

**Hollis Historic District Commission  
Minutes of the October 15, 2019 Meeting**

**Call to Order**

A site walk was conducted at 3 Monument Square at 9:00am

T. Cook called the meeting of the Hollis Historic District to order at 9:00 am.

**HDC2019-019**

The application of the Congregational Church of Hollis, property owners, to construct a new front entrance, construction of an fire rated stairways on east and west sides of the existing structure, create walk-out patio on the east lawn, removal and replacement of any significant trees and the re-location of the existing sign, located at 3 Monument Square, Map 052, Lot 053.

The following were present: Tom Cook, Chairman; Jessica Waters, Vice Chairman; Peter Jones, Michael Bates, Regular Member; Frank Cadwell, Selectmen's Representative; Thomas Hildreth, Dennis Mires, Architect; Rodger Saunders, Ed Wigfield, and Tanya Rasmussen, Pastor.

Items reviewed;

1. the placement/size of the amphitheater/seating area;
2. grade changes to the east side;
3. location and number of trees to be removed;
4. size/placement of retaining walls;
5. drainage swale location in Memorial Park and
6. proposed 2 lane front drop off area.

Concerns the Historic District Commission voiced;

1. 5 ½ grade change to the east side;
2. drainage swale impacting Memorial Park;
3. size and asphalt being used for the drop off area

Site walk ended at 9:30am and the meeting continued in the Community room.

T. Hildreth said reading from the HDC Guidelines and Regulations. The Commission shall have the discretion to waive any condition contained in these Regulations for good cause shown. (pg. 20)

A waiver may be granted if each if the following conditions is found:

1. no decrease in value of surrounding properties would be suffered;
2. granting the variance would benefit the public interest;
3. by granting the variance substantial justice would be done;
4. the use must not be contrary to the spirit and intent of the regulations.
5. the use shall not be detrimental to the character, environment, scenic value or general welfare of the Town.

It was T. Hildreth's opinion the criteria are met in their entirety however, does not feel a waiver would be necessary. The proposal has had 2 noticed public hearings in each hearing all spoke in-favor of the proposal. T. Cook agreed both boards approved the proposal however, the Planning Board and Zoning Board approvals were granted pending HDC approval. Hildreth agreed.

T. Hildreth said focusing on just the proposed drop off area district setting has two components preservation and the other is improvements. (pg. 28) A decision should not only be about appearance, we need to accommodate the vitality, health, relevance and the utility of the enterprise. The church is struggling with declining numbers, decreasing pledges and eroding finical support. The church is trying to find a way to stay relevant in the community. The church has been operating for 275 years. The church is looking to do something to preserve its very existence. The second thing to consider is open spaces (pg. 29) and vistas last line "*screening parking along*

*Ash, Broad, Proctor Hill, Main and Silver Lake roads is to be encouraged as it retains the rural look which is so characteristic of Hollis.*” The church parking is already screened since the parking is at the rear of the church. The parking is not the issue it is the drop off area. The Monuments Square area, because it represents the oldest center of town. Changes to buildings on Monument Square and structures that can be seen from the Square, shall be minimized. The drop off area is not a building change. In 1925, there were two sets of horse sheds one on the east side and the other on the Library side. Those structures were covered facilities dealing in aid of transportation. The proposal is for a modern equivalent so we can get our handicapped people as close as possible to the entrance which serves them. Last line (pg. 29) Streetscape *“...the rhythm, flow and balance of mass with open space is to be preserved and not interrupted with unusual amounts of blacktop...”* The applicant is open to using alternate materials for the black top area which Dennis Mires will present. The amount of blacktop is not unusual it is the exact amount required to achieve the objective. The objective is to provide a safe entry point for mobility impaired people. Interruption to the streetscape by man-made objects (pg. 30) efforts should be made *“...to minimize their visual impact and be screened or concealed from view as much as possible...”* There is an island in between the two curb cuts and it has been discussed to plant a low growing evergreen shrubs. There are ways to minimize the visibility in the drop off area and on the east side. There is also a section on sidewalks and roads. (pg. 31) The proposal is not for a sidewalk a road. The proposal is dealing with a private driveway however the section states *“...the use of cobbles, brick or grass strips to define areas and break up large expanses of paving is to be encouraged...”* The ordinance by its self contemplates potential larger areas of paving. The ordinance does not say those areas are not permitted. The same section also states *“...the existing sidewalks shall be retained as paved walkways with concrete. Additional sidewalks are recommended...”* When the regulations were written, and adopted people contemplated the placement of additional hardscape materials within the district. We can’t say the area is frozen in time and can’t make changes to accommodate evolving needs.

Dennis Mires, Architect, said since the last meeting alternative surface materials for the drop off area were discussed. The drop off area must be ADA complaint to accomplish our objective. The following materials were presented; paver type material in different shades of grey, stamped asphalt which comes in a full range of colors or stamped concrete. Whichever materials are chosen banding should be considered. Banding can be accomplished by either a different color or shape of the material. This would break up the area and it would look more patio like.

T. Hildreth said during the site walk it was mentioned the Church already had a drop off area. T. Hildreth agreed however, the existing half-moon area does not accommodate the needs of the Church. T. Hildreth had heard the existing area can only accommodate one vehicle at a time. The proposal of the two lane bypass is to improve the existing limited drop off area.

F. Cadwell said he had reviewed the minutes from the last meeting and asked if any formal votes were taken for any individual parts or as a whole since it was asked if the application could be broken up. T. Cook replied no votes had been taken.

F. Cadwell said T. Hildreth mentioned the waiver ability of the HDC and agreed all five criteria for granting a waiver are met. The proposal for the east side is an improvement to the area and is required so that the Church can use the basement area. T. Cook said an upgrade to the existing stairwell could be done without creating the patio area and everything else proposed for the site. F. Cadwell agreed. D. Mires disagreed. T. Cook said the Church does not need a 70 foot patio to gain access to and from the basement. D. Mires said even if the existing access was modified the Fire Department would still consider the area as a basement and the Church can’t have people using the basement without sprinklers. The idea was to create enough outside pace so the area was not considered a basement from Hardy Hall. T. Cook said an outside patio area doesn’t change weather not the area is a basement or not. D. Mires replied the grade is modified so Hardy Hall is not below grade that is the difference in the eyes of the Fire Chief. The access from Hardy Hall would be directly outside without navigating a stairwell. T. Cooks said the grade change could be accomplished without the patio. D. Mires agreed.

J. Waters said the removal of the east lawn and the modifications to the front are significant change to the Monument Square area were the regulations states changes should be kept to a minimum. T. Cook said the structure is also contributing to the district. J. Waters said she understands the fire code issues, however the amphitheater is a major change. P. Jones said the changes the fire code requires are going to happen regardless, the proposal is a significant change. However, the change is an enhancement to the area and would be used not only by the Church but the community as well. F. Cadwell said with the exception of the asphalt drop off area the proposal improves the district. M. Bates said the east side changes are an improvement to the district. The two lane drop off regardless

of the materials proposed, would be detrimental to the district. The application should be separated into two different parts, the drop-off area and the east side changes.

F. Cadwell said the viability of the Church with its older community should be considered. T. Cook said residents which do not attend the church should also have some bearing on the application. P. Jones said the HDC can't stand in the way of a historic building staying viable and a corner stone of the community. F. Cadwell said the Church has received overwhelming support for the proposal. Approvals were granted by the PB, ZBA, Library Trustees and the Heritage Commission (HHC). J. Waters said the PB and ZBA approvals were pending HDC approvals. However, the previous approvals didn't deal with aesthetics. M. Bates said he is a member of the HHC unfortunately, M. Bates was out of town when the HHC met. M. Bates asked if the HHC saw the same plan presented to the HDC. M. Bates was surprised there was no comment on the two lane drop-off area. T. Hildreth said there were slight changes made but the fundamental plan remained the same.

P. Jones said he would prefer to have the projects separated if the projects remain together he would be inclined to vote in-favor of the entire project. P. Jones agrees the drop-off area would be detrimental to the district where there could be alternatives to obtain their objectives which would keep the rural character of Monument Square. The structural changes and amphitheater would be a minimal visual change. The returns for the community with use of the area far exceeds the minimal visual impact to the Monument Square.

F. Cadwell said rural character does not mean that everything has to remain the same as it was 50 years ago. Rural character also means how we treat each other in Hollis. The east lawn project improves Monument Square it is used by all the community events and it improves rural character. J. Waters disagrees the HDC should consider the drastic visual change to Monument Square.

F. Cadwell said he was in-favor of the project, the applicant has adjusted the plan per our recommendation. The plan should be adjusted as the HDC sees fit. The material for the drop off area should be changed and the screening on the east side may need to be adjusted.

The HDC discussed the two lane drop off area in length and P. Jones proposed an alternate design for the area. Remove the additional curb cut (turn-around), remove the west side bump out as proposed, widen and straighten the existing driveway which in-turn would make the existing drop off area larger. The alternate design would leave green space in the front of the Church. J. Waters asked would the applicant need to return with the modified design. T. Cook replied yes.

T. Hildreth asked if the HDC would consider splitting the application in two parts so the Church can continue with the project or just remove the turn-round part from the application. Removing that portion may be easier for both parties. The HDC agreed to remove the turn-around aspect of the application.

*P. Jones moved to remove the entire drop off (turn-around) area from the application.*

*M. Bates seconded.*

*Motion was carried unanimously.*

D. Setaro asked the HDC to confirm the items which would be voted on today;

1. amphitheater/seating area
2. tree removal/replacement
3. new emergency exit east side
4. removal of west side dog house.
5. front bump out entrance
6. new sign location.

The HDC members agreed.

T. Cook said the amended application will require a majority vote to prevail. The amount of detail and time spent presenting the application was appreciated. Each member T. Cook feels is only trying to vote in a way they feels is correct. F. Cadwell agreed serving on boards is not easy, it is hard to say no, each member needs to interpret the guidelines and the ordinance to the best of your abilities.

M. Bates noted the amount of replacement trees should be limited so the Church view is not limited. The members discussed the screening and most agreed a few trees and low bushes should replanted so that the church view is not limited.

*F. Cadwell moved to approve the application as amended with the following finding of fact;*

*1. The application improves the district setting.*

*P. Jones seconded*

*Motion approved 3 to 2 with T. Cook and J. Waters voting against the application.*

*T. Cook moved and P. Jones seconded to adjourn. Meeting was adjourned at 10:35 am.*

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Lee Setaro, Building and Land Use Coordinator.