

Chelsea, Vermont, Development Review Board
Draft Meeting Minutes August 2, 2017

Members Present: Anne Carroll (Acting Chair), Arthur Goodrich, Laurence Allen, Debra Melvin
Others Present: Bill Smith (applicant), Susan Elder, Johanna Welch, Timothy McCormick (AO and Clerk)

The Public Hearing on an application by New Creation Fellowship (#ZP17-14) for the following changes to the former Country Store building located on parcel ID # 110-52.000: 1). The conversion of the entire ground floor of the Country Store Building and the attached southern building (currently catering building) from commercial use to community service use for church services and gatherings. 2). The replacement of 5 windows on the main building. 3). The replacement of the concrete stairs in front of the catering building with wooden stairs. 4). The installation of handrails on the outside staircase of the main building, and on the lower platform of the staircase.

The hearing was opened at 6:35pm. No conflicts of interest or ex officio conversations were disclosed. Susan Elder and Johanna Welch were present as members of the Public. There were no other interested parties present.

Anne began the hearing by asking Bill Smith to explain the project. Bill explained that the requested changes are as described in the letter attached to the application (dated July 8, 2017). The primary change that he is concerned about is the conversion of the Country Store Building and the Southern Catering Building from a commercial use to a community service use. This change in use is necessary in order for the Church to purchase the building.

Bill also stated that part of the application was for the replacement of 5 windows on the main building. He submitted an updated version of the proposed window replacements for the record which are vinyl windows that slide horizontally. Bill then mentioned the proposal to replace the concrete steps in front of the southern building with wooden steps. The new steps are proposed to be slightly wider than the existing steps. With the aid of the submitted application photograph, Bill also discussed to plan to install handrails as requested by the State Fire Marshall.

Art mentioned a State requirement concerning upgrades that are more than 40 percent, and said that such upgrades must meet code standards. Anne also referenced several buildings in Barre, and noted that code compliance dictated the railing appearance. Deb asked Bill if the railings would be strong enough to withstand snow. Bill responded that they would and indicated that they would be similar in strength to the railings used for the previously-approved handicap ramp. Anne asked about the height of the railings, and was satisfied that photos and requirements of the Fire Marshall resulted in a proper height for the railings.

Art asked if there would be new windows on the grain store. Bill stated that there will be no changes to the grain store windows. Anne asked if there was a plan to change the “look” of the building to make it look more like a “church”. Bill replied that there are no such changes planned. He stated that one of the greatest assets for the church is that it is located in a historic building and that benefits the church to keep the current historic “look” of the building. Art reviewed some pictures from a Chelsea History Book and the Board discussed what the building and area used to look like in the past.

Bill also brought up the fact that Ned Swanberg from the Flood Management Program visited the site and confirmed that all of the buildings were located in the 500 year floodplain area, and not in the 100 year flood hazard area.

Tim asked for some clarification on the number of windows and where they were to be located. Bill pointed out that there would be three windows changed on the south side of the main building and there would be two changed on the rear side of the main building. Anne asked for some clarification on the proposed change of use. She recalled during a previous hearing that there was some discussion about some type of Bible schooling. Bill said that they have no plans for any type of Bible school, but will have an occasional bible study sessions.

Art motioned to close the hearing, and Deb seconded the motion.

Findings and Decision:

During deliberation, Anne mentioned that she and Blaine attended the last Select Board Hearing and asked whether they had any issues about the change in use from a historic country store in the village to a church. She said that the Board Members did not respond and did not seem to care one way or another. There was some discussion regarding the past and present uses of buildings in the village. Art mentioned that he personally would not want to see the attached, historic buildings changed to two separate uses but, “times change”.

Larry mentioned that many of the buildings in Town have been left to disrepair and “going to hell”. Anne stated that just because some places are going to hell, doesn’t mean that we should let them “go to hell”. There was further discussion about the buildings that were being foreclosed on in the village.

Anne mentioned that the proposed change in use will not substantially change the exterior look of the building. The application for the proposed changes was unanimously approved as presented. Art made a motion to close the meeting and the meeting was closed at 7:30 pm.

Submitted by,
Timothy McCormick, Administrative Officer and DRB Clerk

NOTICE: This decision of the Development Review Board (DRB) may be appealed to the Vermont Environmental Court by an interested person who participated in the proceeding(s) before the DRB. Such appeal must be taken within 30 days of the date of the decision, pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 4471 and Rule 5(b) of the Vermont Rules for Environmental Court Proceedings.