

John T. Sarkis
54 Temple Street
Newburyport, MA 01950

December 30, 2021

Zoning Board of Appeals
City of Newburyport
64 Pleasant Street
Newburyport, MA 01950

RE: File 2021-44, 22-24 Olive Street

Dear Members of the Zoning Board of Appeals:

I am the owner/developer of the above referenced property. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of the above referenced application for Special Permit. We are scheduled to continue the hearing on January 11, 2022.

Our team worked very hard to design a fitting addition to the original structure. We spent much time on site, measuring, designing, redesigning, observing characteristics like sight lines, shadows, position of sun, location of existing trees, etc...all in an effort to ensure a compatible design characteristic of the surroundings.

It is important to remember the proposed addition meets all dimensional controls of the Zoning Ordinance, including front setback, side and rear setbacks, open space, height, and parking.

At the last hearing, I can recall only one member stating he visited the site to observe the proposed addition corner stakes. It is not clear to me if the other members did the same.

May I request each member please visit the site prior to our next hearing. The corners of the proposed foundation are marked and strung so that one can see the shape.

I ask that you please bring the renderings with you, and stand on the lot near the Russia Street sidewalk, in a spot where you can see all the foundation corner stakes, and then envision the removal of the existing one story additions and replacement with the proposed brick addition.

To clearly understand the design intent, when envisioning the improvements, please be mindful of:

- The eave line height of the proposed addition. It is about 2'11" lower than the existing building's eave line.

- The 3 dimensional relief given to the proposed addition's façade. It is not one long boring plane.
- Size, shape, massing and height of nearby structures within eyesight. They are quite varied in style. Several are substantially taller than the proposed addition.
- The open space that will remain, and where it is. The most important open space on the lot is grassy area near the corner of Russia and Olive. It will remain open.
- The openness and lines of site created by the removal of the existing fence and outbuildings. When removed, an additional 25' of front yard will be exposed, for the entire length of the Russia Street frontage.
- The distance the proposed renovations are from all lot lines, as compared to those of surrounding structures. No point of the proposed improvements is within 25' of a lot line.

You might do the same exercise from another point in the backyard, or perhaps from Olive Street.

We find it difficult to believe the proposed change would be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the preexisting nonconforming structure or use. The use is unchanged. The lot has more than sufficient room for the proposed structure. The character, scale and massing of the proposed addition is complimentary to the original structure. Ample parking is provided. Most importantly, no portion of the original historic structure is actually being demolished. It will be restored and remain prominent.

At our recent hearing there were statements made by the public claiming the interior of the existing building can be reconfigured and/or renovated to create two modest units. This in fact was my original hope and intent when I bought the building. However, after substantial studies and efforts, it became clear this was not the best possible option on several levels. The window patterns, exterior door locations, location and number of fireplaces, the width of the existing stair hall, and several other structural characteristics were far too limiting. Even after considerable construction expense, reconfiguring the existing structure without an addition would yield two very compromised units, and would destroy the character of the interior of this historic property. No one "wins" under this option.

It is worth noting the previous owner, who was also very skilled in renovations, did not bother to renovate one of the units at all, and in fact did very little renovation to the other unit to make it livable. He didn't see the wisdom in it either.

One opponent of our proposal wrote to the ZBA and included copies of a sketch we provided to the Historical Commission as part of our graphics to demonstrate a potential use by right scheme. The structure shown on that sketch is the same general size of our current proposal, and is in the same general location.

If this scenario were to unfold, no one but the super wealthy person who could afford this large luxury house “wins.”

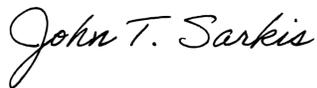
Our City is filled with redevelopment and renovation opportunities. Much of the housing stock is generally old, ready for updating, and owned by an aging population. Many of these properties will come to market in the near future, presenting the City’s boards with the review of proposed change.

The decision of any board should be governed by the thoughtful review of reasonable, compliant proposals and never by the amount of noise those opposed to change can make at a public hearing. Attempting to “freeze the neighborhood in time” like a “living museum” is inconsistent with Newburyport’s rich evolutionary history.

We firmly believe a proposal such as ours, the thoughtful design and planning which preserves, compliments and enhances historic structures embodies the goals of our City.

I hope you will visit the lot to envision the proposed addition in the field as I describe above. I look forward to our next meeting. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John T. Sarkis".

John T. Sarkis