

Newburyport Historical Commission

February 13, 2020
City Hall Auditorium
Minutes

1. Call to Order

Chair Glenn Richards called a regular meeting of the Newburyport Historical Commission to order at 7:07 p.m.

2. Roll Call

In attendance were members Ron Ziemba, Christopher Fay, Glenn Richards and Patricia Peknik. Malcolm Carnwath was absent.

3. General Business

Fire Engine #3

The Newburyport Fire Department is applying for CPA funds to restore a 1938 fire engine to its original condition. The department has requested a letter of support from the NHC. Engine #3 is one of only a few pumpers still in existence because they were often scrapped for metal during the war. The engine is used for parades, funerals and public education. Ron Ziemba moved to draft a letter acknowledging the historical significance of Engine #3. Christopher Fay seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Institution for Savings in Newburyport

93 State Street

DOD Advisory Review

Lisa Mead represented the applicant, who is requesting a DOD special permit from the Planning Board for the construction of a two-story addition to Institution for Savings. The proposed addition would be attached to the rear of the 1980 addition and no portion of the 1871 building would be demolished. The bank and a portion of Otis Place and Garden Street are located in the B2 zoning district. Attorney Mead said the addition has been designed in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and meets the requirements for new construction within the DOD. She said the addition would be smaller than the original structure and would be compatible with it. The same forms, materials and colors of the existing building would be used in the addition, but it would not mimic the historic building. It would not disrupt the form and integrity of the building, its lot and its setting. It would be compatible with the historic structure and other buildings in the DOD. In terms of height, it would be consistent with rest of district. The height of the addition would be 28.4 feet at the cornice. The bank is 34.8 feet tall and the ridgeline of the closest house is at 28.7 feet. The work would be reversible. The addition would be set back 188 feet from State Street and would give the appearance of being a separate structure at the rear of the property.

Architect Chip Nutter said the first plan for the addition was three stories high and sat the property line, which is allowed under the zoning regulations. The size of the building was reduced so that it would not compete with the ornate historic structure. The wood windows, brownstone sills and copper cornice reflect the details of the 1871 building.

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Dr. Judith Seldwyn described the changes that have been made to the plans for the addition. The flat roof would keep the building as low as possible. The cornice ties it to 1871 building. She said the design is sympathetic to the district, in which it is typical for commercial buildings to butt up against houses. There are several places in the city where commercial buildings are situated in residential neighborhoods.

Glenn Richards said that while this is not a public hearing, he will allow time for brief comments from the audience provided they pertain to the elements of the proposal that are under the purview of the Commission.

Peter Mackin, 13 Prospect Street, responded to a comment made by Attorney Mead that the addition on the library is longer than the Tracy mansion. He said the setback for that addition is closely in line with that of the original structure. The bank is set back from the street, but its addition would be very close to the edge of the property.

Peter McNamee, 9 Otis Place, said he is concerned about the visibility of the mechanical equipment on the roof on the roof of the addition.

Attorney Michael Tucker said he represents abutters on Prospect Street and Otis Street who are concerned about the massing of the brick façade at the back end of the lot. While it is in a business district, the back end of the lot has more of the feel of a residential district. The massing of the addition would be intrusive to the neighborhood.

Alex Adrien, 9-11 Garden Street, said the apartments he owns would be adversely impacted by the addition.

Barbara Oswald, 158 State Street, said the bank is the most beautiful building in the city and the addition would dwarf it. It is too tall, too dense and too big.

Coleen Turner Secino, 15 Otis Place, said the addition would dwarf the building.

Stephanie Niketic, 98 High Street, said the Newburyport Preservation Trust submitted a letter in opposition to the addition. She said in the DOD, an applicant must adhere to the standards of the Secretary of the Interior. New construction is to be subordinate to the historic structure. The addition would not be subordinate and would be detrimental to the historic district.

Mark Griffin, 4 Otis Place, said he agrees with the points Nick Cracknell made in a letter submitted in opposition to the design of the addition. New construction is to be differentiated but also compatible with the original structure. The transition between the commercial district and residential neighborhood has not been adequately addressed. The shape, massing, footprint and height of the addition would not be compatible with the 1871 building or the historic neighborhood. He pointed out the applicant's presentation includes a view of the addition from State Street but does not show the existing conditions.

Eric Clausen, 3 Otis Place, said the addition would not compliment the original building. He would like changes to be made in the scale of the addition that would take the neighborhood into account.

Sean Sullivan, 9 Prospect Street, said his house would be dwarfed by the addition and the massing and setback should be reconsidered.

Glenn Richards summarized the comments, saying that while the proposal is allowable under the zoning regulations, the area is a transitional one between commercial and residential uses and the neighbors are concerned by the massing of the proposed addition.

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Christopher Fay said the proposed addition is too large. It looks like a parking garage and it intrudes into the neighborhood. In the future, people would comment that it never should have been built.

Ron Ziemba said the bank is the most intimidating building in the city and nothing could be built that would dominate it. The addition would sit well behind the bank and be in the background. The architect has done a good job of differentiating the new building from the historic one. He does not think it is too tall and is not persuaded that it is too massive. The neighboring Dalton House and the apartment buildings on Garden Street are very large themselves.

Patricia Peknik spoke about the use of the word differentiation. It was originally adopted to provide protection against faux historic structures. It was not intended to promote jarring contrasts or discordant new forms in historic settings. The difference between the old and the new may be subtle. New construction does not need to be modernist in style to be contemporary. It should be subordinate to the historic structure and not compete in size and scale. She said the proposed addition is not compatible with that of the bank and is not subordinate to it. It would alter the character of the neighborhood. The applicant should work to design a scaled-down addition, one that would preserve the sense of place. The key would be to reduce the massing. It would not be enough to change the appearance by breaking up the façade.

Glenn Richards said that while the addition would not be overly visible from State Street, the perception would be quite different in the neighborhood. While there are many examples of commercial buildings in residential neighborhoods, the applicant has the opportunity to do better in this location. He will draft a letter summarizing the comments of the Commission members and will circulate it to them for review before submitting it to the Planning Board.

Vera Ristorante, LLC c/o John A. Santaniello

31-35 Market Square, Unit 1

DOD Advisory Review

The applicant, who did not attend the meeting, is proposing to replace the existing windows at the first-floor level. The new windows would be installed within the existing openings. Patricia Peknik said the application is not complete because it does not show what the windows would look like in the building. She said the proposed transoms are an early 20th century feature and are not appropriate for the structure. The existing windows are more appropriate than those being proposed. A letter stating these concerns will be sent to the Planning Board.

4. Demolition Delay Applications

Peter Carzasty

35 Temple Street

Full Building Demolition – Shed

(Note: A change was made to the application by the Planning Department after the meeting. The application was for an accessory building but the structure to be demolished is attached to the house.)

Lisa Mead represented the applicant, who is proposing to demolish a shed that is in poor condition. The shed is attached to the house but not integrated with it. A new addition on a slightly larger footprint would be constructed. The addition would be wider than the shed but would not extend in the direction of the property line. The view from the street would not change. Dianna Keery, 33 Temple Street, said she submitted a letter of support but is concerned about noise. The applicant responded that the addition would be better insulated than the existing shed.

Patricia Peknik moved that the shed is historical significant but not preferably preserved. Ron Ziembra seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Christopher Fay moved to allow the demolition of the shed and the construction of the addition as proposed. Patricia Peknik seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Michael and Kerrin Costello

249-251 Water Street

(Note: A change was made to the application by the Planning Department after the meeting. An application for a full-building demolition was submitted but the plans that were reviewed were for a partial demolition and proposed renovation.)

Lisa Mead represented the applicants, who are proposing to renovate a two-family structure and convert it to a one-family residence. The structure was built in 1895 and was the home of the South End Gun Club.

Glenn Richards moved that the structure is historically significant and preferably preserved. Patricia Peknik seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

The applicant is proposing to open up the enclosed front porch and remove the vinyl siding from the structure. The sunroom on the side would be rebuilt and extended two feet towards Water Street. Behind it, a first-floor porch would be covered by a deck that would be accessible from a second-floor bedroom. Dormers would be added to both sides of the roof. A two-story rear addition would be constructed that would extend eight feet from the existing structure towards the river. The addition would have a flat roof with a deck above it.

No members of the public spoke in favor of or in opposition to the proposal. Patricia Peknik said while the front porch would make a good addition to the streetscape, she is concerned that the third-floor roof deck on the rear of the structure would be visible from two public ways. The applicant agreed to shorten the length of the deck so that the railing would not be visible from Water Street. The second-floor roof deck on the side of the structure would be permitted because would be located at a distance from the street.

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The dormers were problematic to the Commission members but the applicant argued that the living space would be needed if the first floor were to become unlivable due to sea level rise.

Glenn Richards moved to release the structure for demolition according to the plans presented with the condition that the railings of the third-floor roof deck at its rear shall not be visible from Water Street. Ron Ziemba seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

In addition, the structure is located in the FEMA VE zone. In this zone, when improvements are more than 50% of the value of the structure, the structure must be placed on pilings so that its lowest horizontal member would be two feet above base floor elevation, which would be eight or nine feet above grade. The applicant would not elevate the existing structure but instead would demolish it and construct a new building in its place. The applicant would not prefer this alternative. Attorney Mead asked the Commission for a vote that would affirm the historical significance of the structure in order to obtain a waiver from FEMA and Massachusetts Building Code regulations. Glenn Richards said a vote would not be necessary and he would take the affirmation into consideration when writing the decision.

Windward Shaw LLC

61 Purchase Street

Full Building Demolition

Lisa Mead represented the applicant, who is requesting to withdraw the application.

Christopher Fay moved to allow the withdrawal of the application without prejudice.

Glenn Richards seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

5. Minutes

Glenn Richards moved to approve the minutes of the January 23, 2020, meeting as submitted. Patricia Peknik seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

6. Adjournment

Patricia Peknik moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:04 p.m. Ron Ziemba seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.