

Newburyport Historical Commission

March 11, 2021

Online Meeting

Minutes

1. Call to Order

Chair Glenn Richards called an online meeting of the Newburyport Historical Commission to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. Roll Call

In attendance were members Glenn Richards, Patricia Peknik, Peter McNamee, Joe Morgan, Christopher Fay, Malcolm Carnwath and Marc Cendron. Also in attendance were Planner Katelyn Sullivan and note taker Gretchen Joy.

3. General Business

a) Energy Advisory Committee Discussion

A discussion took place with Bill Clary of the Energy Advisory Committee. The Committee recently undertook a study to investigate the sources of greenhouse gasses in the city. As a result of the study, three subcommittees were formed. The Committee is interested in including a member of the NHC on the Building Subcommittee. It was found that one third of emissions in the city come from buildings. Mr. Clary said he would like to develop a dialogue with the Commission about protecting building values while increasing energy efficiency. While there is no direct relationship between the roles of the Historical Commission and the Energy Advisory Committee, the NHC could offer its expertise on the preservation of historic buildings. Additional guidance could be sought from the Newburyport Preservation Trust. The National Park Service and Historic New England are good sources of valuable information on energy efficiency in historic buildings. Glenn Richards and Peter McNamee will attend the next meeting of the subcommittee.

b) 93 State Street Discussion

Peter McNamee recused himself from the discussion. The proposed plans for the expansion of the Institution for Savings have been changed to reflect comments from the NHC and Planning Board. Glenn Richards asked the members to comment on a suggestion that the new commercial building be located on State Street instead of the rear of the property. Joe Morgan said the applicant is proposing to construct a new building in the context of a historic site and the historic district. The stakeholders do not believe the process has yielded the best result. He said that perhaps a change in the proposed location of the building to State Street would resolve some of the problems that have been encountered. A discussion about compatibility with the adjacent residential neighborhood would be minimized. A new building at the front of the property would contribute to the main street and increase the visibility of the bank. The City would become involved as a stakeholder.

c) Request for Support for CPC Letters of Support

James Hyland of the Lighthouse Preservation Society requested a letter of support for an application for CPA funding for a memorial that would be located on the central waterfront. He and sculptor Mike Keropian described the memorial that would commemorate Newburyport as the birthplace of both the Coast Guard and the clipper ship. The memorial would include a bronze statue of Donald McKay, a naval architect who worked in Newburyport to build the world's largest and fastest clipper ships. The circular memorial would include benches and walls containing educational material.

The discussion was opened to comments from the public. Ghlee Woodworth said the completion of the park design should be the first step in the process. She said while McKay was an excellent builder, he did not invent the clipper ship. He also lived in Newburyport for less than four years. She said others, such as John Currier, Jr., spent their whole lives building ships in Newburyport. Donald McKay should not be highlighted in a memorial. While she would be in favor of adding a shipping building memorial to the waterfront, more stakeholders should be involved in the design process. The public comment period was closed.

Christopher Fay said that given the current political climate, it would not be prudent to support a statute to an individual without knowing everything about him. He said a marker for the Coast Guard already exists and asked if the waterfront should be cluttered with statues. He said Newburyport was a working city and if a monument were to be installed, it should honor ordinary citizens rather than a single man who live here less than four years.

Patricia Peknik said Donald McKay has already been memorialized in Boston. She said the Commission must object to the proposal, as it would not accurately reflect the city's history. She said the story is more complex and interesting than the image of one man. The city was in economic decline during McKay's years here and for him it was a stepping stone to other places. She added that the classic "great man" statue is out of step with the city's culture of public art. There are abstract works of public art on the waterfront and Rail Trail that represent the city's history and promote imagination and play. She said that perhaps the best way to honor the city's architectural history would be to not allow the waterfront to become a formal space with installations and interpretive signage.

Joe Morgan said the Custom House Maritime Museum might be a better venue for the telling of this story. He asked about the role of the Historical Commission members as preservationists with regards to the CPC applications. He said the Commission should be considering the way in which these projects would fit with the historical landscapes in which they would be set.

Glenn Richards said the Commission does not have an official role in the approval of the applications. He added the City is at the beginning of the process of designing the expanded waterfront park. The timing of the application might be out of order, as it is not yet clear where the memorial could be located. He added the applicants for CPC funds often ask for support letters for projects that include aspects of preservation.

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Malcolm Carnwath said he would like to support the applicant in further developing a concept. He said the circle at Cashman Park might be a good location for this type of installation.

Patricia Peknik moved to draft a letter of support for the application. Marc Cendron seconded the motion. The motion failed by a 6-0 vote (Glenn Richards, no; Patricia Peknik, no; Peter McNamee, no; Joe Morgan, no; Christopher Fay, no; Malcolm Carnwath, abstain; Marc Cedron, no).

Joe Morgan asked about the process for selecting public art. Andy Port responded that waterfront park is a prominent location that would likely include public art and interpretive signage. This would be integrated into the process as the Ad Hoc Committee works with the design team. The process would include public input and a discussion on the message that should be sent about the maritime history of the city. The NHC could have a role in determining how this story is told.

4. Approval of Minutes

Malcolm Carnwath moved to approve the minutes of the February 25, 2021, meeting. Joe Morgan seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 7-0 vote (Glenn Richards, yes; Patricia Peknik, yes; Peter McNamee, yes; Joe Morgan, yes; Christopher Fay, yes; Malcolm Carnwath, yes; Marc Cedron, yes).

5. Adjournment

Malcolm Carnwath moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:54 p.m. Peter McNamee seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.