

Newburyport Historical Commission

March 14, 2024

Online Meeting

Minutes

1. Call to Order

Chair Glenn Richards called an online meeting of the Newburyport Historical Commission to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. Roll Call

In attendance were members Biff Bouse, Glenn Richards, Andrew Bernhardt, Marc Cendron, Christopher Fay, Chris Sawtelle and Ed Noymer and alternate member Allen Marquis. Also in attendance were Planning Director Andy Port, Planner Katelyn Sullivan and note taker Gretchen Joy.

3. Demolition Delay Applications

a) 14 Norman Avenue

The Commission members visited the site on Sunday, February 25. The applicant has requested a determination of the historical significance of the structure only. No plans for a replacement structure have been submitted.

Glenn Richards said he reviewed the Demolition Delay Ordinance. He read Article X, Section 5-3.06, which states the “article is adopted for the purpose of preserving and protecting significant buildings or structures within the City of Newburyport which constitute or reflect distinctive features of the architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the city.” He also read Section 5-3.07, which states that there are four categories, any of which could make a structure historically significant. One of these is “any structure within the city which is in whole or in part seventy-five (75) or more years old.” He concluded that, based simply on its age, the structure under consideration is historically significant, although other categories might contribute to this designation as well. He said that in his understanding, the preservation of the streetscape is also the intent of the Ordinance.

Marc Cendron said the house is one of the most boring structures in the city and that while it may have been built more than 75 years ago, he sees no architectural features worth discussing.

Ed Noymer said that when developers demolish or alter structures one at a time, the result is a hodgepodge of styles that looks sloppy. He would be in favor of preserving the structure because he is concerned about the alternative.

Chris Sawtelle said the lack of detail in the post WWII houses is a part of their style. They were built to be affordable.

Christopher Fay said the lack of detail is an architectural style. The whole neighborhood is made up of houses like this. There are many connections between the past owners of these properties and the history of our region and country. While the condition of this house might be poor, it is a good example of this type of structure. He said there is a tendency to only place value on the houses on High Street that were owned by sea captains.

Allen Marquis said the neighborhood has already been changed and the Commission should not try to preserve a certain look.

Biff Bouse said the streetscape is important. He said the Commission must decide about allowing further change to the neighborhood. Marc Cendron responded that neighborhoods evolve and change. The house has no architectural features and there are many similar to it that will continue to exist in the city.

Applicant Braden Monaco said the home has no value to buyers. It was not built to support the second floor that was constructed. He said preserving the house would significantly change the value of other homes in the neighborhood. Glenn Richards pointed out that economic considerations are not part of their deliberations.

Glenn Richards said that the Commission members must decide if the structure is considered for preservation. Doing so would allow them to review the plans for the replacement structure and comment on the impact it might have on the streetscape. He said his concern is with the size of the replacement structure. While additions have been constructed on many of the other structures, the original houses are still visible and the streetscape remains evident.

Marc Cendron moved the structure is historically significant and considered for preservation. Biff Bouse seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 6-1 vote (Glenn Richards, yes; Biff Bouse, yes; Andrew Bernhardt, yes; Chris Sawtelle, yes; Marc Cendron, no; Christopher Fay, yes; Ed Noymer, yes).

Glenn Richards said the applicant should strive to retain the massing of the group of houses along this section of the street. The replacement structure should not be discordant with streetscape. He encouraged the applicant to consider the depth of the lot and the way in which a structure could be designed so as not to be disruptive to the streetscape.

4. DCOD Advisory Review

a) 311 Merrimac Street

Lisa Mead represented the applicant, who is proposing to demolish 29.5% of the walls of a Federal-style structure located in the DCOD that was constructed around 1807. She presented information on the past ownership of the property, which includes connections to the city's shipbuilding history. The structure would be returned from the existing two-family use to the original single-family use.

The applicant is proposing to remove a two-story screened porch at the rear of the structure that is in poor condition. Attorney Mead said the porch does not have an adequate foundation and is pulling away from the house. A two-story addition would be constructed at the corner of the structure and a second-story would be added over an existing first-story section of the structure.

Attorney Mead said most of the material that is to be removed was not original to the structure. The area of proposed work is at the rear of the structure and would not be visible from the street. As only 328 square-feet would be added, the changes to the footprint would be minor. The proposed modifications would be of the same form, shape and dimensions of the existing structure, but shape of the roof would be more in keeping with the style of the remainder of the structure. No changes would be made to the front

façade, with the exception of the replacement of windows. The size of the openings would not change.

Attorney Mead said the proposed addition could be removed and the rear of the home would still be visible. The proposed plans respect the current trim and rake board of the existing house. The new wood corner would match the existing and the double-hung simulated divided-light windows would match the existing windows. The cedar clapboards of the addition would be painted to match the existing clapboards.

Marc Cendron moved to authorize the Chair to prepare a report on the historical significance of the structure and its relative importance in the context of the neighborhood for review and approval at the next meeting. Chris Sawtelle seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 7-0 vote (Glenn Richards, yes; Biff Bouse, yes; Andrew Bernhardt, yes; Chris Sawtelle, yes; Marc Cendron, yes; Christopher Fay, yes; Ed Noymer, yes).

5. General Business

a) Correspondence

A letter was received from Kim Turner about the Bartlet Mall Restoration Project. She wrote that the bids received were significantly higher than the amount budgeted for the project. The CPA bond is to be released while other funding sources are being sought. Andy Port said some work might be done in phases, which would allow the plans for the pond and the fountain to proceed.

b) Annual Election of Officers

Andrew Bernhardt moved to nominate Glenn Richards for the position of Chair. Marc Cendron seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 6-0 vote (Glenn Richards, abstain; Biff Bouse, yes; Andrew Bernhardt, yes; Chris Sawtelle, yes; Marc Cendron, yes; Christopher Fay, yes; Ed Noymer, yes).

Glenn Richards moved to nominate Biff Bouse for the position of Vice Chair. Andrew Bernhardt seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 7-0 vote (Glenn Richards, yes; Biff Bouse, yes; Andrew Bernhardt, yes; Chris Sawtelle, yes; Marc Cendron, yes; Christopher Fay, yes; Ed Noymer, yes).

6. Updates from the Chair

Glenn Richards said the term of Joe Morgan has expired and the Mayor did not reappoint him. He was thanked in absentia for his contribution to the Commission. Ed Noymer has been made a full member of the Commission.

Some Commission members have expressed a preference to return to in-person meetings. The holding of meetings in the Mayor's Conference Room in City Hall was discussed. Andy Port explained the room is reserved by another group on a regular basis. It would be preferable to conduct each meeting in the same building, rather than alternating between the Senior Community Center and City Hall. It should be possible to begin in-

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person meetings in April. The meetings would take place in the Senior Community Center Board Room when it is available and the computer lab when it is not.

A letter was prepared for the Commission's review and approval in support of the City's application for a \$100,000 grant from the Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund for the restoration of the Frog Pond and surrounding park area. Andy Port said the City hoped to submit the letter the next day. The Commission members had only just received the letter and not all had had a chance to review it. Those that did found it lacking in detail and did not support its approval at this time.

7. Minutes

Biff Bouse moved to approve the minutes of the February 22 meeting. Andrew Bernhardt seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 6-0 vote (Glenn Richards, yes; Biff Bouse, yes; Andrew Bernhardt, yes; Chris Sawtelle, yes; Marc Cendron, abstain; Christopher Fay, abstain; Ed Noymer, yes; Allen Marquis, yes;).

8. Adjournment

Marc Cendron moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:11 p.m. Biff Bouse seconded the motion. The motion was approved.