

Newburyport Historical Commission
City Council Chambers
April 18, 2013
Minutes

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, Margaret Welch, Sarah White and Stephen Dodge.

3. General Business

Clipper City Rail Trail

Linda Smiley recused herself from the discussion. Geordie Vining said the design for the terminus of the Rail Trail at the Central Waterfront has been revised in a way that is agreeable to the stakeholders. In the previous proposal the transition was accomplished with a granite planter and brick plaza at the end of the Custom House lawn. It is now proposed that the trail cross Custom House Way and continue into the NRA parking lot. Mr. Vining said the revised design would avoid a potential negative impact on the Custom House. Tom Kolterjahn said the change is a good one and he encouraged the addition of interpretive signage about the City's history along the waterfront. He will draft a letter to MHC and MassDot indicating the Commission's support of the project and stating it would have not any adverse effects on the Custom House or the National Register Historic Districts.

4. Applications

Murray and Lynda Berkowitz c/o Worthen Taylor

2 Woodwell Avenue

Roofline Change

Worthen Taylor said the applicants wish to take the roof down to the second floor and rebuild it to gain headroom for a third-floor bedroom. They are proposing to add 4.5 feet of height to the existing ridge, which is currently at 22.5 feet. They would like to add a small shed dormer in the location that the stairwell comes up through the floor.

The applicants would also like to rebuild a porch on the side of the house and extend it towards Union Street. The shed roof would continue an additional five feet to provide a covered doorway.

Tom Kolterjahn said the shape and form of the house are early ones. It might be older than the 1755 date that is listed on the records at the Assessor's office. Linda Smiley said the proposed roof pitch is in keeping with the geometry of the house. She said that while she does not like shed dormers, their use along the length of the house in this case would allow the shape of the original roof to be retained. She said consideration should be given to the stress that would be placed on the framing and foundation by the raising of the roof. She added that the Commission would support the construction of an addition to the house. Stephen Dodge said

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the interior of the house is in poor condition. He said an addition with a steeper roof pitch was made to house on the street of the same age, but the pitch of the original house was retained. Tom Kolterjahn said he would like the original form of the house to be preserved.

Linda Smiley moved that the structure is historically significant. Tom Kolterjahn seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved. A site visit will take place on Saturday, April 20 at 9:00 a.m.

5. General Business Continued

Lisa L. Mead, Esq.

12 Oak Street

Plan Revisions

Lisa Mead said the applicant has revised the plans for 12 Oak Street based on the comments at the public hearing on the context of the neighborhood. In the new design the proposed house would be located on the street in the same way as the original and would be one foot wider on each side. The design of the existing structure would be retained, although a portico would be added to its front. The new structure would be 1.5 feet higher than the existing, but the corners, windows, peaks and trim would remain the same. Linda Smiley said that while she appreciates the applicant's willingness to work with the Commission, the charge of the Commission is to preserve and protect the existing historic fabric of the city. Tom Kolterjahn said the walls of the structure are straight, the foundation is solid and the building is worth saving. He said an addition could support modern living while maintaining the original fabric. Lisa Mead replied that the building is unremarkable and was made of common materials. She said some of the structural members are undersized and the applicant would like the first floor ceilings to be higher. She said most of the comments at the public hearing focused on the streetscape and neighborhood context, rather than on the structure itself. She added the house is not worth that money that would be required to preserve it. Sarah White said that scale and context are important in that the smaller houses built for workers tell the story of the social-economic development of the city. She added that while it is expected that houses change over time, their general form should be retained. Linda Smiley said in those cases where demolition is necessary, the Commission does not look for the structure to be replicated. She said the addition of two feet to the height would noticeably change the geometry of the structure. She said the scale of the city is changing because the new buildings that are being constructed are large ones. She said many of the houses in the city could be labeled as being unremarkable and if that were an excuse for demolition, the city would become one with very little original architecture. She is concerned the city is becoming one of reproductions. Lisa Mead said this is a broad statement and the Commission's decisions are individual, non-precedent setting ones. George Haseltine said while he supports historic preservation, the house is not worth restoring. Margaret Welch pointed out that if the applicant waited out the delay, the Commission would lose its say in the replacement structure.

Tom Kolterjahn moved that the delay as imposed be maintained. Linda Smiley seconded the motion. Linda Smiley and Tom Kolterjahn voted in favor of the motion. Margaret Welch, Sarah White and Stephen Dodge were opposed to the motion. The motion to keep the delay did not pass and the delay was rescinded.

6. Public Comment

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Dick Hordon, 338 Merrimac Street, discussed a possible alternative for achieving the goals of the local historic district. He suggested financial incentives might be the key to preserving the city's buildings. He said the Commission would serve in an advisory capacity and its approval would be required for homeowners to receive preferential treatment from the banks, such as lower interest rates or longer terms for loans. The Commission members will prepare a list of the building and contextual elements that should be included in the program and Mr. Hordon will take the proposal to the banks.

7. Minutes

Tom Kolterjahn moved to approve the minutes of the March 21, 2013 meeting as submitted. Margaret Welch seconded the motion. The motion was approved with Sarah White and Stephen Dodge abstaining.

8. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 p.m.