

Newburyport Historical Commission

April 11, 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 Glenn Richards, Biff Bouse, Andrew Bernhardt, Marc Cendron, Christopher Fay and Chris Sawtelle and alternate member Allen Marquis. Member Ed Noymer was absent. Also in attendance were Planning Director Andy Port and note taker Gretchen Joy.

3. Demolition Delay Applications

a) 5 Spofford Street

Doug Deschenes represented the applicant, who is proposing to entirely demolish the three structures at 5 Spofford Street, 11 Spofford Street and 570 Merrimac Street. The project involves the purchase of five properties to be divided into four building lots on which four new houses would be constructed. The Demolition Delay Ordinance does not apply to the structures at 572 Merrimac Street and 7 Spofford Street. There are no plans at this time for the replacement structures. Attorney Deschenes said there are a variety of structures in the neighborhood, some of which are historic and some are of new construction.

A resident has submitted an extensive history of the structure that indicates it was constructed in the early 1800s. Attorney Deschenes said it is in poor condition and open to the weather in some locations. It has been vacant for some period of time. He said the applicant's engineer could not say that the building is structurally unsound, but the cost to restore it would be greater than the price for which it could be sold.

Attorney Deschenes said the applicant would be willing to advertise the structure to be sold for deconstruction or salvage so that aspects of it might be preserved. The applicant hopes that if he were to make this type of good-faith effort, the Commission might release the structure for demolition before the end of the one-year delay.

Chris Sawtelle moved that the structure at 5 Spofford Street is historically significant and considered for preservation. Biff Bouse seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 7-0 vote (Andrew Bernhardt, yes; Biff Bouse, yes; Marc Cendron, yes; Christopher Fay, yes; Chris Sawtelle, yes; Glenn Richards, yes; Allen Marquis, yes).

The hearing was opened to comments from the public. Louise Duda, 6 Spofford Street, said she is concerned about the size and height of the new house.

Rita Mihalek, 53 Warren Street, said the Newburyport Preservation Trust strongly opposes the demolition of the three historic structures, which are located at the gateway of the city. The structures could be renovated with small additions and remain a part of the city's heritage. The public comment period was closed.

Biff Bouse said the Commission exists to prevent this type of demolition and it would be a shame to lose these historic structures at the entrance to the city.

Chris Sawtelle moved that the structure at 5 Spofford Street is preferably preserved. Marc Cendron seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 7-0 vote (Andrew Bernhardt, yes; Biff Bouse, yes; Marc Cendron, yes; Christopher Fay, yes; Chris Sawtelle, yes; Glenn Richards, yes; Allen Marquis, yes).

b) 11 Spofford Street

Attorney Deschenes said the City records show the building was constructed in 1879. He has no information on the historical significance of the structure. He said the applicant would be willing to make an effort to find someone to save the building or salvage its architectural details. After this effort is made, the applicant intends to return to the Commission to request that the delay be lifted before the end of the year.

Biff Bouse said not much is known about the building because the research has not been done, but this would be a good time to obtain the information.

Christopher Fay said he would like to receive more information on the property. The five properties could be related. The inlet on the property could have been manmade and connected to the lumber workshop that existed at 5 Spofford Street.

Chris Sawtelle said the style of the building appears to be Gothic Revival. He asked about the garage at the rear of the property. The age of the garage is not known. While it is not as old as the house, it could have been constructed prior to 1924. Attorney Deschenes said the applicant would be willing to conduct research on the garage. He asked the Commission to vote on the application for the demolition of the house so that the research on the garage could be done while the clock is running on the delay.

Biff Bouse moved that the structure at 11 Spofford Street is historically significant and considered for preservation. Marc Cendron seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 7-0 vote (Andrew Bernhardt, yes; Biff Bouse, yes; Marc Cendron, yes; Christopher Fay, yes; Chris Sawtelle, yes; Glenn Richards, yes; Allen Marquis, yes).

Marc Cendron moved that the structure at 11 Spofford Street is preferably preserved. Andrew Bernhardt seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 7-0 vote (Andrew Bernhardt, yes; Biff Bouse, yes; Marc Cendron, yes; Christopher Fay, yes; Chris Sawtelle, yes; Glenn Richards, yes; Allen Marquis, yes).

c) 570 Merrimac Street

Attorney Deschenes said the City records show the building was constructed in 1914. He has no information on the historical significance of the structure. He said the applicant would be willing to make an effort to find someone to save the building or salvage its architectural details. After this effort is made, the applicant intends to return to the Commission to request that the delay be lifted before the end of the year.

Andrew Bernhardt moved that the structure at 570 Merrimac Street is historically significant and considered for preservation. Marc Cendron seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 7-0 vote (Andrew Bernhardt, yes; Biff Bouse, yes; Marc

Cendron, yes; Christopher Fay, yes; Chris Sawtelle, yes; Glenn Richards, yes; Allen Marquis, yes).

Marc Cendron that the structure at 570 Merrimac Street is preferably preserved. Biff Bouse seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 7-0 vote (Andrew Bernhardt, yes; Biff Bouse, yes; Marc Cendron, yes; Christopher Fay, yes; Chris Sawtelle, yes; Glenn Richards, yes; Allen Marquis, yes).

d) 8 Lincoln Street

Lisa Mead and Matt Langis represented the applicant, who is proposing to change the roofline of a house that was constructed around 1885, according to the District Data Sheets. An addition to the east side of the structure was constructed in 1951. A single-story addition was constructed at its rear in 1999. The District Data Sheets describe the house as an Italianate cottage. Attorney Mead said the house has been modified over time and has lost its symmetry and detail.

Biff Bouse moved that the structure is historically significant and considered for preservation. Marc Cendron seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 7-0 vote (Andrew Bernhardt, yes; Biff Bouse, yes; Marc Cendron, yes; Christopher Fay, yes; Chris Sawtelle, yes; Glenn Richards, yes; Allen Marquis, yes).

Matt Langis said no changes would be made to the footprint of the original structure or the 1951 addition. The applicant is proposing to remove the 1990 addition at the rear of the house and construct a two-story addition in its place. The roof of this addition would overlap that of the main portion of the house. The ridge of the addition would be 1'-9" higher than the existing house. The type of detail that was lost when the 1951 addition was constructed and vinyl siding was installed would be reintroduced. The windows on the front façade would be relocated to create symmetry. The front door would be moved to its original location. Mr. Langis said the ridge of the addition would be minimally visible from the street. The change to the existing streetscape would be minimal.

Andrew Bernhardt moved that the structure is preferably preserved. Marc Cendron seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 6-1 vote (Andrew Bernhardt, yes; Biff Bouse, yes; Marc Cendron, no; Christopher Fay, yes; Chris Sawtelle, yes; Glenn Richards, yes; Allen Marquis, yes).

Glenn Richards said the architecture in the neighborhood is consistent. The proposal would be an improvement over the existing conditions. The materials and details proposed would be in keeping with the original structure. The roof height of the addition would not be highly visible from the street.

Marc Cendron moved to accept the plans as presented and lift the Demolition Delay. Andrew Bernhardt seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 7-0 vote (Andrew Bernhardt, yes; Biff Bouse, yes; Marc Cendron, no; Christopher Fay, yes; Chris Sawtelle, yes; Glenn Richards, yes; Allen Marquis, yes).

e) 9 56th Street

Lisa Mead and Aileen Graf represented the applicant, who is proposing to fully demolish an existing single-story bungalow that was constructed in 1944, according to the Assessor's records. There is no Form B or District Data Sheet.

Attorney Mead said none of the historic features of the original structure remain. It has been heavily modified over time. The existing solid foundation is cracked. The timbers are undersized and scrap material used for the construction. The framing is inadequate and does not meet the building code. She said the house possesses little historic value, if any. The proposed new house would be constructed on pilings, which would be more appropriate for Plum Island.

Glenn Richards asked the applicant to document the structure prior to the demolition to preserve its part of the city's history. Attorney Mead said the files submitted are complete, but the applicant would be willing to provide additional material prior to the issuance of the demolition permit.

Andrew Bernhardt moved that the structure is historically significant and considered for preservation. Christopher Fay seconded the motion. The motion failed by a 2-5 vote (Andrew Bernhardt, no; Biff Bouse, no; Marc Cendron, no; Christopher Fay, yes; Chris Sawtelle, yes; Glenn Richards, no; Allen Marquis, no).

4. General Business

a) Correspondence

A letter was received from Michael and Stella McCormick, 16 Norman Avenue, regarding the proposal for 14 Norman Avenue.

5. Updates from the Chair

None

6. Minutes

Biff Bouse moved to approve the minutes of the March 28 meeting. Andrew Bernhardt seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 5-0 vote (Glenn Richards, abstain; Biff Bouse, yes; Andrew Bernhardt, yes; Chris Sawtelle, abstain; Marc Cendron, yes; Christopher Fay, yes; Allen Marquis, yes).

7. Adjournment

Marc Cendron moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:15 p.m. 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; Allen Marquis, yes).