

Newburyport Historical Commission
Minutes of the 7 October 2010 Meeting

1. Call to Order

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Newburyport Historical Commission (NHC) was called to order at 7:33 in the Council Chambers, City Hall. Present: Linda Smiley, Stephen Feige, Ned McGrath, Tom Kolterjahn, Leah McGavern, and Margaret Welch. Guest: Andy Port, Planning Director.

2. Demolition Applications

35 Rawson Avenue (Anna Jacques Hospital) – Attorney Lisa Mead, representing the hospital, introduced the plans to demolish the building built in 1917 and now used for physical therapy. The demolition will allow for the renovation of a wing. Steve Van Ness of the architectural firm SBA said that the interior features have been removed and the vestibules added. He noted that there were no alternatives to demolition because the water tank and helipad could not be moved. NHC members could not see features relating to its 1917 origins, and NHC members McGavern and Smiley noted that it did not resemble Newburyport vernacular forms and did not relate to a streetscape. In response to a query by Member Feige, Mr. Van Ness said that it was not known whether the building was used for staff housing. Member McGrath asked whether the slate roof could be used as salvage; the Facilities Manager thought that some slates could be saved for repair on other buildings.

The NHC voted the building not historically significant (6 yes, 0 no).

3. Review of Minutes

Review deferred.

4. Old Business

Belleville Congregational Church Preservation Restriction – Member Kolterjahn suggested that the towers be pointed out as significant architectural elements. He is working with Emily Wentworth of the Planning Office on the PR. The NHC voted to accept the draft with Kolterjahn's recommendations (6 yes, 0 no). Member McGrath praised the church's members for their outstanding support for the preservation of the church and parish house.

Whittier Bridge Update – Planning Director Port reported that he would forward the draft Memorandum of Agreement with details on the wayside signage and architectural elements suggested for a "linear park" stretching across the river.

Director Port also spoke about updating the Open Space Plan. He and members discussed updating the 2001 Master Plan. He would like to schedule an event for 8 November, World Town Planning Day.

36 North Atkinson Street (Janet Moreland, applicant) – Attorney Robert Brennan and Ms. Moreland returned to see whether the NHC would hold a restriction on the property (they would be reporting this decision to the Planning Board). Mr. Brennan spoke about the provision in Section 26 of M.G.L. 184 which allows a governmental body such as the NHC to hold a restriction in perpetuity without the express approval of MHC. (The MHC had earlier refused to approve a PR, citing the loss of original material and marginal significance of the structure.) NHC members expressed surprise, stating that they had believed that a 30-year term could be extended another thirty years but not be extended into perpetuity. After discussion, members agreed that enough original structure and the original massing and scale remain to make a preservation restriction held by the NHC worthwhile. Chair Smiley said that it was the duty of the Planning Board to decide whether the special 6-C permit would be awarded. Member Feige said that the applicant should attempt again to persuade the MHC that the structure was worthy of a preservation restriction; if the MHC did not believe the structure worthy, the NHC should not hold a restriction. The NHC voted to hold the PR with the Planning Board responsible for deciding whether the permit be granted (5 yes, 1 no). Member Feige, who voted against the motion, asked that his opinion be entered into the record and in the letter to the Planning Board.

5. New Business

Coombs Wharf – Bill Harris and Member Kolterjahn described the discovery of one side of Coombs Wharf originally as the foot of Lime Street. Granite blocks had been unearthed and moved during the Sewage Wastewater project. There is concern that the other side of the wharf may be disturbed in November when the drainage pipe will be installed. Director Port reported that the Planning Board made documentation and salvage of granite blocks a condition for continuing the project. Mr. Harris discussed the possibility of obtaining funding from the EPA in the future and said that the challenge remained in having an archaeologist document the excavations this fall. Project manager Peter Harford described how the siting of the new building had been changed because of the granite block discovery. He does not believe that the second wall will be unearthed.

Meeting ended 10:05.