

CHATHAM BOROUGH HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

December 14, 2021

7:30 p.m.

Chairman James Greener called this Regular Meeting of the Historic Preservation Commission to order at 7:30 p.m. by way of Zoom.

Pursuant to the requirements of the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10: 4-6 et. seq. Adequate notice of this meeting have been provided by including same in the Annual Notice, copies of which were posted on the official bulletin board on the main floor of Borough Hall, emailed to the Chatham Courier, and the Daily Record, on January 27, 2021.

Names	Present	Absent
James J. Greener, Chrmn.	X	
Frank Truilo, Council Member	X	
Carolyn Dempsey, Council Member	X	
Catherine Chin	X	
Lynn Magrane	X	
Liz Holler, Recording Secretary	X	

Public Comments

There were none.

Motion to Adopt Meeting Minutes

The minutes of the October 19, 2021 HPC meeting were approved as submitted.

Discussion Items

Review of Application PB 20-002

Flo-Joe LLC

5 South Passaic Avenue

Block: 121 Lot: 16

Preliminary & Final Site Plan Variance

At Chrmn. Greener’s request, Council Member Truilo explained why the HPC moved up their meeting date for this month. The original December meeting date was too close to Christmas to guarantee a quorum of Commissioners would be present to review tonight’s plans.

For the public viewing this Zoom meeting, Council Member Truilo explained the function and responsibilities of the Historic Preservation Commission. He also reviewed the streets and boundaries of Chatham Borough’s Historic District. Council Member Truilo explained that the structure that will be discussed tonight has been designated as a “contributing structure” in the Historic District.

Chrmn. Greener added that the Historic Commission is an Advisory Committee whose charge is to make recommendations in situations like tonight's review, specifically if a demolition is being proposed to a building in the Historic District. The Commission must put together a report giving their views about this application and if they feel a demolition is necessary, and submit it to the Borough Planning Board. The Planning Board will be making the final decision whether or not this project can move ahead.

Chrmn. Greener pointed out that the reason this building at 5 South Passaic Ave. was designated as a "contributing building" was because of its architectural integrity. Mr. Guter had stated in his Historic District report that "this building should be a model of responsible treatment in the Main Street District."

Chrmn. Greener explained what the Commission is most concerned about is the concept to demolish this building. The Commissioners would like to hear the reasons for taking down this building.

At Council Member Dempsey's suggestion, everyone involved in tonight's meeting introduced themselves:

Gary Haydu, Esq., attorney for Flo-Joe, LLC introduced the following:

Nancy Barmakian Stepanian, Managing Member of Flo-Joe, LLC

Tim Klesse, architect for Flo-Joe

Dr. Joseph Barmakian, a member of Flo-Joe LLC

Mr. Greener introduced the Commissioners who were present.

Mrs. Stepanian gave a brief history of 5 South Passaic Avenue. Her grandfather bought the building and property in 1963. The building and property has belonged to the Barmakians ever since that time, starting from her grandfather to Mrs. Stepanian's mother, Bertha Barmakian, and then on to Mrs. Stepanian and on to her children. Mrs. Stepanian stated that she has lived in Chatham her entire life of 72 years.

Mrs. Stepanian stated that her family has always had a good relationship with the two tenants at 5 South Passaic Avenue. The Chatham Barber Shop has been a tenant for 40 years. Next door, is TM Ward, which has been a tenant for 30 years. Mrs. Stepanian noted that the building foundation has been compromised over the years. It has been temporarily re-supported, but this re-supporting is not a long-term solution. Mrs. Sepanian stated that she and her family then hired an architect to explore the possibility of replacing the existing structure with a new one. She asked her brother Joseph Barmakian to give more background information on the building.

Dr. Joseph Barmakian stated that when his mother reached her 90s, she could no longer serve as landlord of the building. Dr. Barmakian noted that whenever a problem came up with the building, he or one of his siblings would receive a phone call. Axlin Somers, of TM Ward called to report that the floor in the store was sagging. She was afraid that the shelves would fall down. Dr. Barmakian noted that the building has a very, very shallow crawl space. He explained how

he had to insert cinder blocks to squeeze into the crawl space, looked at the joists and observed the sagging of the building. A contractor accompanied Dr. Barmakian on this inspection. They decided to hire Andrew Bowles, an architect, to have a look. Mr. Bowles felt that the building was structurally sound; however, he did not want to climb through the crawl space.

Dr. Barmakian reported that Mr. Bowles' worst case scenario for the building would be to replace the joists and give new support to the foundation. This work would come to \$300,000.

Dr. Barmakian consulted with Vince DeNave, who was the Zoning Officer and Borough Engineer at the time. Dr. Barmakian told Mr. DeNave that his grandfather always had dreams of "going up" on the building, making it higher. Mr. DeNave suggested a temporary fix be done to the building to better support it, and then the Barmakians could then work on proposing a new building at that location.

Dr. Barmakian pointed out that the front windows are old. The building is not in good shape. It's difficult to get someone to go through the crawl space. Dr. Barmakian reported that the repairs have been done to the building, however, he and his family are looking towards the long term. Dr. Barmakian noted that when his mother passed away in 2020, he and his siblings had discussed about selling the building. His sister Nancy wanted to keep this building in the family, so the remaining siblings sold their share of the building to her. Nancy Stepanian and her family are now the present owners.

Dr. Barmakian discussed what he felt was a serious need for apartments right now in Chatham Borough. The building being proposed would help fill that need. The building is close to the train station, which would be beneficial for commuters.

Dr. Barmakian asked Mr. Klesse to design a building that would fit in nicely in Chatham.

Referring to the floor issues, Mr. Greener asked Dr. Barmakian if the structure was now stable. Dr. Barmakian answered yes; however, only a repair work had been done. The \$300,000 project was not done.

Mr. Greener asked if the removing/replacing of the joists had been done. Dr. Barmakian answered no. That would be a major project. The tenants would have had to move out.

Mr. Greener informed Mrs. Stepanian that the historical records show that the building was constructed between 1925 and 1930.

Chrmn. Greener noted that this particular building is very popular in town. He felt it was an "architectural jewel" in Chatham Borough. Two great tenants occupy the building. Chrmn. Greener felt the Commission is struggling to find the justification for taking this building down, aside from the ability to build residential units on top. Chrmn. Greener reviewed the situations when such a demolition may be acceptable.

Dr. Barmakian explained the difficulty in inspecting the conditions in the crawl space of the building. The lack of lighting and crawling on your stomach in the dirt is very hard. Russ Brown, the Building Inspector, suggested a structural engineer be called in to inspect the

conditions in this space. The structural engineers that the Barmakians contacted did not want to do that inspection.

Chrmn. Greener asked Mr. Klesse if he had a chance to inspect the building, if that had been part of his assignment.

Mr. Klesse answered that he never entered the basement. He and the Barmakians were working under the assumption that the building would be taken down. Perhaps a historic architect could write a report and submit it to the HPC. This architect may not feel that this building is a contributing structure. Also, a structural engineer could not be found to evaluate the building.

Council Member Truilo confirmed with Mr. Klesse that no one has actually done a structural inspection of the building. Right now only assumptions are being made.

Mr. Klesse pointed out that the Barmakians are proposing to construct a 3-story building which is what the Borough Master Plan recommends. It seems that the Borough wants larger buildings in its central business district.

Council Member Truilo noted that the Master Plan does not supersede that this building is in the Borough's Historic District. This structure is also a "contributing building" in the Historic District.

Mr. Greener felt that the report from a historic architect would be a document to submit to the Planning Board, not the HPC. Such a report would not affect the HPC's opinion. Mr. Greener explained that the HPC gives their views and opinions to the Planning Board about what is being proposed tonight. There is always the chance that the Planning Board will completely ignore the HPC's views.

Mr. Klesse suggested, at this point, that he present his schematics for the proposed building. Chrmn. Greener agreed.

On the Zoom screen, Mr. Klesse showed a composite of photos depicting the businesses on the east side of South Passaic Ave. Mr. Klesse believed that 5 South Passaic Ave. is a "mock tudor" built around 1927. He described its building materials.

Mr. Klesse showed a rendering of the proposed building inserted into the existing streetscape of South Passaic Avenue. The proposed building will contain two retail establishments on the lower level with a second level containing two apartments. The original slate will be re-applied to the roof. The center dormer will contain an elevator. The third floor will contain a single apartment. Mr. Klesse pointed out that the gutter mark of the proposed building will be lower than the gutter mark of the building to the left.

Mr. Klesse put the proposed floor plans on the Zoom screen. He pointed out the two retail spaces that will be on the first floor. A recessed door will be put in place that would lead into a residential lobby. A "scissor stair" will be constructed to provide access to the second floor. The easements on either side of the building will be the same as what is existing today. Mr.

Klesse pointed out the two apartments on the second floor and one on the third floor. Parking for the tenants will be in the Post Office Plaza, and will be included in the redevelopment in that area. Mr. Greener noted that matters like parking will be examined by the Planning Board. The HPC does not get involved in this aspect.

Chrmn. Greener asked Commissioners to decide on which motion to recommend to the Planning Board – to allow for the demolition of the existing building, perhaps with some conditions, or not to allow the demolition.

At Council Member Truilo's request, Mr. Klesse put the proposed front and side elevations on the Zoom screen. They discussed the stair tower shown on the elevations and any possibility of seeing the tower from the street.

Chrmn. Greener asked if the Commissioners had any questions or comments for Mr. Klesse.

Mrs. Chin asked if the building's roof was slated.

Mr. Klesse answered yes. The original slate from the original building will be used. Some additional slate, to match the original, will also be used.

Mr. Klesse and Mrs. Chin discussed the type of brick to be used. Mr. Klesse felt that the brownish-red brick would be a good selection for a mock Tudor building, rather than the yellowish tone brick which was more popular with the late 1940s, early 1950s.

There were no questions or comments from the public.

Council Member Truilo felt that this building was one of the architectural gems of Chatham Borough's Historic District and adds to the uniqueness and charm of the Borough.

Council Member Dempsey felt the renderings were attractive and fit in well with the streetscape. The proposed building does not look overly high in comparison with the neighboring buildings. However, if there is not a structural problem with the existing building, she had a hard time green-lighting the destruction of a contributing building.

Chrmn. Greener noted that the HPC has a legal quorum present tonight. He suggested one of the Commissioners make a motion on what recommendation the HPC has on these plans, and to forward this recommendation(s) to the Planning Board.

Mrs. Magrane made a motion that the existing building at 5 South Passaic Avenue not be demolished. The following Commissioners voted in favor of the motion: Mrs. Magrane, Mrs. Chin and Chrmn. Greener. The motion passed.

Council Members Dempsey and Truilo are Council Liaisons to the Commission and could not vote.

Chrmn. Greener reminded the applicants that the Historic Preservation Commission is an advisory entity. The Commission can only make recommendations. The Commission will write a report within the next 45 days and submit it to the Permitting Official and the Borough Planning Board. They will take whatever action they feel is appropriate.

Chrmn, Greener complimented Mr. Klesse on putting together a good schematic of the proposed building. However, the Commission is fond of this particular contributing building. Unfortunately, Chrmn. Greener felt the HPC could not forward a positive report to the Planning Board.

Chrmn. Greener thanked the applicants and Mr. Klesse for their presentation tonight.

There was no further business.

At 8:27 p.m. the meeting adjourned.

The next Chatham Borough Historic Preservation Commission Meeting will be held on Tuesday, January 18, 2022, 7:30 p.m. This will be the Commission's Reorganization Meeting.

Respectfully submitted:

Liz Holler
Recording Secretary