

Newburyport Historical Commission
City Council Chambers
June 19, 2014
Minutes

1. Call to Order

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

2. Roll Call

In attendance were members Linda Smiley, Malcolm Carnwath, Sarah White, Mark Bilodeau and Ned McGrath. Peter Binette was also in attendance.

3. Applications

None

4. Advisory Review

24 Collins Street

The applicant wishes to demolish the existing structure, which sits in the middle of a large lot, in order to replace it with a two-family house. The Commission members visited the site in order to make recommendations to the Zoning Board.

Sarah White said that while the back portion was poorly enclosed and could be removed, the remainder of the structure does not have the critical issues the architect claims. She disagrees with the applicant's contention that this structure is not significant because it is merely a workman's house. She said the house could be reused and should be incorporated into the future plans for the site.

Mark Bilodeau agreed the house should be saved. He said it contributes to the neighborhood and while cosmetic work is needed, the foundation is solid. He did not observe any structural issues.

Ned McGrath said moving the house closer to the abutter to the east and constructing an addition on the west side of the lot could both meet the needs of property owner and protect the interests of the city.

Malcolm Carnwath commented that if the foundation were weak, as the applicant claims, moving to the structure to one side of the lot to make room for a second unit would solve this problem. He added the proposed Cape would not fit in with the gabled-roofed structures that make up the neighborhood and would change the look of the street.

Sarah White moved to recommend to the Zoning Board that the structure not be demolished. Linda Smiley seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

114 Merrimac Street

Linda Smiley said the Commission members visited the site. She added that a great deal of research was done on the historically significant structure and its use as a fire engine house. She opened the meeting to public comment. Linda Tully said an 1851 map shows a brick building in

the location of the current structure. The building that housed the fire engine was built in 1846 and was used for this purpose until 1866.

Robert Cook said that between 1920 and 1934 the building went through many changes and grew significantly. He thinks the building was reconfigured to make room for several shops and he does not think it more significant that it served as a firehouse than any of its other uses. He said the trim work around the door matches that on a house on Toppan Lane from a later period and the style of the cornice is not associated with the 1840s, which leads him to believe it had been replaced. He said very little original material remains and that which does is in poor condition. He added the spalling would be very difficult and expensive to remove. He concluded by saying that saving the remaining original brick on the second floor would not be worth the cost of making the structure habitable. Linda Smiley closed the public comments.

Ned McGrath said that the proposed urban renewal of the downtown in the 1960s was stopped because residents had the foresight to recognize that the buildings did not need to be torn down. He said although the owner has not maintained the building, it is a historic asset that should be preserved. He would not want the structure to be demolished.

Mark Bilodeau said at the site visit he observed a beautiful brick building that is historically interesting. He said the foundation is adequate. He questioned why the owner would not be able to address drainage issues for the existing structure but plans to do so for its replacement.

Linda Smiley said alterations have been made to many structures, but this does not diminish their historical significance. She said the building in question is a significant one. It is a gateway structure and is reminiscent of what much of the downtown would have looked like. The decorative brickwork and slope of roof are worth saving, but there is room for compromise. The significant portion of the building could be raised and parking located beneath it. An addition could be constructed beside it.

Linda Smiley moved to recommend to the Zoning Board that the brick portion of the structure not be demolished. She said the Commission would work with the applicant to incorporate it into a new design. Mark Bilodeau seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

5. Minutes

Linda Smiley moved to approve the minutes of the June 5 meeting as submitted. Ned McGrath seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved. The approval of the minutes of the March 6, March 20, April 3 and April 17 meetings was tabled.

6. Other Business

The Planning Department has requested a clarification of the new ordinance because the intent was not clear. Roofline change is a demolition issue that is under the purview of the Commission and now includes dormers.

Stephanie Niketic, 93 High Street Stephanie, said structures at 193 High and 114 Merrimac are instances of demolition by neglect. The owner of the carriage barn at 193 High Street has caused damage to the structure by directing runoff from the house to one of its sides. Linda Smiley moved to send a letter to Planning Board, the Zoning Board, the Planning Office and the Building Commissioner stating that the carriage barn at 193 High Street would be considered a

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case of demolition by neglect under the ordinance. Sarah White seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

7. Correspondence

A letter was received from Gary Calderwood stating the Commission had not take action on a demolition application for 22 Toppans Lane. Linda Smiley said the Commission had voted to impose a demolition delay on the structure. She will review the files to determine the date of the action.

8. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.