

**HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
MINUTES OF MEETING
MAY 4, 2016**

Town of Bedford
Bedford Town Hall
Selectmen's Meeting Room

PRESENT: William Moonan, Chair; Alan Long, Vice Chair; Karen Kalil-Brown, Clerk; Lorrie Dunham; Chris Weisz; Sal Canciello; Kevin Latady

ABSENT: None

Mr. Moonan introduced himself and read the emergency evacuation notice.

PRESENTATION: Ms. Kalil-Brown read the notice of the hearing.

PETITION #010-16 – CONTINUATION – First Parish Church, 75 Great Road, for solar panels.

Mr. Moonan welcomed Mr. Latady to the Commission as a new member. He explained that Mr. Latady had been present at the original hearing as a guest, but Ms. Kalil-Brown, Mr. Weisz, and Mr. Canciello had not been in attendance; they had, however, all read the meeting minutes and invoked the exception to the Mullen Rule in order to vote. He said that the five-member quorum would, therefore, be himself, Mr. Long, Ms. Kalil-Brown, Ms. Dunham, and Mr. Weisz.

Karl Winkler, of the First Parish Church Energy Conservation (ECO) Taskforce, greeted the Historic District Commission (HDC) and introduced Rebecca Neale, a member of the Church and its legal counsel for this meeting. Mr. Winkler said that they had put forth a comprehensive plan to modernize the building and make it more “green” while still keeping the historic and architectural integrity of the structure. He noted that they had added storm windows, built a new elevator, and added insulation. Mr. Winkler said that, in the interest of continuing with this plan, their next proposal involved solar panels.

Ms. Neale explained that the First Parish Church was a Unitarian Universalist Church, and Unitarians followed seven core principles, the seventh of which stated, “Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.” She said that, as part of this principle, the Church congregation believed that it was very important to reduce their carbon footprint in order to conserve energy and provide sustainable living; she added that their beliefs include an “inherent right to a livable climate,” and that they felt strongly that these solar panels would meet that belief.

Mr. Winkler gave a PowerPoint presentation on the proposed solar panels (see attachment), discussing the aesthetics and their specific placement on the building; he noted that there would be no visual difference from the Bedford Common. He also

showed a series of 10 short videos showing the walking perspective from all points around the Church, pointing out where and when the panels would be visible on the building.

There was extensive discussion about the visual effects of the panels. Mr. Winkler noted that the proposal involved straight rows of panels with no “sawtooth” areas where the panels would be staggered. He noted that the maximum efficiency would be gained by using the sawtooth configuration, but the Church wanted to keep the panels as unobtrusive as possible, so they elected to go with a slightly less efficient option in order to keep the panels inconspicuous. He showed an original configuration and compared it to the new one. Mr. Winkler said that they also planned on using a “critter guard” along the bottom of the panels, which would hide the visual impression that the panels were floating because it eliminated the shadow beneath them. He added that the panels would also be a matte finish, not glossy, which would also make them less obvious. He said that it was fortuitous that the roof needed to be re-shingled in the near future, so they also planned to change the color from gray to black in order to make the panels blend in even more. He concluded that the Church had given this a great deal of thought and had done the best they could to keep these panels inconspicuous and reduce the “visual noise” on the structure.

Mr. Latady noted that most solar panel installations on structures such as this were required to be two feet from the edge of the roof, and he asked whether the applicants planned to do that here. Mr. Winkler said that they did, and that the panels would be at least two feet in from the edge.

Ms. Neale said that she saw two avenues for the HDC to approve this application. The first was to find that denying the application was an unreasonable limitation of their religious beliefs. She quoted from the Dover Amendment of Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 40A Section 3, which states: “No zoning ordinance or by-law shall prohibit or unreasonably regulate the installation of solar energy systems or the building of structures that facilitate the collection of solar energy, except where necessary to protect the public health, safety or welfare.” She said that the second avenue for approval was to find that, under the Bedford Zoning Bylaw, denying the application would be a substantial hardship to the Church because it limited the implementation of their beliefs.

Mr. Weisz stated that “freedom of religion” could be used to ask for, or demand, many things, but he did not believe it was appropriate in this case. Mr. Moonan agreed, noting that religion should not be the main focal point of this discussion. Mr. Long also agreed and stated that the HDC’s sole mandate was the preserving the historic character of the District.

Mr. Moonan opened the hearing to the public.

Brett Leida, of 25 Woodland, expressed his support of this project.

Brown Pulliam, of 102 Badger Terrace, said that we were living in a transition period, moving from carbon to non-carbon energy sources, and it was important for institutions such as this Church to show that they were willing to change with the times. He said he urged the Commission to vote in favor of these panels and, by extension, vote in favor of clean energy.

Bill Rabinowitz, of 9 Noreen Drive, said that many solar panel arrays throughout Bedford were frankly quite ugly, so he understood the hesitation to approve them; however, the Church were making extra effort to make them as unobtrusive as possible so that no one would even notice them, let alone think they were unattractive.

Mr. Winkler showed a photograph of the First Parish Church taken during the early 20th century and said it was important to consider the fact that the power lines shown in the picture were no longer there; the photo was a snapshot of a moment in time when technology was changing. He stressed that these panels were similar in that they would not be there forever; they too would be a snapshot of a moment in time when the world was finding new ways to become more energy efficient. He said that, when the time came that the panels were no longer necessary, they would be removed, and they were designed for easy removal.

Mr. Weisz said he wished that there was a photograph of the exact installation that the Church was proposing, because they had to imagine a great deal in order to get an idea of what it would look like. There was conversation about other historic churches that had installed solar panels, and the aesthetics and details of those installations.

Ron Green, of 12 Old Stagecoach Road, said that this Church was proposing something that was for the greater good of everyone, so he could not understand the objection to it.

David Enos, of 43 Hillside Avenue, said that he was always delighted to see solar panels on any structure because it was a sign that more people were embracing clean energy. He said that he thought it would be a wonderful statement for the Church to have these panels on the roof because it showed that they were forward-thinking and dedicated to the environment.

Mr. Weisz said that he had very little problem with allowing panels on the back half of the building; his biggest concern was the panels on the front half of the building that are visible from Great Road and the Common. Mr. Winkler said that, if the panels were only on the back, they would need to be placed in sawtooth style and have as many as possible in order to come close to the energy footprint that they needed. He said that this was what the Church was trying to avoid, because they wanted to reduce the visual noise and have the panels be as inconspicuous as possible.

Mr. Latady asked whether the Church members had looked into any sort of energy programs that would help achieve the same outcome, both environmental and economic. Jennifer McClain, a member of the ECO Taskforce, said that they had looked into

programs like that, but most of those programs were aimed towards residents and commercial businesses but not institutional uses like churches.

Abigail Hafer, of 260 Davis Road, said that she thought it would be a strong statement not only by the Church but by the Town of Bedford to have solar panels on the Common. She said that a town like Bedford should be setting an example for the rest of the state and the rest of the country.

Ron Cordes, of 3 Jeffrey Circle, said that he hadn't heard any of the Commission members specifically state why they might object to this application. Mr. Weisz said that he worried that it would make the building much less visually appealing, which was a great concern to him because he believed that this was the most beautiful building in Bedford. He said he was also concerned because the Commission didn't have a true visual reference as to what, exactly, these panels would look like on the building. He said the Commission was being asked to imagine several things and to try to put it together in their minds without seeing anything concrete. Mr. Winkler commented that he did have a sample of the panel at the last meeting. Mr. Weisz apologized that he hadn't been present to see it but noted that he still wished he could see the panels as they would actually be placed, with the critter guard and the black roof. The other members agreed.

Laurie Groves, of 7 Hilltop Drive, said that this would not only benefit the Church but the entire Town, and these kinds of installations were very important in the world today.

Christine Rabinowitz, of 12 Noreen Drive, said that First Parish built a beautiful addition back in the 1990s, and she recalled that the HDC members were very hesitant about it at the time, but they had faith that the Church would make it attractive, and the Church came through. She said that she hoped the HDC would have the same kind of faith in them now, because they were the stewards of this building and wanted it to stay beautiful just as much as the Commission did.

Mr. Moonan read emails from the Chairpersons of other Historic District Commissions throughout Massachusetts who had responded to his query regarding solar panels.

There was further discussion about the aesthetics of the panels and the different options of placing them on the building.

Ms. Kalil-Brown said that, if she were to make a motion to approve panels on the front and back of the Church, she would put conditions that the panels would be matte finish and not glossy; that the critter guard would be in place; that the panels would be at least two feet in from the edge of the roof; and that the roof shingles be changed to black before the installation took place. She said that, with these conditions in place, she felt that she could support the application as it was presented, without the need to have the panels only on the back of the building. Ms. Dunham agreed.

Mr. Moonan took two straw polls:

1) Would the voting members be willing to accept the panels as presented, in a “clean” and “non-sawtooth” style, on the front and back of the building?

Moonan: No

Long: No

Kalil-Brown: Yes

Dunham: Yes

Canciello: No

2) Would the voting members be willing to accept panels on the back of the building only, even if a more jagged, “sawtooth” placement were required to achieve maximum effect?

Moonan: Yes

Long: Yes

Kalil-Brown: No

Dunham: No

Canciello: Yes

Mr. Moonan said that it appeared that the Commission was still divided, and he thought it best to continue the hearing one more time to allow the HDC members to get the best possible idea of what, exactly, this installation would look like. Mr. Winkler said they would do everything in their power to come back again with a sample of the panel along with more details and photographs of the critter guard and roof shingles. Mr. Weisz said that a photograph of this exact proposed installation would go a long way towards helping him make a determination. Mr. Canciello stated that he would love to get the address of another building, preferably a church, that has a similar or identical installation, so he or the entire Commission could look at it in person.

Mr. Moonan called for a motion to continue the meeting.

MOTION:

Mr. Long moved to continue First Parish Church, 75 Great Road, for solar panels, to June 1, 2016 at 7:30 PM.

Ms. Dunham seconded the motion.

Voting in favor: Moonan, Long, Kalil-Brown, Dunham, and Canciello

Voting against: None

Abstained: None

The motion carried unanimously, 5-0-0.

Adjournment

With no other business to discuss, Mr. Moonan called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

MOTION:

Mr. Long moved to adjourn the meeting.

Ms. Dunham seconded the motion.

Voting in favor: Moonan, Long, Kalil-Brown, Dunham, Weisz, Canciello, and Long

Voting against: None

Abstained: None

The motion carried unanimously, 7-0-0.

The meeting adjourned at 10:55 PM.

William S. Moonan 11/2/16
William Moonan, Chair Date

Respectfully Submitted,

Scott Gould
HDC Assistant