

Newburyport Historical Commission
Minutes of the 15 March 2012 Meeting

1. Call to Order

The regularly scheduled meeting the Newburyport Historical Commission was called to order at 7:30 in the City Council Chambers, City Hall. Present: Steve Dodge, Tom Kolterjahn, Linda Smiley, Bill Todd, and Margaret Welch. Absent: Ned McGrath.

2. Community Preservation Act Applications

Superintendent of Schools Marc Kerble discussed the application made on behalf of the High School's landscaping project. Emily Wentworth of the Planning Office had suggested to Mr. Kerble that Historic Preservation was the most appropriate CPA category, and Mr. Kerble wished to know whether the NHC thought that the project related to the school's historic landscape. Mr. Kerble described his desire to keep the stately aspect of the school. NHC Chair Smiley shared an anecdote about a friend from out of town who asked the name of the college, mistaking the High School for an institute of higher learning. NHC members said that the trees proposed to line High Street and an irrigation system for the expansive lawn, a signature feature since the school's creation, would be eligible for CPA funding. Also eligible would be wayside signage describing the school's history. Members advised that the traditional ivy be moved onto a trellis so it would not damage the brickwork.

Chair Smiley closed the public meeting and opened the public hearing at 7:52.

3. Public Hearing for 26 Toppans Lane

Chair Smiley read a letter from the estate of Doris Rindler by attorney Mark Griffin who represented the trustees of the estate. He wrote that his clients expected that the building would be "preferably preserved" and that the one-year demolition delay would be invoked. He also wrote that his clients preferred not to tear down the building in order to make way for an access road to a planned memory care facility and were considering turning the building sideways to accommodate the road.

Chair Smiley received no response from the audience when she asked for those in favor of the proposed demolition to speak.

Chair Smiley asked those opposition to demolition to speak. Tom Eremo of 28R Toppans Lane said that he was a direct abutter and that he was concerned about a commercial roadway from Toppans Lane. He and his wife Virginia Eramo voiced concern over the change of the neighborhood and the historic significance of the house made from salvaged materials from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century houses torn down for Route 1. Bill Harris, 56 Lime Street,

said that he was not an abutter but did not want to lose an historic house. Jim Utterback, 6 Toppans Lane, reflected about other Toppans Lane properties' development and the downgrade of the quality of life since the High School renovation. His property had the potential for development; he was seeing less and less reason to preserve the historical context in light of the other developments. Kathleen Ryder of 45 Toppans Lane said that the neighborhood was becoming a medical complex. She spoke of another house being demolished and said that her fourteen-year-old asked why a roadway was being built in a residential area.

The public hearing was closed at 8:10 and the public meeting was reopened.

4. Demolition Applications

NHC members spoke about the unique features of the house observed at the site visit. The NHC voted to invoke the demolition delay (5 yes, 1 absent). Chair Smiley noted that the owners could return to the NHC to discuss options. In response to queries from the audience about the access road, Chair Smiley said that she would write a letter to the company not allowing closer access road to the proposed memory care facility. The project would also come before the Planning Board and ZBA.

5. Guests

Pieter Harford, project manager for the Sewage Wastewater Plant, talked with the NHC about the memorandum he drafted for the MHC. NHC member Kolterjahn wanted the memorandum to note that at least two types of granite splitting were evident. Bill Harris of the Chapter 91 Committee commended Mr. Harford's efforts, noting that the project had rediscovered two important wharves.

Mr. Harris suggested that additional signage was needed to identify Coombs Wharf and shared ideas about the images that might be used. Mr. Harford wished to have the sign specifications and additional comments in a timely manner.

6. Community Preservation Act Applications (cont.)

Mr. Harris, as Chair Emeritus of the Customs House Maritime Museum, requested a letter of recommendation to the MHC in support of repairs to the roof and north-west elevation masonry. The CHMM was seeking MHC funding to act as a matching grant to its CPA application. The NHC voted that the Chair write a letter of support (5 yes, 1 absent).

7. Review of Minutes

The NHC accepted the minutes of 1 March.