

Newburyport Historical Commission

June 8, 2023

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 Joe Morgan, Biff Bouse, Chris Sawtelle, Andrew Bernhardt, Christopher Fay, Marc Cendron and Glenn Richards. Also in attendance were Planner Katelyn Sullivan and note taker Gretchen Joy.

3. Demolition Delay Applications

255 High Street

Lisa Mead represented the applicant, who is proposing to remove a one-story section of a Queen Anne style structure. The two-family house was constructed in 1890, according to the District Data Sheets, and is located in the HSRB. The section that is to be removed is at the rear of the structure and appears on the 1900 Sanborn Map. A side porch that was constructed in 2010 is to be removed, along with a garage that was constructed in the 1950s.

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

Attorney Mead said the addition would be constructed in the space occupied by the existing garage and one-story portion of the house. It would be subservient to the main structure because it would be shorter in height and length and narrower in width than the main house. A new garage would be constructed at the rear of the property.

Architect Aileen Graf said a two-story connector would be constructed at the rear of the structure, with a larger wing behind it. A covered entry would be constructed in the location of the side porch that is to be removed. The addition would be sided with cedar clapboards. The rooflines of the addition would be similar to those of the existing structure. The windows would be two-over-one. Some of the Victorian details of the house would be picked up in the addition. The addition would complement, but not copy, the historic structure.

The applicant was asked about the amount of living space in the addition. One existing unit is 3,642 square feet and the second unit is 915 square feet, for a total of 4,557 square feet. When the structure is reconfigured, one unit will be 4,349 square feet and the second unit will be 2,410, for a total of 6,759 square feet. The new construction would be 2,202 square feet, which is an increase of 48%.

Chris Sawtelle asked if the vegetation would remain in place after construction. Attorney Mead said the vegetation is not under the purview of the Commission and owners are allowed to remove plant material from a property. However, no construction

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would take place in the side yard, which is the vegetated part of the site. The area of construction is already disturbed.

Biff Bouse pointed out that the Attorney Mead stated the addition would not be visible from the street due to the vegetation on the side of the structure, so it is appropriate to discuss it. He said he is concerned that a part of the structure over 120 years old would be removed, along with original windows, and about massing. He said the proposal would be larger than is appropriate and it would be visible to pedestrians, especially in the winter.

Glenn Richards said the massing of the addition in relation to the original structure is under the purview of the Commission. The size of an addition could impact the design of the original house.

Marc Cendron said the size of the footprint would increase in size significantly. A part of a historic structure would be removed for new construction and the addition would be visible in the winter.

Andrew Bernhardt said the size of the addition would not have a negative impact on the historic values of the original house.

Joe Morgan said the addition would be subordinate to the original structure and he does not object to the proposal. The size of the addition would only be an issue if it were visible from the street.

Christopher Fay said that while the addition would be visible in the winter, its impact on the original structure would matter even if it were not. The size of the addition is relevant to the discussion because it must be subservient to the original structure.

Glenn Richard said he agrees massing is a design element that could impact the historic values of a structure.

Attorney Mead said the portion of the house to be removed does not have a foundation. The addition would meet the Secretary's Standards by being smaller than the existing structure and it could be removed without damaging its box.

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

Joe Morgan moved to lift the Demolition Delay and accept the plans as presented. Andrew Bernhardt seconded the motion. The motion failed by a 3-4 vote (Glenn Richards, yes; Biff Bouse, no; Joe Morgan, yes; Chris Sawtelle, no; Andrew Bernhardt, yes; Christopher Fay, no; Marc Cendron, no), as four affirmative votes are needed for a motion to pass.

Attorney Mead said size is not a part of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. She asked for more specific comments.

Glenn Richards said massing is a part of the purview. Joe Morgan said that to his understanding, the design element to be considered is not quantitative but qualitative; it is the way that the project would be perceived that is pertinent. It might be possible for the square footage of the addition to actually be larger than that of the original structure, as long as it is perceived as being smaller and more compact. In this case, the addition

would be large, but it would be subservient and would not be visible unless one were to trespass on the property.

Marc Cendron said the proposed addition is major and would create a different volume that would change the character of the house in a significant way, whether it could be seen from the street or not.

Biff Bouse said the volume of the addition in relation to that of the house is significant. He said it looks like a miniature house would be added to the original structure. Massing is an important consideration and he is concerned that an old section of the house would be removed, along with some original windows.

Christopher Fay said it is significant to him that the house is on High Street.

4. Updates from the Chair

A site visit of the Old Gaol is scheduled for June 10 at 10:00 a.m.

5. Minutes

Marc Cendron moved to approve the minutes of the May 25 meeting. Chris Sawtelle seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 7-0 vote (Glenn Richards, yes; Biff Bouse, yes; Joe Morgan, yes; Chris Sawtelle, yes; Andrew Bernhardt, yes; Christopher Fay, yes; Marc Cendron, yes).

6. Adjournment

Biff Bouse moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 p.m. Chris Sawtelle seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 7-0 vote (Glenn Richards, yes; Biff Bouse, yes; Joe Morgan, yes; Chris Sawtelle, yes; Andrew Bernhardt, yes; Christopher Fay, yes; Marc Cendron, yes).