February 1, 2021

RE: City of Newburyport Survey and Planning Grant 2021 Application

Michael Steinitz, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

Survey and Planning Grants 2021

Massachusetts Historical Commission

Massachusetts Archives Building

220 Morrissey Blvd.

Boston, MA 02125

Dear Mr. Steinitz,

The Newburyport Historical Commission (NHC) strongly supports the City’s application to the Massachusetts Historical Commission Survey and Planning Grant Program. NHC has been interested in getting this project underway for several years and is pleased that the City is taking this opportunity to get it started.

In 1984, the City created a list of historic structures located within the Newburyport Historic District as part of the National Register of Historic Places. This district encompasses thousands of structures, many of which are historic. However, this list does not capture all potentially “contributing” properties which presents a problem because being on this list is what makes these structures eligible for protection within the City’s local Demolition Control Overlay District (DCOD) and Downtown Overlay District (DOD), which combined covers the entire Newburyport Historic District.

In 2013, the Newburyport City Council passed the DCOD and DOD Ordinances, both of which were intended to provide a significant measure of protection for the City’s historic architectural assets, after failing to secure support for a large Local Historic District (LHD). The DOD provides for advisory review by the NHC on exterior changes (including demolition) to the Planning Board which then acts as Special Permit Granting Authority (SPGA) under the Newburyport Zoning Ordinance. The area covered by the DOD is the core Federal period commercial center of the City and is centrally located within the National Register District (NRD).

The DCOD provides for advisory review by the NHC on the demolition (partial or whole) of historic structures to the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) which then acts as Special Permit Granting Authority (SPGA) under the Newburyport Zoning Ordinance and determines whether demolition should be allowed for any given structure. The area covered by the DCOD is the remainder of the National Register District.

Since passing the DOD and DCOD Ordinances creating these regulated areas, the NHC and the City have come to realize that there are gaps in the list of protected (“contributing”) historic structures and that virtually no accessory buildings are included in it. Updating this inventory and including accessory structures will help protect the historic fabric of the community through additional Form B inventories which will, in turn, allow additional “contributing” structures to qualify for protection under the DOD and DCOD regulations. We believe this is critical to maintaining the City’s important historic core.

 We look forward to working with you and the Massachusetts Historic Commission on this important project. We thank you for this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Glenn Richards, Chair

Newburyport Historical Commission

60 Pleasant Street

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