

TOWN OF AMHERST  
Historic District Commission Meeting

January 18, 2024

**APPROVED**

In attendance: Doug Chabinsky – Acting Chair, Martha Chabinsky (remote), Tom Grella – Board of Selectmen Ex-Officio, Bill Glenn.  
Staff present: Nic Strong, Community Development Director, and Kristan Patenaude, Recording Secretary (remote)

Doug Chabinsky, Acting Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:20 p.m., noting that issues with the audio feed for the Zoom recording of the meeting had created some difficulties with starting the meeting.

**PUBLIC HEARING**

1. **CASE #: PZ18362-122923 – Congregational Church of Amherst (Owner) & Preschool in the Village (Applicant); 11 Church Street, PIN #: 017-066-000 –**  
Request for approval to replace wooden playground climbers that are 20+ years old with new structures in the same location due to decaying wooden structural beams.

Doug Chabinsky read and opened the case.

**Bill Glenn moved to accept the application as complete and that there is no regional impact. Seconded by Tom Grella.**

**Roll Call Vote: Doug Chabinsky – aye, Martha Chabinsky - aye, Tom Grella – aye, Bill Glenn – aye. 4-0-0.**

Tina Summers, Director of Preschool in the Village, explained that the climbers were installed in approximately 2002. Repairs have been made over the years, but the structural beams are decaying at the bottom and top. The structure contains warped floorboards where the children stand and damage from carpenter bees. She explained that she contacted Craig Fraley, Director of Recreation, regarding suggestions for structure vendors, which is how she came to the recommendation of O'Brien & Sons. In order to respect the Church property, she picked an item to blend in with the landscape with a lower sight line than the current structure.

Bill Glenn asked about the proposed material. Tina Summers stated that it is a composite material, similar to the structures at Joshua's Park, so little-to-no maintenance will be required.

**FINDINGS:**

1. Church is a contributing property in the Village
2. View from the public way is very limited
3. Structure is planned to be similar to those approved for Joshua's Park, composite material, and similarly colored; no gaudy colors are proposed

There was discussion regarding the fact that play structures of this type were not historic. Doug Chabinsky agreed, but noted that, as with mechanical and utility structures, it was the

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responsibility of the Commission to review such things to ensure that they do not detract from the character of the Village.

**Tom Grella moved to approve the application as submitted. Seconded by Doug Chabinsky.**

**Roll Call Vote: Doug Chabinsky – aye, Martha Chabinsky - aye, Tom Grella – aye, Bill Glenn – aye. 4-0-0.**

**OTHER BUSINESS:**

**2. Minutes: December 21, 2023**

**Doug Chabinsky moved to approve the December 21, 2023, meeting minutes, as presented. Seconded by Tom Grella.**

**Roll Call Vote: Doug Chabinsky – aye, Martha Chabinsky - aye, Tom Grella – aye, Bill Glenn – abstain. 3-0-1.**

Doug Chabinsky stated that the company the Commission planned to use to develop design guidelines using grant funding will not be able to support the project in a timely fashion. Nic Strong explained that the project must be completed by September 2024. The Commission could consider an RFP process, but it may not be completed quickly enough.

Doug Chabinsky suggested that the Commission could consider reducing the RFP scope, such as removing the proposed pictures, in order to find other potential vendors. Martha Chabinsky requested that someone else take photos of properties in the Village to include in the document, as it is important to have visual examples for applicants. Nic Strong noted that up close photos on private property would require permission from homeowners.

Bill Glenn asked if the existing photos used in the Preservation Company survey from 2019 were of every property. Nic Strong stated that she is unclear on this. She has not seen a separate file with only the photos.

Martha Chabinsky explained that pictures are important because people may not know how to rebuild certain structures if there is not documentation of the original structure.

The Commission reviewed the proposed RFP. Doug Chabinsky stated that it was important in his mind that the guidelines address such things as how to propose an addition or renovations with appropriate massing to the existing structure, and why preservation of important architectural details on the property is important. He also thought that the consultant could have access to plans and materials that have been submitted to the Commission for past applications that show inappropriate massing as examples of what not to do. Discussion took place regarding creating details for the various styles of building in Town, e.g. Colonial, Cape Cod, Federal, Georgian, Greek. Ultimately it was determined that general guidelines that could be used for any property would be more efficient. It was also noted that the guidelines should help clarify the regulations

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and educate property owners on significant features as well as what is needed for the Commission to review as part of an application. Information could be pulled from the Department of the Interior's guidance. Doug Chabinsky pointed out that the old courthouse on Foundry has a pyramidal roof which is the defining architectural feature of the property and something that should be called out.

Nic Strong suggested that if the Commission was comfortable with the direction that this discussion was taking, they could authorize Doug Chabinsky to propose amendments to the RFP that was previously used, and then review those changes by email.

**Doug Chabinsky moved that he would amend the language of the RFP consistent with the discussion at this evening's HDC meeting and send to Nic Strong to be circulated for the Commission's review prior to posting the revised RFP. Tom Grella seconded the motion.**

**Roll Call Vote: Doug Chabinsky – aye, Tom Grella – aye, Bill Glenn – aye. 3-0-0. [Audio issues meant that Martha Chabinsky did not participate in this vote.]**

**At 8:06 p.m., Tom Grella moved to adjourn. Bill Glenn seconded the motion.**

**Roll Call Vote: Doug Chabinsky - aye, Tom Grella - aye, Bill Glenn - aye. 3-0-0. [Audio issues meant that Martha Chabinsky did not participate in this vote.]**

Respectfully submitted,  
Kristan Patenaude

Minutes approved: