

Newburyport Historical Commission
Minutes of the February 4, 2010 Meeting

1. Call to Order

A regular meeting of the Newburyport Historical Commission was called to order by Chair Linda Smiley at 7:30 p.m.

2. Roll Call

In attendance were members Linda Smiley, Tom Kolterjahn, Ned McGrath and Margaret Welch.

3. Advisory Review

First Religious Unitarian Church

Linda Tulley and Barbara Owen of the First Religious Unitarian Church discussed plans to apply for CPA funding to restore the church's organ, which was built in 1834. In order for the organ to be eligible for the funding, the local historical commission must determine that it is historically significant. Ms. Owen described how the organ is the only surviving piece of a part of Newburyport musical history and said conferences have been held that highlight the organ for both its musical and historic character. The church has raised \$180,000 of the \$270,000 needed for the restoration, \$16,500 of which has come from local charitable organizations. Tom Kolterjahn moved to declare the organ historically significant. Linda Smiley seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

4. Demolition Applications

254 High Street - Keystone Development Corporation

Michael Staiti presented changes to the plans. He said the height of the building is now lower than in the original plans and the units along Carter Street have been separated to break up the massing. Driveways have been added between the units, which both separates them and allows for green space rather than parking behind the structure. The new construction has been stepped back from original structure and now is clearly distinct from it. Margaret Welch said the plans have been significantly improved and are much more acceptable. The setbacks and separation between the units defines them as their own set of row houses. Linda Smiley said she is still concerned that the scale of the new building overwhelms the existing neighboring houses. Ned McGrath said the neighborhood would be overpowered by the mass of the structure and he wants the new construction to be distinguishable from the original building. He asked if the rooflines could be varied. The applicant said a set of dormers could be eliminated.

5. Public Hearing

254 High Street - Keystone Development Corporation

The public hearing that was continued from January 7 was reopened. Linda Smiley asked to hear from members of the public speaking in favor of the partial demolition.

David Smith, 248 High Street, said he likes the project. John Crawshaw, the owner of the property, said he does not want the house to deteriorate any further and the project would return it almost to its original condition. He said the project would be a credit to the city, would benefit the neighborhood and would bring in additional tax revenue. Howard Fairweather said he does not think the height of the new structure will significantly impact Eagle Street.

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Linda Smiley asked to hear from members of the public speaking in opposition to the partial demolition. Phillip Hurzeler, 252 High Street, said he is concerned with the massing of the new structure. He said that the site is too small for six units and 11 parking spaces. He also questioned if six units would be allowed on the property and presented a note dated July 26, 2007 from Gary Calderwood to the assessor's office that states there have been no building permits or ZBA decisions that provide for more than four units on the property.

Linda Miller, 20 Ship Street, said the project is not good for the city. Its neighborhood is comprised mainly of single-family houses on large lots, which is a characteristic of the North End. The project would saturate the lot with units that don't fit into the neighborhood. The entire lot would be filled, with very little open or green space, which contrasts with the single-family houses in the neighborhood. She said if the character of neighborhoods is to be retained, then their outbuildings, of which there are not many and which are disappearing at an alarming rate, must be preserved. The barn is a sound structure that does not need to be demolished and could be adaptively reused as housing. She concluded by saying it is imperative to keep the outbuilding and commission must do what is best for the city.

Leslie Eckholdt, 36 Warren Street, said the project would destroy the streetscape of Carter Street. She would like the barn to be reused and a smaller structure to be added to the lot for a total of four units. This should be the maximum saturation of the lot and bring enough new cars to an already busy intersection. She requested that the commission impose the demolition delay on the barn.

Linda Smiley said she does not want to make a decision on the demolition application until the allowable number of units has been decided by the ZBA. Some of the comments made by the public focused on issues outside of the purview of the commission. The commission must decide how the proposal will impact the historic structure. Tom Kolterjahn said he is concerned about the scale of the project and its impact on the surrounding historic structures. The large scale of the structure would overwhelm the smaller neighboring buildings. Margaret Welch said she likes the removal of some of the dormers and she is not concerned about the impact of the project on the streetscape. Ned McGrath said they should focus not on the proposed project but rather on the demolition of the barn. Linda Smiley she disagrees with this statement. Margaret Welch said a straw vote had been taken at a prior meeting at which Ned was not present to allow the demolition if the proposed plans were acceptable to the commission.

Tom Kolterjahn said the barn is in perfectly good condition, and while it needs some work, it still reads as a barn and there is no need for it to be demolished. He would like it to be retained. Margaret Welch said she is concerned that the property has been on the market for a long time. Linda Smiley read a written statement from commission member Stephen Feige who could not attend the meeting. He wrote that the project compromises the understanding of the history of the neighborhood, of which generous open space is characteristic. In addition, the repetition of windows makes the structure feel more massive and the new construction should be differentiated from the historic house.

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The applicant had previously granted a time extension and has not yet submitted a letter requesting reinstatement. He agreed that original extension is still in effect.

Linda Smiley moved to extend the public hearing until the next NHC meeting that occurs after a ZBA meeting at which the issue of the allowable number of units has been resolved. Margaret Welch seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

The public hearing was closed and the meeting resumed.

6. Minutes

Tom Kolterjahn moved to approve the minutes of the January 21, 2010 meeting as amended.

Linda Smiley seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

7. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m.