

Newburyport Historical Commission

October 24, 2018

Mayor's Conference Room

Minutes

1. Call to Order

Chair Sarah White called a regular meeting of the Newburyport Historical Commission to order at 7:31 p.m.

2. Roll Call

In attendance were members Sarah White, Stephen Dodge, Ron Ziemba, Glenn Richards and Christopher Fay. Malcolm Carnwath arrived at 8:18. Ned McGrath was absent.

3. General Business

Kevin and Donna Gendreau

28 Titcomb Street, #2

DOD Advisory Review

The applicant is proposing to construct a second-story "bump out" on the driveway side of the structure to accommodate a gas fireplace. The Commission members did not view the proposed change as detrimental to the structure because it has been greatly modified over time and the small addition could easily be removed. Sarah White moved to recommend to the Planning Board that the alteration be approved as proposed. Glenn Richards seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Arthur Murphy

7 Prospect Street

DOD Advisory Review

The applicant is proposing to construct a 5' x 16' foot addition above an existing one-story section of the structure to accommodate a bathroom and closet. The addition would be at the rear of the structure and would not extend across the entire width of the building. Tom Kolterjahn, 64 Federal Street, said he has reviewed the plans and is pleased with the modest addition to the structure. Sarah White moved to recommend to the Planning Board that the addition be approved as proposed. Glenn Richards seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Section 106 Review of Proposed High Street Improvements for Safe Routes to School

Sarah White opened the discussion by reviewing the history of the project. At the July 25 meeting the Commission members considered the proposed changes for High Street and voted to authorize the Chair to write a letter to MassDOT listing the items of concern and stating that if these were to be adequately addressed, the Commission would be more likely to determine the project would not have an adverse impact on the historic resource. The letter was prepared and several members of the public subsequently requested in writing that some of the statements made in the letter be modified.

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Andy Port said a balance must be struck between the two objectives of preserving the historic qualities of High Street and providing for public safety. Geordie Vining reviewed the letter received from the members of the public point by point. He said it would not be viable to reuse the existing brick due to its condition and accessibility issues. Universal access standards require that brick be applied to a firm and stable surface without changes in height of greater than one quarter inch. Jennie Donahue, chair of the Commission on Disabilities, said City Hall Pavers are not uniform and are slippery when wet. She said wire-cut brick is the only reasonable compromise but she would prefer the sidewalks to be constructed of a center strip of concrete with brick on either side.

Mr. Vining assured the members of the Historical Commission that the sidewalks were not to be widened or straightened. Wire-cut brick with a one-foot concrete foundation would be used in the locations where brick sidewalks exist and concrete would be used for the remaining sidewalks. The existing granite will be used for curbing as much as possible. New granite would be used for the curb extensions. The Planning Office will work with DOT to reduce the amount of signage to be installed.

The Commission members were concerned about the planned installation of refuge islands, the dimensions of which have not yet been provided to them. Two islands are planned for the area where the street is widest. The Commission members had previously suggested the islands might be at the existing grade and constructed of granite cobbles with planters on either end. They also stated their preference for additional curb extensions to be used instead. Andy Port said a 6" curb would be important for safety and he does not believe this would negatively impact the historic district. The islands would shorten the distance that must be crossed and would help slow traffic. The curbing would deflect cars.

The meeting was opened to comments from the public. Tom Kolterjahn said everyone has the same objects – for children to be safe and the project to be successful – but he would also like history to be preserved. He said old brick could be used successfully provided it is properly installed and maintained. He said bricks are an important part of the character of Newburyport and the existing historic sidewalk should be re-laid. He said this would be a reasonable position for the Commission to take because its purview is the preservation of history. He added is he is pleased the existing granite curbing is to be retained and that curved brick would be used in the bump outs. Mary Baker Eaton commented the project would restore the street to its historic width. Rick Taintor said the project would enhance the appearance of High Street while improving public safety. Stephanie Niketic said she is concerned additional islands would be installed after a precedent has been set by their use in a small area. She said the public should be able to review the layout and materials before the final design has been completed. She added that four rapid-flashing beacons are too many for such a small stretch of road. Sarah White asked Andy Port to review the study to determine why four beacons was deemed to be the appropriate number. City Councilor Heather Shand said the project would bring two million in tax dollars back into the city and is a good opportunity to make the road safer and more accessible. Jennie Donahue said the city streets have never been adequately maintained and safety must come before aesthetics. The public comment portion of the meeting was closed.

Glenn Richards moved to allow the use of wire-cut brick for the sidewalks because, while not optimal from a historical perspective, it would provide a greater benefit to the community.

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Christopher Fay seconded the motion. The motion was approved with Malcolm Carnwath voting against it and Stephen Dodge abstaining.

Sarah White moved to strongly recommend that granite cobbles and granite curbing be used if refuge islands are to be installed. Glenn Richards seconded the motion. The motion was approved with Malcolm Carnwath voting against it.

Sarah White will work with Geordie Vining to prepare an updated letter to MHC that reflects the votes of the Commission.

4. Minutes

The approval of the minutes of the September 26 and October 10 meetings was tabled.

5. Adjournment

Glenn Richards moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:45 p.m. Christopher Fay seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.