

Historic District Commission

February 27, 2025

Meeting Minutes

Chair Eddlemon called the meeting of the Historic District Commission to order at 6:01 p.m. on Thursday, February 27, 2025, at City Hall in the Council Chamber, 181 S. South Street of Gastonia, NC.

Present: Chair Andi Eddlemon and Commissioners, Jeff Trepel, Josh Hauser, Blair Propert, and Kaitlyn Peeler

Absent: Vice-Chair Carol Hauer

Staff present: Charles Graham, Joe Gates, Jalen Nash, and Rebeca Mintz

ITEM 1a. Roll Call / Sound Check

Chair Eddlemon opened the meeting, conducted a roll call, and declared a quorum.

ITEM 2. Public Hearing – Certificate of Appropriateness (File # PLCA202400601)

- Frances Smith
- 412 S. Chester Street
- Requesting approval for the construction of a new one-story garage.

Chair Eddlemon 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 that it is zoned O-1 CD (Office, Conditional District) and is surrounded by office and residential land uses. He noted that a previous application was submitted for the September 26, 2024, Historic District Commission meeting, in which the applicant requested approval to demolish the existing garage that had been damaged by a fallen tree.

Mr. Nash then outlined the key elements of the proposed garage, stating that it would be a one-story, 320-square-foot structure with a double-brick foundation. It would feature gabled roofs on the left and right elevations and hipped roofs on the front and rear elevations. He described the front elevation as including a 12x7 ft framed garage door and a 3x7 ft entry door. The left-side elevation would have one window, though the application did not specify its dimensions. He initially stated that the siding would be vinyl and painted white to match the home.

Commissioner Trepel pointed out that the application listed the siding material as fiber cement. Mr. Nash then corrected himself, clarifying that the siding would be fiber cement, while the trim and soffit would be vinyl.

Mr. Nash presented the related excerpts from the Design Standards. He added that there was a preconstruction subcommittee review held with the applicant at the end of January, and the board members present had no additional recommendations for the applicant.

Discussion ensued amongst the board regarding the incorrect labeling in the elevations.

Commissioner Peeler asked Mr. Nash if there were any details or specifications provided for the garage door or window. Mr. Nash responded that those details had not yet been decided.

Commissioner Trepel then asked if the garage door would differ from what was shown in the elevation drawings. Mr. Nash confirmed that was correct and suggested that the garage could be approved with the condition that the applicant return for final approval of the door selection.

Commissioner Hauser stated that he believed the application would need to come back with additional details. Commissioner Trepel agreed.

Commissioner Hauser then asked if the applicant planned to make any driveway modifications, as they would be necessary based on the submitted plans. Mr. Nash responded that no driveway modifications were included in the application.

Discussion ensued amongst the board regarding which way the garage will be situated.

Commissioner Hauser stated that he would like to continue this application due to multiple unknowns regarding the window design and dimensions, the garage door selection, and the incorrect labels on the elevation drawings. Several commissioners agreed.

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Commissioner Eddlemon suggested that it might be better to deny the application and require a new submission. Commissioner Trepel agreed.

With no further discussion, Commissioner Hauser moved to deny the application as submitted, citing the need for additional details. Commissioner Peeler seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion was unanimously approved.

ITEM 3. Public Hearing – Certificate of Appropriateness (File # PLCA202500067)

- Jennifer Baker
- 508 W. Eighth Avenue
- Requesting approval for after-the-fact work, including the renovation of the front porch.

Chair Eddlemon 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 home was built in 1940 and presented the property description. He noted that the property is considered a contributing structure within the local York-Chester Historic District, is zoned RS-8, and is surrounded by residential zoning.

Mr. Nash then outlined the key elements of the request, stating that the original red front door had been replaced with a new black-painted front door, the fascia and window trim or casing had been painted black, and the horizontal vinyl siding on the front elevation had been replaced with vertical vinyl siding. Additionally, vinyl shake had been installed on the front gable, two metal columns on the front porch had been replaced with wooden columns featuring a standard capital and base, and the vinyl shutters had been removed.

Mr. Nash presented before photos of the property.

Commissioner Trepel asked if the roof had been replaced or if the chimney had been painted black, noting that he did not see these changes listed in the application. Mr. Nash responded that the chimney was painted black before the current homeowner. When Commissioner Trepel asked if there was an application for that repainting, Mr. Nash stated that, according to Google Maps, the chimney had been black since at least 2015, but he was unsure whether an application had been submitted for the change.

Commissioner Trepel then asked if the roof had been replaced. Mr. Nash explained that the tiles might appear different due to lighting in the photos but confirmed that black tiles were used both before and after the recent changes.

Commissioner Trepel also inquired whether there had been a previous application to remove a tree from the property. Mr. Nash clarified that there was no such application and that its mention in the Staff Report was an error. He added that revised agenda packets should be available to the Commission.

The board then discussed the differences between the 2015 photo and the current photo.

Commissioner Peeler asked when the violation for the after-the-fact changes had been issued. Mr. Nash responded that it was issued in late December.

With no further questions for Mr. Nash, Commissioner Eddlemon recognized the applicant, Jennifer Baker, of 508 W. Eighth Avenue, Gastonia, NC.

Commissioner Hauser asked Ms. Baker that, in her application, it states that only the front elevation received board and batten siding, and inquired whether any changes had been made to the sides or rear. Ms. Baker responded that she only replaced the horizontal siding as it was. Commissioner Hauser asked if the siding was vinyl. Ms. Baker responded, "Yes."

Commissioner Trepel commented that in this particular case, where vinyl is being replaced with vinyl, it would be allowed according to the Design Standards. However, he noted that this doesn't address the change in direction of the siding. Commissioner Eddlemon agreed.

Commissioner Peeler asked Ms. Baker what size the wooden columns were. Commissioner Hauser responded that they appeared to be 6-inch columns. Ms. Baker replied that she was unsure, but 6 inches sounded correct compared to 4 inches.

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Commissioner Trepel asked Ms. Baker if she intended to paint the columns. Ms. Baker responded that she was considering either staining or painting them, but since the wood was pressure-treated, she had not yet decided.

Commissioner Murphy asked Ms. Baker if the previously installed iron columns were in bad shape. Ms. Baker responded that they were old and rusted, and one of the columns wasn't attached at the base, not properly supporting the front porch covering.

Commissioner Eddlemon stated that while she thought Ms. Baker did a great job on the full renovation, she was unsure whether it fit in with the historic neighborhood. Her main concerns were the black trim on the windows, fascia, and soffit, as well as the size of the columns, which she also recommended needed to be painted.

Commissioner Hauser stated that his biggest concern was with the board and batten siding, but he felt the size of the columns was appropriate and that they just needed to be painted. Commissioner Trepel agreed with Commissioner Hauser, stating he was okay with the size of the columns and that they should be painted. He also mentioned that he was fine with the black trim around the windows, as it complemented the roof and chimney, even though he would not support painting the chimney if it were in front of him now. Discussion ensued over a color palette for the home. Commissioner Peeler asked the board how they would feel if the black shutters were added back to the home. Further discussion took place regarding the color palette with the addition of black shutters.

Commissioner Peeler asked Ms. Baker if the front door was currently painted black. Ms. Baker responded yes, the door is black, and there is a window in the door that is currently blocked by a wreath. Commissioner Murphy asked Ms. Baker if this was a new door or if the old door had just been painted black. Ms. Baker responded that it was a new door and the previous red door was old and chipping.

Commissioner Propert asked Ms. Baker if she still had the shutters that were previously removed. Ms. Baker responded no because they were too small for the windows and did not look right aesthetically. Ms. Baker added that she decided to paint the window trim black because the trim was old and off-white, not matching the new white siding, and she could not afford to replace the windows.

Commissioner Eddlemon asked if anyone had any additional questions for the applicant or if anyone felt prepared to make a motion.

Commissioner Peeler asked the board if they were okay with the current direction of the siding, as it differs from the original house. Commissioner Hauser responded that he was fine with it, noting that there are many houses in the neighborhood with a mix of horizontal siding and cedar shake gables. Discussion ensued over a color palette for the home.

Commissioner Eddlemon stated that the shake siding doesn't bother her and fits in with the neighborhood, but the black trim is incongruous with the area. Commissioner Trepel asked Commissioner Eddlemon for her thoughts on the siding. Commissioner Eddlemon responded that she agrees with previous comments that the siding should have been horizontal, but now that vertical siding has been installed after the fact, she would like to see all of the black trim addressed. Commissioner Peeler added that the changes made are very similar to the new homes being built today.

Commissioner Hauser asked Commissioner Eddlemon, with the chimney, gutters, foundation, and steps being black, if she would like to see the window trim and the trim below the gable white. Commissioner Eddlemon responded that she would like to see all of the trim returned to white.

Commissioner Hauser stated he was still concerned about the board and batten siding.

With no further discussion, Commissioner Trepel moved that the application be approved on the condition that the vertical board and batten siding be replaced with horizontal siding similar to what was on the house before and that the columns be painted white. Commissioner Hauser seconded the motion.

Ms. Baker asked Commissioner Trepel if his motion included replacing the vertical siding with horizontal siding. Commissioner Trepel responded, "Yes."

Ms. Baker responded that she had some concerns with the cost of replacing the siding and added that she went around the neighborhood for this discussion, taking pictures of all the homes that stood out

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as being in disrepair, very desolate, in need of improvements, and located on Eighth Avenue and Jackson Street. Ms. Baker stated that she looked at the HDC website, which had all the conditions and standards, and noted that not one of the pictures regarding architectural aesthetics represented the houses on Eighth Avenue or Jackson Street. She mentioned that the pictures were all of the houses on 321, Second, Third, and Fourth Avenue, which were nice and old. Ms. Baker pointed out that the homes on Eighth Avenue and Jackson Street had siding falling off and roofs caving in. She understands that this might be a zoning issue or a code enforcement issue, but emphasized that this is still the city of Gastonia.

Commissioner Eddlemon emphasized that the board needed to stay on topic, addressing not only this application but also the issues surrounding it. She clarified that the discussion should not focus on the fact that many houses in the neighborhood need work, agreeing that it would be great for others to come forward and have the same conversation. However, she explained that this situation arose because work was done without consulting the Historic District, and some of these issues could have potentially been avoided before any money was spent. She also stated that the board could not consider the cost of the work, as it is not within their purview to manage such concerns. Commissioner Eddlemon acknowledged Ms. Baker's frustration but reiterated that the board's goal was to uphold the standards, not to upset her.

Ms. Baker stated that she understands the need to uphold the standards and apologized for not submitting the Certificate of Appropriateness, not realizing it was needed for minor work. She explained that she thought it was required only for larger projects. Ms. Baker mentioned other homes in the neighborhood had undergone changes, like replacing metal columns, and expressed frustration that the focus was on her house. She added that, as a single mother, she was trying to improve her home, which she believed was one of the best in the neighborhood, while others with dilapidated homes weren't being held to the same standards.

Commissioner Trepel stated that it's not that they don't care, and he appreciated Ms. Baker's efforts in keeping her house up nicely. However, he explained that the board doesn't have jurisdiction to require anyone to make changes to their house unless they are making an exterior change, in which case the board has jurisdiction over the appearance. Discussion ensued over the Design Standards and the board's purview.

With there being no further discussion, Commissioner Eddlemon asked the board if they were ready to vote on Commissioner Trepel's previously stated motion. Discussion ensued among Commissioner Propert and Ms. Baker regarding what changes in her renovation would have been different after hearing some of the Design Standards and comments made tonight. During the discussion, Mr. Graham noted that there was a vote on the floor for Commissioner Trepel's previous motion, and if the board wanted to discuss a different option with the applicant, the motion on the floor would need to be withdrawn.

With there being no further discussion, Chair Eddlemon took the vote on Commissioner Trepel's previous motion. The motion died (1-5).

Commissioner Peeler stated that where she struggles with Commissioner Trepel's motion is that if Ms. Baker is changing the vertical siding to horizontal but is still leaving the black trim, the style then conflicts with itself. Discussion ensued over the color palette and style of the home compared to newer developments in the surrounding areas. Commissioner Peeler added that she is struggling with the design due to the removal of the shutters.

Commissioner Hauser asked Commissioner Peeler, assuming the previous shutters were vinyl, whether she would prefer the vinyl shutters to be added back or if no shutters would be preferable. Commissioner Peeler responded that adding the vinyl shutters back wouldn't bother her too much. Commissioner Trepel then asked if the home originally had shutters. Commissioner Eddlemon responded yes, the removal of the shutters was listed in the application, and Commissioner Trepel clarified that he was asking if the home originally had shutters back in 1940. Commissioner Trepel noted that the inventory for this home does not describe it as having shutters. Discussion continued over the color palette for the home and a potential motion.

Commissioner Murphy stated that, although the board is not supposed to consider cost, he believes the best approach to this application would be to find a way to correct the violation without removing the siding, as Commissioner Propert mentioned earlier. He added that the changes should include paint options and potentially adding shutters.

Commissioner Hauser stated that any shutters that are appropriately sized will drown out the elevation, as the shutters that were there before were not appropriately sized.

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Commissioner Eddlemon asked Commissioner Peeler for her opinion. Commissioner Peeler responded that she likes the style of the home but worries that if they approve things just because they are done after the fact, it might set a precedent for the rest of the neighborhood to do the same.

Discussion ensued regarding the surrounding homes in the area.

Commissioner Hauser asked if anyone had a motion in mind that would allow the vertical siding to remain. Commissioner Murphy responded that he was in favor of keeping the siding. Commissioner Peeler stated that the siding itself did not bother her as much as the overall change in style, which now resembles newer builds.

Commissioner Hauser stated he would be open to painting the trim a more appropriate color, for example white. Ms. Baker responded that the vinyl trim is painted black but is black itself. Commissioner Peeler asked if vinyl could be painted. Commissioner Hauser responded yes, and the vinyl trim can be replaced if not painted.

Commissioner Hauser added that he thinks adding shutters would take the attention a little bit away from the vertical board and Batten, which is what he has an issue with.

Chair Eddlemon stated that accepting the vertical siding would be a compromise, not necessarily what the Commission would have originally approved. She emphasized the risk of setting a precedent by approving changes after the fact and questioned whether denying the application would allow the applicant to return with a revised proposal. She advised the board not to take on the role of designer in the discussion.

Discussion ensued regarding staff assisting the applicant in developing a new design. With no further discussion, Commissioner Probert moved to deny the application, granting the applicant 30 days to work with the planning department to propose alternatives that better align with the historic district's design standards. Commissioner Hauser seconded the motion.

Commissioner Trepel expressed concern that the board was shifting its responsibility onto Mr. Nash. Commissioner Hauser disagreed, stating that the responsibility remained with the applicant. Commissioner Peeler concurred, adding that the applicant should present multiple options to the Planning and Zoning group, whether through a subcommittee or the full board. Commissioner Eddlemon noted that it was not uncommon for the planning department to provide a mock-up if needed.

With no further discussion, Chair Eddlemon called for a vote on Commissioner Probert's motion, which passed unanimously.

ITEM 4. Other Business

Mr. Nash stated that a subcommittee meeting is needed.

ITEM 5. Adjournment

With there being no further discussion, Chair Eddlemon adjourned the February 27th, 2025 meeting of the HDC at 6:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Andi Eddlemon, Chair
Historic District Commission

Jalen Nash – CZO, Planner
Planning Department