

Newburyport Historical Commission

Minutes of the 18 November 2010 Meeting

1. Call to Order

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Newburyport Historical Commission (NHC) was called to order at 7:37 in the Conference Room, City Hall. Present: Linda Smiley, Ned McGrath, Tom Kolterjahn, and Margaret Welch. Absent: Stephen Feige.

2. Demolition Applications

80-82 Middle Street (Daniel and Mary Herlihy, applicants) – The Herlihys explained that they wished to remove a small back addition and a barn. A single-car garage will replace the barn. NHC members questioned the design of the proposed garage; Mrs. Herlihy said that she did not like the architect's positioning of windows and would request a new drawing from him. NHC member Kolterjahn said that the barn probably was built no earlier than the 1930s and that dimensional lumber had been used. The NHC voted the main house historically significant (4 yes, 1 absent) and voted to release the barn and the small back addition for demolition with the opportunity to review the new plans for the garage (4 yes, 1 absent). The Herlihys may attend either December meeting.

3. Old Business – Coombs Wharf

Bill Harris, Citizens for Chapter 91, and Pieter Hartford, project manager for the sewer wastewater project, gave an update. More granite blocks in line with the one previously discovered had been unearthed. Mr. Harris spoke about the possibility of the wharf being eligible for the National Register which would bring up mitigation. Mr. Harris suggested that the pipe could be diverted around the wall so the wall would be undisturbed. Mr. Hartford was waiting for Dr. Mitch Mulholland's plan to work through these issues. Mr. Hartford asked that he act as the contact for Dr. Mulholland. He referred to a previous meeting with EPA, UMass, and NHC representatives (former member Leah McGavern represented the NHC). Mr. Hartford also reminded the NHC that the Planning Board required any disturbance to be reported to the NHC.

4. Public Hearing

28 Hancock Street (Concordia Homes, applicant) Public meeting suspended 8:24. Public meeting opened 8:25. Tom Piekarski, representing Concordia Homes, presented his plan to demolish the entire house and to replace it with a similar structure 26 feet high. An analysis by a structural engineer said that it was not worth the effort to repair the foundations of the front of the house.

Chair Smiley asked for comments in favor of the project. Paul Goldberg and Paul Bell of 19 Chestnut favored the project because they were concerned about the structure being vacant for a year if the delay was invoked. Anton Becker of 26 Hancock was reluctant to see the house gone but liked that the footprint and general presence on the streetscape would be retained. Mr. Becker later said that the later additions were not worth saving, but that he was concerned about losing historic assets like the front of the house.

Chair Smiley asked for comments against the project. Linda Miller, 20 Ship Street, said she saw no benefit to the loss of historic assets and that the house was of post and beam construction in relatively good condition. She was concerned that Newburyport would turn into a city of new houses. Greg Colling, 64 Liberty Street, expressed concern about the loss of the building. The new building would be of a different scale. He visited the site and thought that replacement of the sills would mitigate the problem. Jerry Mullins, 7 Parsons Street, said the building was listed as a contributing structure to the National Register District. A discussion about the house's age ensued with Mr. Piekarski saying that information from the Planning Office indicated that the structure was built ca. 1900-ca. 1920. The audience pointed out that the post-and-beam construction indicated an earlier date. Bill Harris, 56 Lime Street, said that there were methods to reinforce foundations. He said that the house's presence on the street would be lost.

Chair Smiley closed the public hearing at 8:45. The public meeting resumed 8:46.

5. Demolition Applications (cont.)

Mr. Piekarski stated that he had had two architects and two structural engineers advise him to tear down the entire structure. NHC member Kolterjahn spoke about his observations made on a site visit. He believed the front to be a late 18th-century structure, noting its mortise and tenons and wooden pegs. He and NHC member McGrath noted that the sills could be replaced if the rear wall was reinforced. Chair Smiley said that she hoped the applicant would work with the NHC to save the frame of the front of the house with replacement of the clapboards. Mr. Piekarski wanted a vote so that the delay would begin. He said that not many persons would buy a house with seven-foot ceilings. NHC member McGrath said that buyers would need to appreciate an older home. NHC member Welch noted that many South End houses have had sill replacement. She also sympathized with the concerns of the neighbors re: an empty structure. The NHC voted to impose the demolition delay on the front portion of the house (4 yes, 1 absent).

244 High Street (The Huntington Group) – Attorney Lisa Mead represented the project. The house, built in 1845 according to the National Register Data Sheet, used to hold seven illegal units. The current project proposes to retain the carriage house but to remove the side porch and rear additions. The original building will hold one unit with the new addition holding two units. The windows will be restored, and the trim, shutters and slate roof retained or repaired in kind. Member Kolterjahn said that the carriage house was a gem, and he and Mr. Harris advised the

property owner how to straighten the building. NHC members did not object to the chimney in front being removed. The NHC voted to allow the porch and back additions to be demolished and to allow the project to proceed as presented.

6. Advisory Review

121 Merrimac Street – Owner Art Murphy discussed preliminary plans to apply for a Special Permit 6-C to build new residences on this property including affordable housing. He is seeking input whether the small building possibly built ca. 1790 retained enough historic significance to warrant a preservation restriction. The NHC signified that it would join Planning Board members on a site visit.

223 High Street – Attorney Lisa Mead wished to discuss the proposed development of this project again. NHC members agreed to work out issues over the proposed preservation restriction (one that would renew after thirty years) but did not approve of the overall project. Ms. Mead showed a drawing of the proposed buildings in context of the present historic residence. When Chair Smiley asked about the condition of the house, Ms. Mead said that the owners would do repairs in advance of the sale.

7. Community Preservation Act

Belleville Church – Moderator Jim Marshall voiced the congregation's concerns about the proposed preservation restriction. He discussed the example of replacing basement windows with glass blocks. NHC members gave alternative suggestions. The congregation would vote on the restriction the following Sunday.

Meeting ended 10:40.