

Newburyport Historical Commission
City Council Chambers
June 20, 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, Margaret Welch, Ned McGrath, Stephen Dodge and Bill Todd.

3. Applications

10 Oak Street Realty Trust

Partial Demolition

Lisa Mead appeared for the applicant, George Haseltine. She said the proposal is to rehab and not demolish the structure. The plans include the construction of an addition at the rear of the building. The back end would be demolished to accommodate the addition. The front portion would remain in tact, although some windows and the banister would be replaced. Ms. Mead said no dormers are planned for the main part of the building.

Linda Smiley moved the structure is historically significant. Margaret Welch seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Linda Smiley said in her opinion there would be no need for a public hearing. She said the portion of the structure to be demolished is an insignificant later addition and the proposal is compatible with the structure. She said the Commission advocates for the type of stepped-back section that is to connect the addition to the existing structure. Margaret Welch said the lot is a deep one and a large addition had been made to a neighboring house on a similar lot that does not detract from the historic portion of the building.

Linda Smiley moved to allow the demolition of the rear portion of the structure and the construction of the addition as proposed. Ned McGrath seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

4. Public Hearing

Jonathan Woodman

17-19 Bromfield Street

Full Building Demolition

Linda Smiley said the applicant would not be able attend the public hearing. She read the summary of Mr. Woodman's proposal from the minutes of the meeting June 6 meeting. She said the applicant exemplifies the need for a local historic district because the structure is significant and there is not a compelling reason for demolition. Mr. Woodman indicated at the June 6 meeting that he tired of maintaining the property.

Linda Smiley opened the hearing to comments from the public. She asked to hear first from those wishing to speak in favor of the demolition. David Clarridge, 15 Bromfield Street, said the structure does not have any historic features that are worth saving. He said while he believes in historic preservation, the application presents a good case against a local historic

district. He said those buildings that are significant should be saved but homeowners should not be told what might be done with their properties. He said he appreciates the work of the Commission and he wishes some of the working-class houses of the South End had been saved but he does not think the delay should be imposed in this instance. Linda Smiley responded that the Commission is attempting to preserve the fabric of the neighborhood. She said many new structures are of a size and scale that is inappropriate for the neighborhood in which they are located.

Linda Smiley asked for comments from members of the audience wishing to speak in opposition to the demolition. Jared Eigerman, 83 High Street, said it is regrettable the City does not have a tool to protect structures other than the demolition delay and that it gets used in this manner, where the applicant is interested only in starting the clock. He believes the structure in question is significant. He said it is the City that should make the decision on historic significance, not the homeowner.

Bonnie Sontag, 10 Upland Road, asked the Commission to explain the historic significance of the structure to the audience. She said in this case the structure is not attractive and has been changed over time, but is significant because it was owned by the Lunt family and because it is a working-class structure, a type easily lost.

Mark Bilodeau, 63 High Street, said the city is a destination for tourists and the presence of a new house in the midst of historic ones detracts from the neighborhood. He said it appears the owner is snubbing the city and the Commission by not attending the public hearing. He said Mr. Woodman should sell the property if he no longer wishes to maintain it.

Michael Sales, 6 Fruit Street, said the “my property” vs. “our town” dilemma requires sensitive attention. He said the Commission should fight for houses such as this because they are a part of the score of the city.

Jerry Mullins, 7 Parsons Street, said the South End is the hottest area in the city in terms of real estate and it is filled with many small homes. The purpose of the South End would be lost if the small homes were to be torn down and replaced with larger ones.

Stephanie Niketic, 98 High Street, said she is opposed to the demolition for reasons that were articulated by others during the public hearing.

Linda Smiley read a letter submitted by Bill Harris, who spoke at the last meeting about the application but was unable to attend the public hearing. She said, in response to a question from Bonnie Sontag, that the Commission encourages applicants to return with an alternative to demolition. The Commission might rescind the delay anytime within the year. Both sides must be willing to compromise.

Ned McGrath thanked audience members for attending the public hearing. He said it is meaningful they have demonstrated an interest in the process. He said it is the first time since he has been on the Commission that he has seen a demolition application for a property that is not structurally unsound or that the owner would not be able to sell, but simply wishes to stop owning. He said the structure may not be the most striking one but it is a part of the fabric of the city. He said the Commission members are stewards of the community and the decisions they make today help create the future. The members wish the city to be attractive for many reasons, one of which is the historic value of its structures. He said he would like to work with the applicant to save the structure.

Margaret Welch said the Commission must do a better job of explaining why the little houses are important. The houses on Bromfield Street are modest, yet the streetscape is worthy

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of preservation. She said the imposition of the delay is worthwhile because Mr. Woodman has not yet made up his mind about what he wishes to do with the property.

Linda Smiley moved that the structure is preferably preserved and to impose a one-year delay. Ned McGrath seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

5. Minutes

Linda Smiley moved to approve the minutes of the June 6, 2013 meeting as amended. Ned McGrath seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

6. General Business

The Commission members continued their discussion on the importance of small houses. Margaret Welch said more education is needed and walking tours might be helpful to this end. She added it might be a good topic for Preservation Week.

7. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.