

Chaplin Historic District Commission

Minutes

Special Meeting & Public Hearing

Tuesday, November 15, 2022

A. Certificate of Appropriateness Hearing: James Burrows, 342 Phoenixville Rd, installation of solar roof panels.

Chairman Warren Church opened the public hearing at 7:13 P.M. Present were regular members W. Church, D. Cox, C. Smith P. Peifer and J. Givens and alternate members C. Lindquist and L. Ricklin. Also present applicant James Burrows and Jake Malek, representative of Elite Energy Consulting of North Haven, CT. Mr. Church read the legal notice published in The Willimantic Chronicle November 2, 2022. Mr. Malek presented a solar panel design that provides enough power to run the house and barn and minimizes the visibility of the panels from the road. The design uses forty-nine 400 watt panels with enough sun hours to meet needs to be installed on the rear addition roof, the rear of the main roof and both sides of the barn roof. Normally forty panels with ideal exposure would have been used but the additional nine panels were needed for the less optimum position in order to make them less obtrusive. Mrs. Cox asked about the cherry tree near the barn, it will remain and without leaves in winter would make the panels somewhat more visible, there are also trees along England Rd. that block visibility of the panels from that street. The plan was to be mindful of the historic property. Mr. Peifer asked about a ground array or solar shingles. Mr. Malek replied it would be a very large array with that many panels and would be much more visible, the solar shingles would have to be installed on the entire roof and they do look like solar panels not regular roofing and the cost is much more than installing a new roof and the forty-nine panels. Mr. Malek said the panels have a 35 year life expectancy with a 1/2 % loss of efficiency a year. Ms. Givens said if the roof is replaced with the same shingles now installed, no hearing would be required. Mr. Peifer asked to see a picture of the actual panel. Mr. Malek showed the panel on his phone and explained it is 2 1/2 inches high with black panels and on the black roof will be unobtrusive. Mr. Burrows said it is a twenty year payment plan and he would keep the panels installed after payoff. Mr. Malek explained that the solar industry will improve aesthetics and efficiency with time. Ms. Givens asked what pitfalls could arise between contract signing and installation that could derail the project. Mr. Malek said their engineer reviewed the project and noted several rafters would have to be sistered to add strength to the roof. Mrs. Smith asked about the timeline, it would be about three months from contact to install and another month or two for Eversource to replace the meter with a solar power meter. Mr. Church asked about storage; Mr. Malek replied there is a small amount built into the system but a battery would be needed for larger storage and, at this time, it is more cost effective for the homeowner to have a generator. Mr. Church closed the hearing at 7:42 P.M.

B. **1.** Business meeting called to order at 7:43 P.M. Members seated were W. Church, D. Cox, C. Smith, P. Peifer and J. Givens. C. Lindquist and L. Ricklin were present but not seated.

2. Approval of September 13, 2022 minutes. J. Givens moved and D. Cox seconded to approve the minutes. The minutes were approved unanimously.

3. Audience for citizens: None

4. New Business:

a. Certificate of Appropriateness for Installation of Solar Roof Panels at 342 Phoenixville Rd.

Mr. Peifer made a motion to approve the Certificate of Appropriateness, Mrs. Smith seconded. Mr. Peifer said he is usually opposed to the look of solar panels but in this case the applicant has done a good job to conceal the panels; there was no alternate plan submitted and generally not in favor of solar panels in the Historic District but in this case he reluctantly can vote to approve; but it may negatively impact the District. Ms. Givens said we already have four properties in the District and people have mitigated the siting of the panels. Mrs. Smith said she was also hesitant but the applicant has an excellent plan to have the least impact on the District and we should keep each application as a separate case instead of looking at it as a precedent. Mr. Lindquist said Connecticut has encouraged solar in Historic Districts. Ms. Givens added unless it substantially impacts the character of the District and is a legitimate detriment to the visual character we should review each case on the plans. Mrs. Cox said the door is open and there will be more but the HDC has had success with a case by case basis. Ms. Givens complimented the applicant on the useful graphics provided. Motion was approved unanimously.

5. Old Business

a. Ross Library The septic system was installed and is higher than expected, owner Nell DeVane is getting a landscape plan done to mitigate the berm and replace the granite steps leading to the front door. There will probably be a hearing scheduled in the spring for a C of A.

b. 47 Chaplin St. (Front Lawn) Mr. Church spoke to the Cassidys and they understand the situation with the raised beds and have removed taller structures and will work to minimize the look of the beds. Mrs. Smith noted that they rent the house and the HDC should be working with the owner.

c. 42 Chaplin St. (House repairs) A chimney was removed and is being rebuilt in the same style and material as original. There was water damage to the interior of the building.

d. Museum. There is no further progress, the Town has to take the next steps in the process.

6. Correspondence: Received Preservation Connecticut magazines. Mr. Church sent a certified letter to Mr. Allen notifying him of the denial for his C of A application for installing solar panels. The letter was returned, so Mr. Church talked to Mr. Allen by phone.

Adjournment. Mr. Peifer moved to adjourn, Ms. Givens seconded. Mr. Church adjourned the meeting at 8:17 P.M.

Respectfully submitted, Susan Peifer- Recording clerk- HDC