

Newburyport Historical Commission
Mayor's Conference Room
March 8, 2017
Minutes

1. Call to Order

Chair Sarah White called a regular meeting of the Newburyport Historical Commission to order at 7:32 p.m.

2. Roll Call

In attendance were members Sarah White, Malcolm Carnwath and Stephen Dodge. Ned McGrath participated by telephone. Mark Bilodeau was absent. James Bone was also in attendance.

3. General Business

Malcolm Carnwath moved to approve a letter of support for a Massachusetts Cultural Council reimbursement grant for the restoration of the Firehouse tower. Stephen Dodge seconded the motion. The motion was approved with Ned McGrath abstaining.

4. Public Hearing

Jonathan Young

7 Butler Street

Roofline change

The applicant is proposing to raise the roofline of a single-family home and add a second story to the rear portion of the structure. The plans originally submitted were revised as recommended by the Commission to include a narrower, two-over-two, double-hung window on the third-floor street façade and the addition of symmetrical windows on the first and second stories of the plain wall. The Commission members stressed their concerns about the proportions of the proposed changes. The applicant provided plans showing the superimposition of the proposed changes over the existing structure. The applicant also submitted an alternative to the raising of the roofline that included dormers, of which the Commission members were not in favor. Ned McGrath said he is not concerned about the raising of the roof in the context of the abutting properties and the proposal would improve the structure given the changes that have been made to it over time. Malcolm Carnwath said that by raising the roof, the structure would better fit in with the other houses on the street. Stephen Dodge moved to accept the plans as presented with the conditions on type of windows, proportions and materials as discussed. Malcolm Carnwath seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

5. General Business

Lisa Mead

1690 House, 262 Merrimac Street

Preservation Restriction

Eric Ekman of Berkeley Investments and Adam Costa spoke on behalf of the applicant. A preservation restriction was to be applied to the exterior features of the 1690 House along with the interior staircase, floors, windows, paneling and mantles. Instead the interior was gutted and most of these elements were destroyed. With regards to the exterior elements, the Greek Revival entrances were not preserved and the entablatures were discarded. The Commission asked for

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an explanation for these actions and for the applicant to identify additional items to be added to the restriction or actions that could be taken to compensate for the failure to preserve the agreed upon features. If an acceptable proposal is not submitted the restriction will be sent back to the Planning Board unsigned.

Mr. Ekman said the 1690 house was a challenging project, the objectives of which were not to retain the structure's historic elements but rather to create a newly renovated house. Many of the challenges were addressed in the field and not through the design process. The flooring material was damaged and not enough of it remained to make its reuse viable. He said the Indian shutters and some windows were restored and he was remiss in not informing the Commission that items were available for salvage. He said the design was modified when it was discovered the staircase was too narrow and the risers not high enough to comply with the building code. Sarah White responded that she does not accept this explanation, as compliance is not required for many elements in National Register projects. She asked about the mantel and the moldings. Tom Kolterjahn, 64 Federal Street, responded the mantel panels and moldings were placed in a dumpster. He said many materials could have been saved and were not. He would have been able to remove and preserve certain elements of the structure, but did not because he was told they would be retained. The entablatures were identified at the site visit as an element that should be saved and they were not. The same is true for the Greek Revival entrances on the front and right hand side of the structure. He said the developer made representations at a public hearing that certain elements of the building would be preserved and these promises were not kept.

Ned McGrath said the Commission would not be able to sign a preservation restriction for a building that has been gutted. He said Mr. Ekman's comment about the uneven floors reflects his interest in commercial real estate development rather than the preservation of an important element of Newburyport's architectural and cultural history.

Attorney Costa said specific elements were identified for preservation in the restriction, including the stairs, floors, moldings, doors and shutters. All that was retained were the windows. He proposed adding the historic beams, which have been exposed, to the restriction. He said there is not much else left of the building that could be included. He also said the developer might contribute to a fund to monitor preservation restrictions. Sarah White responded she does not wish to send the message that money could be given to the City to compensate for the actions of a developer. This occurred for a project on Lime Street and was not well received in the community. She said what the applicant has proposed thus far for inclusion in the restriction is not enough. She asked about the fireplaces, which have been covered up, and the attic flooring and masonry arches in the cellar. These could be added to the restriction but these should be a given and the applicant must make additional concrete proposals. Ned McGrath commented the onus should be on the developer, and not the Commission, to develop a proposal to rectify the situation. He said the Preservation Trust or the Massachusetts Historical Commission could be involved in offering suggestions and contacting them would indicate the property owner is committed to making things right.

The item will be placed on the agenda for the March 22 meeting. The applicant was asked to provide concrete examples of what could be offered in compensation for the destruction of the elements that were to have been preserved.

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6. Minutes

Malcolm Carnwath moved to approve the minutes of the February 22, 2017 meeting as amended. Stephen Dodge seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

7. Adjournment

Stephen Dodge moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:31 p.m. Malcolm Carnwath seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.