

HISTORIC AREA COMMISSION
1 Municipal Drive
October 9, 2025

Present: Tera Hayward-Olivas, Chairperson
Michael Westman
Lisa Doak
Kevin Wade
Cynthia Batty, Planning Commission Liaison

Also Present: Jeff Bergstrom, City Building Official
Lisa Hatfield, City Solicitor

Ms. Hayward-Olivas convened the meeting at 6:30 p.m. Roll call followed and a quorum to conduct business was declared.

Minutes

June 12, 2025 – **A motion was made by Ms. Batty to approve the minutes of the June 12, 2025 meeting as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Westman and was carried with a vote of four (4) in favor and one (1) abstained (Ms. Doak).**

July 10, 2025 – **A motion was made by Mr. Westman to approve the minutes of the July 10, 2025 meeting as presented. The motion was seconded by Ms. Doak and was carried with a vote of three (3) in favor and two (2) abstained (Mr. Wade and Ms. Batty).**

New Applications

59 The Strand – Mark and Laurie Lorenz – Solar panel installation

An application was submitted to install a solar panel array at 50 The Strand. Mr. Lorenz introduced Mr. Mark Miller from CMI Electric. Messrs. Lorenz and Miller explained the proposed installation and responded to questions from the Commissioners:

- The proposal to install solar panels is to produce sufficient energy to offset the consumption of electric.
- The solar panel array will be installed on the rear of the garage roof (12 panels) and on the rear of the house roof (4 panels).
- Neither location is visible from the public right-of-way.
- Ms. Hamroun consulted with the property owners on the location of the solar panel array, and she approved the final location as noted.
- An exterior mounted battery is not included in the proposal and the surplus power will flow back to MSC.
- In order to take advantage of solar incentives, the work must be completed, inspected, and approved prior to December 31, 2025.
- The panels are 68” x 45”. The inverter package is 2’ x 2’ and will be located on the Harmony Street side of the house behind two levels of greenery screening and cannot be seen from the public right-of-way.

Ms. Hayward-Olivas stated that Ms. Hamroun was unable to attend the meeting due to travel delays, but she submitted her notes and recommended approval of the application as submitted. She added that the project complies with the Design Guidelines and Standards.

Public Comment

Rob Rossiter

Ms. Hayward-Olivas read a statement from Mr. Rossiter.

Mr. Rossiter wrote in opposition of the installation of solar panels on a historic building, opining that installing high-tech devices of this size in the Historic District is counter-intuitive. He added that as a community the historic nature of the buildings in the Historic District should be preserved, and residents should not be permitted to install large, unsightly solar panels on their homes.

Ms. Hayward-Olivas reiterated that HAC decisions are guided by the criteria in the Design Guidelines and Standards and the advice from the subject matter expert, Ms. Hamroun; and the applicant has met all the required criteria.

A motion was made by Ms. Batty to approve the application as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Westman and was unanimously carried.

Planning Commission Update

Ms. Batty reported that:

- Ordinance 555 – The Planning Commission approved language in the proposed Ordinance regarding short-term rentals. She noted that the Commission recommended legal structures which will allow short-term rentals while ensuring that there is no negative impact to the neighborhoods. Ms. Batty explained several of the pertinent points of the Ordinance. Ms. Batty noted that all requirements of the Ordinance must be in place in order to operate a short-term rental.
- Comprehensive Plan – The Planning Commission is in the process of reviewing the Comprehensive Plan and is making recommendations for changes at the 5-year and 10-year reviews.
- Home Occupancy Business – The City Code does not presently permit home occupancy businesses (HOB) in the Historic District by omission. Ms. Batty opined that City Council is attempting to solve a problem for one situation by allowing an HOB in the Historic District. She expressed her deep concern about this because:
 - The Code does not require the number of people who can come into an HOB.
 - The Code allows 25% of the usable interior property to be used for an HOB.
 - The City Solicitor stated that all HOBs would be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, which Ms. Batty opined sets up an inherent unfairness and a potential for favoritism.
 - There is no requirement that HOBs must have a license with the City.
 - There is no process in place to revoke or terminate an HOB license.

The Planning Commission voted in favor of the language with the exception of whether the Commission wanted to change some of the underlying rules for HOBs in the City Code. Ms. Batty stated that all discussion was focused on the Yoga Studio and not on other types of HOB, such as people setting up training classes, party venues, childcare, etc., that are not expressly forbidden in the code. She reiterated that there are no rules to revoke a HOB license.

Mr. Wade initiated a discussion of individuals who work from home as an employee of a larger company, or individuals who may have a small office from which to conduct business but that does not have clients or customers who visit their office. Ms. Batty stated that the Planning Commission had an in-depth discussion on this matter. She added that the City Solicitor gave conflicting advice on this matter. Mr. Wade opined that the language should be more specific.

Ms. Hatfield stated that she would discuss this matter with Mr. Hoffman, who is working on the language. Ms. Batty stated that the language has no specificity.

Ms. Hayward-Olivas opined that the Code states that an HOB cannot interfere with the residential aspect of the area; however, Ms. Batty stated that the Code does not contain that specific language. Mr. Wade opined that the matter needs to be considered further to ensure that the intent cannot be mis-assigned in the future. Ms. Batty concurred, adding that as it is written, the language exposes the Historic Area to favoritism in decision-making.

Mr. Bergstrom stated that he has shut down HOBs on The Strand and in Van Dyke Village due to excessive traffic caused by pick-ups and deliveries. He added that the Code does state that an HOB cannot have a negative impact on the neighborhood.

Ms. Batty stated that she voted against the proposal. She added that New Castle is one of the most important Historic Areas in the United States, and she does not feel that is currently being respected with the way some legislation is going.

Signage in the Historic District

Ms. Hayward-Olivas stated that HAC drafted a supplemental document to the Design Standards and Guidelines that provides helpful information regarding commercial signage in the Historic Commercial District. The was submitted to the City Administrator, and Ms. Tantillo informed Ms. Hayward-Olivas that she would like more time to review the document. Ms. Hayward-Olivas expressed her hope that Ms. Tantillo would submit her comments before the next HAC meeting.

Ms. Hayward-Olivas added that Ms. Tantillo is planning a Workshop for the Downtown Development District as well as the Historic Area. Ms. Hayward-Olivas also stated that questions should be directed to the City Office for review by Ms. Hamrout or Mr. Bergstrom. Ms. Hatfield will reach out to Ms. Tantillo regarding the draft document.

Miscellaneous

Ms. Batty requested that the Agenda include "Next Agenda Items" as a standard topic. Ms. Hayward-Olivas will submit the request to the City Office.

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There being no further business to discuss, Ms. Hayward-Olivas called for a motion to adjourn.

A motion was made by Mr. Westman to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Wade. The motion was unanimously passed and the meeting adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen R. Weirich
City Stenographer