

Town of Odessa

Minutes from the Historic Commission Meeting
Thursday, November 20, 2025
7:00 PM Meeting

- I. Call to Order - The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM.
- II. Roll Call – Commission members present were Debbie Buckson, Neeka Grove, Todd Nelson (via telephone), Melissa Steeley (via zoom) and Carla Pyle. Also in attendance was Mayor Harvey C. Smith Jr. and Town Secretary Amy Marie Ottinger. Representing K. Hovnanian Homes was Land Planning Manager Jonathan Contant. There was (1) resident in attendance.
- III. Approval of the Minutes
 - a. Meeting Minutes from 10-9-25: There were no additions or corrections to the minutes.
- IV. New Business
 - a. K. Hovnanian Homes Architectural Design Manual Proposal, attached hereto as Attachment A (2-page letter with 1-page drawing)
 - Neeka Grove questioned as to why this was coming up again. Mayor Smith started off by stating that the residential builder, K. Hovnanian Homes, is asking for reconsideration on two items: external muntins and concrete front stoops and porches. The Mayor has consulted with the town attorney Barrett Edwards who pointed out that there are houses, specifically located at 215 Mechanic Street, 221 Mechanic Street, and 654 Main Street that have been built after our Architectural Design Standards (ADS) were in place and have muntins between the glass and concrete porches. The town has been in negotiation with the builder to dedicate a parking area off of Rt. 299 for the Memorial Park. He stated that the parking lot for the park is near and dear to him because it is a safety issue. Right now for people to park, they park along Rt. 299 and have to back out, sometimes directly onto Rt. 299. He would like to eliminate that issue. The builder is proposing a 38-space parking lot for the Memorial Park. In speaking with the town attorney he has stated that the door has been opened for these front porches and the muntins between the glass because the properties sit outside of the historic area. As the Mayor he is trying to keep the residents as well as all that use our town park safe and as satisfied as possible.
 - Neeka Grove questioned whether or not we were already given a parking area. Jonathan Contant stated that nothing is given until the record plan is recorded – that's what creates the parcel and what will deed or dedicate the land to the town. The previous negotiation was for a dedication of that space to be used for a parking lot but was not to build all of what they are proposing now. They are offering to build what is being presented here tonight in exchange for having the two requirements dropped from the Architectural Design Manual.
 - Neeka Grove stated that she doesn't feel the commission should be influenced by outside factors. The Mayor stated that he agreed with her but pointed out that other

buildings in town have been built after the ADS were developed that are outside the Historic District and have the very things they are asking for.

- Debbie Buckson stated that when this project was brought before the commission they created a specific set of guidelines that only affects this planned neighborhood development. Their commission spent a lot of time going thru these guidelines and they made considerable concessions until this point. She doesn't feel they should be asked to come back and revisit this.
- Neeka Grove stated that if the commissions were to make the requested concessions, what is to say that the town would even get the parking lot in the end if the plan has not yet been recorded? Jonathan Contant stated that if the town accepts their offer then it becomes a contract.
- Debbie Buckson stated she felt that the builder was trying to use leverage now with something that has already been before this commission, was already agreed upon, and was already voted on. Jonathan Contant stated that they are trying to offer the town something we want (a parking lot) in exchange for something they want (two concessions). Neeka Grove stated that they already made several concessions from what they really wanted for the town so that these houses would be a little special and now they (the builder) are asking for more.
- Town resident and planning commission member Michael Callaghan asked the commissioners what difference does exterior muntins versus interior muntins make? He sees exterior muntins as being a maintenance issue. Neeka Grove stated that interior muntins are not historically correct. Michael replied that the houses are not located in the historic district, nor are they historically adjacent. He then suggested stamped concrete for the porches to which Debbie Buckson stated that the commission won't accept that either. Michael stated the builder is willing to provide a fully engineered and paved parking lot which will address safety concerns with people backing out onto Rt. 299. Neeka Grove said they didn't want it – further stating she did not want an asphalt parking lot and would much rather have gravel. Debbie Buckson agreed with the gravel parking lot stating that it's more historically accurate and fits more with what this town has always looked like. She said that currently there are a lot of changes coming to this town that is changing the character of the town, and we will never get that back. She stated she has been associated with this town for 45 years and it's beginning to not even resemble the colonial town it once was. She stated that they spent well over a year discussing these materials and they were under the impression that when this project came forward that the parking lot was a part of the original deal. The town secretary clarified that the builder has always stated that they were willing to dedicate land for a parking lot, but they never promised to build one. Jonathan Contant added that DelDOT would never agree to a gravel parking lot. Debbie Buckson stated that DelDOT has already created a mountain of run-off problems in this town. She stated that she does not live in this town and is on this commission to serve in the capacity of a historic preservation perspective and she already sees a lot of historic preservation issues that are coming at this little town so rapidly that it can't keep up. She stated she would not change her mind and feels that this is being used as leverage at the last minute.

- Carla Pyle asked the Mayor if the commissioners were to do nothing with this proposal, are Mayor and Council able to still move forward with the agreement? Mayor Smith clarified that Mayor and Council has final say on this matter.
- Debbie Buckson said she doesn't feel like this matter should have ever been brought back to this commission. She said if the town wants to change what they decided on, or override the commission's decision, then that's up to them. The Mayor stated that the reason it came before the commission was at the suggestion of the town attorney since this commission was the one to originally approve the manual.
- The commissioners stated that a flagstone over concrete would be acceptable as a compromise to all concrete porches and stoops.
- Jonathan Contant stated that the builder has always objected to these items but that the commissioners were not going to move the project forward unless they were in there. They are now asking for a revision to those guidelines.
- Todd Nelson (via telephone) stated that he is very disappointed that this matter has even come before the commission. He feels ambushed. He stated that there was no confusion at the end when the manual was approved, and now to hear all this, even from town residents, is disappointing. He agrees with Neeka and Debbie's perspective on the matter. Jonathan Contant confronted Todd stating that after they got done with the preliminary plan and they talked about these issues after the meeting, he was the one that recommended that they come back and ask that these items be revised. Jonathan said it does not sound like that is the same thought process that he has tonight, so he was wondering what changed. Todd stated that Jonathan and his boss were very confused as to why their dormers were removed, as well as the peaks and valleys and bells and whistles that the commissioners asked them to take away. He told them then that if it was an issue, they should come back. What has changed now is they are not trying to enhance the homes, he feels they are trying to cheapen the homes. Jonathan stated that they are improving the durability and the maintenance aspect of the homes for their future homeowners. He stated that their residents do not want to maintain exterior window muntins and wood porches. The commissioners felt that comment was a matter of opinion.
- The commissioners took no action on the proposal.

V. Old Business – There was no old business.

VI. Public Comment – There was no additional public comment.

VII. Next Meeting Date and Time – Next regularly scheduled meeting is Thursday, December 11, 2025 @ 7:00 PM.

VIII. Adjournment – There was a motion by Neeka Grove to adjourn, and it was seconded by Debbie Buckson. Motion was approved. Vote: 5 Ayes, 0 Nays. The meeting adjourned at 7:31 PM.