



CITY OF NEWBURYPORT
HISTORICAL COMMISSION
60 PLEASANT STREET • P.O. BOX 550
NEWBURYPORT, MA 01950
(978) 465-4400
WWW.CITYOFNEWBURYPORT.COM

DCOD Historical Report

Meeting Date 22 October and 12 November, 2020
Property Address 12 Harrison St.
Applicant: Michael Gray c/o David Mack (O'Connor Carnathan and Mack LLC)

Executive Summary:

This report refers to a structure that, at this time, no longer exists in any meaningful way. Nonetheless, the NHC provides this report in the hope it may be useful to the Zoning Board of Appeals, as the SPGA.

Project description:

Originally, the proposal presented to the NHC was to:

- demolish an existing rear section(s) and build a new addition on the same footprint.
- Elevate the gambrel roof of the original (historical) structure to increase ceiling height and accommodate a proposed roof deck.

The applicant had plans for other extensive changes to the interior which did not fall under NHC review.

Plan(s) of Record:

Application for DCOD Special Permit, 21 September, 2020; Demolition Plan Review application of 12 March, 2020; project plans dated 6 May, 2020.

Significance of the historic building/structure proposed for (partial) demolition:

This property is listed on the Newburyport District Data Sheet as contributing to the National Historic District, and is described in an accompanying "Form B" compiled by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC). In 1980, when that survey was done, the house still maintained much of its characteristic 18th Century appearance, and was described as "an excellent example of the two and a half story gambrel-roofed home built in Newburyport during the eighteenth century." The photograph taken at that time shows the structure still retained its original form.

More recently, probably in the early 1980s, the structure suffered poorly executed alterations, probably to create multiple dwelling units, transforming it from its original single-family use. The additions to the rear of the house ruined its characteristic roof line.

The relative importance of such historic building/structure to its setting within the District:

According to the 1851 Plan of Newburyport, the house was then owned by the Lunt family, who were active in the shipbuilding and fishing industries in the Joppa district. In 1872 Benjamin Lunt was in residence; he was a pilot, undoubtedly serving area merchants and shipowners. The property was owned by the Newburyport City Railroad Company briefly in the 1870's, and a railroad bed was laid behind the house, which is now the Clipper City Rail Trail.

The structure is an important contributor to the overall impression on a visitor to Newburyport's South End. This area contains many older structures, but few this old and well preserved, until it was modified in the 80s. The house is also quite visible from the Newburyport Rail Trail, which directly abuts it to the Northwest.

Recommendations to the SPGA:

The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA), in deciding whether or not to grant a Special Permit, will need to consider both the structural conditions that may (or may not) justify demolition, and the proposed plans for the new addition and the existing historic structure as to their impact on the historical character and values on the neighborhood. When the NHC voted to allow the project, we had several reservations and recommendations, and recent events appear to have justified our concerns.

In our first meeting, the applicant expressed a willingness to work with the commission and made some modifications to the original plan at our request. While we had reservations about raising the roof, we felt that restoring the characteristic gambrel roof line and removing some badly executed alterations from the 1980s would improve the overall impression of the house. (Since the time of the historic survey, several poorly designed and executed alterations were made which have seriously degraded the historic qualities which are seen in the 1980 photograph.)

At the second review meeting, an attorney for the applicant argued the the NHC had little or no oversight authority over the overall plans, and as a result we were forced into the position of agreeing to aspects of the plan that we really opposed. That legal argument was later determined to be false, but by then it was too late, and work on the project was set into motion.

Given that situation, the fact that he kept a roof deck despite our recommendation to remove it, *and even added a second roof deck*, taken along with other very extensive changes already made or planned, leads us to conclude that the applicant has little regard for preservation and is content to completely renovate the structure to suit his preference.

Glenn Richards, Chair
Newburyport Historical Commission