazzo agreed with Ms. Heydt’s analysis regarding the glass, a potential car door opening issue, and the foundation being too massive, heavy and encroaching. He further stated that the original porch door went directly into the kitchen, and was not visible on the front façade. Any new door design facing the front façade should contain a lot of glass, and not be solid wood. The design needs to be lightened and revised.

Commissioner Schneider considers this discussion as now being an informational hearing and not a hearing to grant a Certificate of Appropriateness. The Commissioners further discussed what to do, and concluded that a new design needs to be submitted, based on tonight’s comments. Chairman Michelson feels the Commission will have to grant some relief, but not as much as is sought now. Commissioner Gurshman indicated that there are too many variables to grant a Certificate of Appropriateness on this Application as presented. Mr. Perez indicated the HPC determines project aesthetics. Vice-Chairman Quirk reiterated that a new design be submitted by the Applicant. Faced with a consensus to carry this Application, the Applicant agreed to supply the HPC with new design plans based on tonight’s discussions. A motion was made by Vice-Chairman Quirk, seconded by Commissioner Gurshman, and approved by voice vote, to carry this case to the April 28, 2020 HPC meeting.

Discussion

The 2019 Annual Certified Local Government (CLG) Report for continued status was submitted to the NJDEP by April Stefel on February 11, 2020.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Vice-Chairman Quirk made a motion for adjournment, seconded by Commissioner Schneider. All voted in favor, none opposed. The meeting adjourned at 9:39 P.M.

