

Newburyport Historical Commission
City Hall Conference Room
April 16, 2015
Minutes

1. Call to Order

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

2. Roll Call

In attendance were members Linda Smiley, Stephen Dodge, Margaret Welch, Malcolm Carnwath, Mark Bilodeau and Ned McGrath. Sarah White participated by telephone. Assistant Building Inspector Peter Binette was also in attendance.

3. Minutes

Linda Smiley moved to approve the minutes of the April 2, 2015 meeting as submitted. Mark Bilodeau seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken: Linda Smiley, yes; Stephen Dodge, yes; Margaret Welch, yes; Malcolm Carnwath, yes; Mark Bilodeau, yes; Sarah White, yes; Ned McGrath, abstain. The motion was approved.

Linda Smiley moved to approve the minutes of the February 19, 2015 meeting as submitted. Sarah White seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken: Linda Smiley, yes; Stephen Dodge, yes; Margaret Welch, abstain; Malcolm Carnwath, abstain; Mark Bilodeau, yes; Sarah White, yes; Ned McGrath, abstain. The motion was approved.

4. Advisory Review

Bill Heenehan provided an update on the status of the project to repair the First Religious Society meetinghouse and steeple. The first phase of the work is nearly 85% complete. During the course of the work it was discovered the condition of the lower light tower of the steeple was worse than expected. Significant rot was found in the four posts of the pediment on which the steeple stands. The repairs to this section of the steeple began on April 1. Portions of the four posts will be replaced, along with four girts. The bell deck roof will be replaced with copper to protect against such damage in the future. The total cost of the project will be approximately \$730,000, which is \$300,000 more than originally anticipated.

5. Demolition Applications

Beacon Avenue Real Estate Trust

9 Beacon Avenue

Full Building Demolition

Adam Costa represented the applicant. He distributed copies of a letter of support that was prepared on the applicant's behalf and signed by three abutters. He said the structure is not historically significant; it has vinyl siding and windows and is in poor condition. The replacement structure would not be significantly different than the existing house. It would be slightly larger but the peak of the roof would be 1.5 feet lower than the existing peak.

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Linda Smiley opened the meeting to comments from the public. She read into the record the letter that was signed by Carolyn Laser, 17 Beacon Avenue; Susan Atwood, 14 Beacon Avenue; and Mary Parson, 18 Beacon Avenue. No one from the audience spoke in favor of the demolition.

Tom Kolterjahn, 64 Federal Street, spoke in opposition to the demolition. He said he is worried about the direction in which the city is headed. Historic buildings are being lost and developers have control of the city. He said this is just one more small historic house that would be lost.

Jerry Mullins, 7 Parsons Street, said the character of the city is changed when old houses are demolished and replaced with new ones.

Linda Smiley closed the public hearing. She said while she agrees with the comments made by Mr. Kolterjahn, she disagrees that this particular property is worth saving. She said the only factors in its favor are its age and size. The house is of dimensional lumber, the windows have been replaced and the chimneys have been removed. Mark Bilodeau said the neighborhood is not a historic one. Stephen Dodge said he does not believe the house is historically significant. Ned McGrath commented that many people perceive the Historical Commission as being driven by emotion, but this case demonstrates that decisions are based on practical thinking and experience.

Linda Smiley moved to allow the demolition of 9 Beacon Avenue with the condition that the windows in the replacement structure shall be true divided lights. Mark Bilodeau seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken: Linda Smiley, yes; Stephen Dodge, yes; Margaret Welch, yes; Malcolm Carnwath, yes; Mark Bilodeau, yes; Sarah White, yes; Ned McGrath, yes. The motion was approved.

6. Informal Review

Jack Van Loan, 4 F Street, asked if it would be possible to demolish a shack on Plum Island without a full review. Linda Smiley said all residents must follow the same procedure. Because the structure is more than 75 years old, the Building Department would issue a denial.

7. General Business

Andy Port reviewed the plans for the construction of a parking garage on Titcomb Street. The brick building on the site, formerly the Port Cinema Theatre and the Fitness Factory, would be demolished. Federal Transit Administration funds would be used for the project, which would make it subject to a Section 106 review to determine any impacts to historic properties. A consultant for the FTA has determined the building would be eligible for listing in the Nation Register. The FTA has asked the Historical Commission for its support of this determination.

The Commission members do not agree with the consultant that the building should be listed individually in the National Register. They said in the context of the city, the building is a blight and would not be worthy of a listing. The building does not contribute to the historic context of the city. Sarah White will draft a response for discussion at the next meeting.

Linda Smiley moved to support the demolition of 90 Pleasant Street. Mark Bilodeau seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken: Linda Smiley, yes; Stephen Dodge, yes; Margaret Welch, yes; Malcolm Carnwath, yes; Mark Bilodeau, yes; Sarah White, yes; Ned McGrath, yes. The motion was approved.

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8. Correspondence

None

9. Adjournment

Linda Smiley moved to adjourn the meeting 9:15 p.m. Ned McGrath seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken: Linda Smiley, yes; Stephen Dodge, yes; Margaret Welch, yes; Malcolm Carnwath, yes; Mark Bilodeau, yes; Sarah White, yes; Ned McGrath, yes. The motion was approved.