

Newburyport Historical Commission
City Council Chambers
June 6, 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, Sarah White, Stephen Dodge and Bill Todd.

3. Applications

Jonathan Woodman

17-19 Bromfield Street

Full Building Demolition

Sarah White recused herself from the discussion. Jonathan Woodman said his wife owns the two-family rental property at 17-19 Bromfield Street. The back portion must be re-shingled and he would like the clock to begin ticking on a demolition permit in case he finds more work is required than he expected. He said the property is difficult to rent and he has grown tired of keeping it up. He said the stairs are narrow and he must repaint the walls between tenants. He does not yet know what he would like to do with the property if he were to demolish the structure.

Linda Smiley said Mr. Woodman, in saying the roof is in need of repair and the house requires general maintenance, could be describing almost any property in the city. She said it sounds as if Mr. Woodman is simply tired of owning the house and she asked if demolition is a fair solution.

Ned McGrath said most of Mr. Woodman's comments against the structure pertain to its interior, over which the Commission has no purview. He said there are alternate means by which the issues with the building might be addressed. He asked if any of the challenges were structural in nature. Mr. Woodman said the configuration of the rooms is undesirable and there are constraints with regards to the bathrooms. He would like the flexibility to modify the structure without these constraints. Mr. McGrath said the city is a special place and the Commission has stewardship over its structures.

The Commission members expressed a desire to visit the site. Mr. Woodman said he does not wish to ask the tenants to allow them to enter the building.

Linda Smiley moved the structure is historically significant and preferably preserved. Margaret Welch seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved. A public hearing will be held on June 20.

Linda Smiley said that while the public hearing would not take place until the next meeting, she would allow comments from the audience. Bill Harris, 56 Lime Street, said he would not be able to attend the public hearing. He said Newburyport has the highest percentage of historic structures of any coastal town in Massachusetts and is losing them at the highest rate. Bromfield Street is the densest in the city in terms of historic structures. He said this is an opportunistic demolition that is not being done because the house is not repairable. He said it is

unfortunate that an architect in the community who claims to care about preservation would not allow the Commission members inside an 1830 house, even if just for the record. He said it is deplorable that Mr. Woodman is seeking to demolish a structure with no compelling reason to do so. He added it is a sad day for the city. Jerry Mullins said the house could be seen in early photographs because of its proximity to a ropewalk. He said it is the duty of the Commission to preserve historic buildings. Charles Tontar, 29 Jefferson Street, said the neighborhoods, in addition to the downtown, draw tourists to the city. The neighborhoods are a part of the experience and contribute to the economic vitality of the city. He said nothing is more important than the preservation of the city's historic homes and once they have been demolished they are gone forever. Margaret Welch reminded the audience members that letters or emails about applications might be sent to the Planning Office.

4. General Business

251 Merrimac Street

The Commission members reviewed the preservation restriction with Brad Kutcher.

Linda Smiley said the style of the house should be changed to Greek Revival. She said the Commission's original list appears to have been watered down. She thinks it is important that the corner trim and roof-edge trim, which are original, be included in the restriction. The pediments and columns and front and side doors should be listed as features. The window trim was made to exactly match the original and should also be included. Full glass storm doors will be permitted. The Planning Office will make the changes to the document and the restriction will be signed at next meeting.

Custom House Preservation Restriction

Linda Smiley said the Commission holds the preservation restriction on the Custom House. At the time it was drafted the document did not include the building's owner, which is the NRA. The Custom House has applied for a grant from MHC. The agency is requiring a preservation restriction on the structure as a condition of funding and is requesting the NHC subordinate its roll as the overseer of the restriction. Linda Smiley said she would like the Commission to continue to be a reviewing party. Bill Harris said the Commission should subordinate its agreement to the MHC agreement but should be named as a reviewing party. Ned McGrath moved to authorize Linda Smiley to sign the preservation restriction on the Custom House on behalf of the NHC. Sarah White seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Kelley School

Margaret Welch said the Community Preservation Committee did not award funds to the City for the Kelley School feasibility study. There were many good applications and limited funds available. She said the committee was of the opinion that the work to make the structure accessible and water tight could reach \$1 million. The committee thought it might be preferable to sell the building to a private-sector owner, who would not face the same accessibility constraints, and it could be protected by a preservation restriction.

17 Ship Street

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Linda Smiley said the owners' architect contacted her for ideas about saving the structure. An estimate from Dodge Builders showed the type of work that could be done for a certain amount of money.

Merrimac Ale House

Linda Smiley said she sent a letter to MHC about the plans for the restaurant that stated parts of the project should be adjusted.

4. Minutes

Linda Smiley moved to approve the minutes of the May 2, 2013 meeting as amended. Sarah White seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

5. General Business

Linda Smiley moved to commend Tom Kolterjahn for nine years of fine service to the Commission. Ned McGrath seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

6. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:25 p.m.