

Newburyport Historical Commission

June 25, 2020
Online Meeting
Minutes

1. Call to Order

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

2. Roll Call

In attendance were members Christopher Fay, Glenn Richards, Patricia Peknik, Peter McNamee, Joe Morgan and Ron Ziemba. Malcolm Carnwath was absent. Also in attendance were Planning Director Andy Port, Planner Katelyn Sullivan and note taker Gretchen Joy.

3. Demolition Delay Applications

John and Genevieve Bleiler
3 Plumber Ave
Partial Demolition

The applicant is proposing to demolish an addition to a Cape-style house that was built in 1864. The 98 square-foot sunroom was probably built as a porch and later enclosed. Patricia Peknik said the house was constructed by Michael Rooney, a shipbuilder, and the street was originally called Rooney Lane.

Patricia Peknik moved the structure is historically significant and preferably preserved. Christopher Fay seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 6-0 vote (Glenn Richards, yes; Patricia Peknik, yes; Christopher Fay, yes; Peter McNamee, yes; Joe Morgan, yes; Ron Ziemba, yes).

The applicant is proposing to construct a two-story addition to the side of the structure from which the sunroom is to be demolished. The proposal would add 156 square feet of living space on the ground floor and 213 square feet on the second floor. The addition would be set back from the original structure and the peak of its roof would be lower. Cedar clapboards would be used to match the existing conditions.

No one from the public spoke in support of or in opposition to the plans. Patricia Peknik moved to approve the partial demolition application. Ron Ziemba seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 6-0 vote (Glenn Richards, yes; Patricia Peknik, yes; Christopher Fay, yes; Peter McNamee, yes; Joe Morgan, yes; Ron Ziemba, yes).

4. General Business

Institution for Savings c/o Lisa Mead, Mead, Talerman & Costa, LLC

93 State Street

DOD Review/Advisory Opinion

Peter McNamee recused himself from the discussion. The applicant has revised the plans and the Planning Board has asked the NHC to provide an advisory opinion on the new design. Patricia Peknik outlined the role of the Commission in a DOD advisory review. The NHC provides advice to the Planning Board on whether or not the proposed plan would be sufficiently protective of the historic structure, the surrounding neighborhood

and the historic district. She said the ordinance requires adherence “to any relevant provisions of the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, including all related bulletins and other official guidance promulgated by the National Park Service.” This guidance consistently requires that an addition must be compatible with the scale, massing and design of the subject building and also be harmonious with the context buildings surrounding its site. The addition must be evaluated both by how it impacts the historic building and the district in which it is located. The Department of the Interior emphasizes the need to protect the historic setting and context of a property. The mission of the NHC is to protect, preserve and promote the city’s historic structures, neighborhoods and landscapes. The Commission has the responsibility to encourage development that is sympathetic to the context buildings and settings and will preserve the sense of time, place and community that is expressed by the architectural aesthetic of the downtown.

Joe Morgan said the ground floor parking deck is not included in the square footage of the building. He estimated that the volume of the proposed structure is approximately 2.5 times as large as that of the historic structure. He said the applicant has not taken advantage of the opportunity to anchor the Prospect Street corner of the structure and has not created a transition that is sympathetic to the neighborhood. He said the materials of the new structure could echo the clapboards and wood trim of the residential structures. The window sizes and trim boards should harmonize with those in the neighborhood. The proposed bays are over-scaled and would overpower the scale of the residential window and door openings. He said the scale of the façade could be broken up both vertically and horizontally to produce residential dimensions. He concluded by saying the cornice is very heavy and would not be appropriate facing the neighborhood. The cornice line could be dropped to around 24 feet to reduce the scale of the building and the upper portion could be stepped back.

Ron Ziemba said the contribution of the bank to the betterment of Newburyport should be taken into consideration. The Institution has made significant contributions to the community in terms of both money and volunteers. The bank deserves to have opportunity to add to its campus on State Street.

Patricia Peknik said the addition should be subordinate to the historic building. Instead, it would be dominant with regards to both volume and height. This becomes more pronounced when the 1980 addition is taken into consideration. She said the design should respond to the neighborhood context. The facades facing Otis Place and Prospect Street should be compatible with the residential character of those streets. The addition should be responsive to the context and not subvert the character of the neighborhood. The highest level of preservation response would be two smaller buildings with open space between them. A single structure of a lesser volume could meet the Secretary’s standards if the design were to engage with its neighbors. She said this is a landmark building and it must have a reciprocal relationship to neighborhood. The historical significance of this neighborhood has documented in a Form G.

Christopher Fay said he is intrigued by the idea of the proposed addition fitting in with the context of the neighborhood rather than State Street. He does not convenience of the need for the parking garage. He is not in favor of the proposal and he believes it

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would alienate members of the community.

Glenn Richards said there is a conflict between the program of the bank and its context. As much of the program should be accomplished as possible while causing the least amount of harm to the neighborhood. He said the nods to the historic building to do not appear to be authentic. The bays are much bigger than those on the residential structures. He said he agrees with the comments made by Mr. Morgan.

While the discussion was not a part of a public hearing, comments from the public were permitted. Lisa Mead said she is concerned about the comments made by Mr. Morgan. They were not related to the original DOD report and he was not a Commission member at the time it was prepared. She said the property is a commercial one and the applicant has the right to use the property in the context of its zoning. She said sharp transitions between commercial and residential districts exist in the city. The applicant has responded to the comments made at the February 13 meeting and those of the Planning Board and has attempted to match the architectural features of the neighborhood. The Commission has an obligation to understand the entire setting, which is a historic commercial district with historic zoning patterns. She said the setting is a myriad of layers and not just what is immediately adjacent.

Christopher Angelakis of ARC said the proposed addition would not be large in the context of the city. He said it should not look like a residential structure.

Peter Makin, 13 Prospect Street, said the addition would change the fabric of the neighborhood. It would have an industrial appearance that would overwhelm the residences.

Jeff Caswell, 78 State Street, pointed out the property is in the B-1 zoning district and he believes the addition would fit in well.

Coleen Turner Secino, 15 Otis Place, said the massing and scale of the addition is unreasonable and it would dwarf the original building. It is not respectful of its context. She said the addition would mostly serve as a parking garage and would be better located along State Street.

Ann Clausen, 3 Otis Place, said her windows would look out directly on the garage and the architecture of the building would not fit in with neighborhood.

Mark Griffin, 4 Otis Place, said he is the closest abutter. The walkway to the building would run along property line, near his kitchen window. The design has not changed much from the first version and the scale has not been reduced. The addition would not be subordinate to the historic building.

Sean Sullivan, 9 Prospect Street, said the addition is overly large and not subordinate to the historic building. It could be designed to fit in better with the neighborhood.

Tim Wacker, 13 Otis Place, said the addition would look like a large box that was dropped into a unique neighborhood. It would cause a hardship for the residents of Otis Place, which is not the appropriate location for this structure.

Clare Papanastasiou, 4 Otis Place, said she agrees with the other abutters who have spoken against the proposal. She said the massing is too much and the bank could do better. She thanked the Commission members for their thoughtful comments.

Glenn Richards concluded that the DOD ordinance was written for the purpose of historic preservation. The role of the Commission is to preserve the city's cultural and historical heritage. He will summarize the comments made and submit a summary to the Planning Board.

Central Congregational Church

14 Titcomb Street

Preservation Restriction Discussion

The applicant requested to be on the agenda for the next meeting. Christopher Fay moved to continue the discussion to the July 9 meeting. Glenn Richards seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 6-0 vote (Glenn Richards, yes; Patricia Peknik, yes; Christopher Fay, yes; Peter McNamee, yes; Joe Morgan, yes; Ron Ziemba, yes).

Daniel and Judith Lynch c/o Lisa Mead, Mead, Talerman & Costa, LLC

342 Merrimac Street

Preservation Restriction Discussion

The comments of the Commission were submitted to the Planning Board. The Planning Board members asked for the opinion of the NHC on shutters. There are shutters on the house now but they are not shown the plans.

Glenn Richards moved that neither the presence nor absence of shutters would have an adverse impact on the historic structure or the district. Ron Ziemba seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 6-0 vote (Glenn Richards, yes; Patricia Peknik, yes; Christopher Fay, yes; Peter McNamee, yes; Joe Morgan, yes; Ron Ziemba, yes).

5. Approval of Minutes

Christopher Fay moved to approve of the minutes of the May 28, 2020, meeting. Glenn Richards seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 6-0 vote (Glenn Richards, yes; Patricia Peknik, yes; Christopher Fay, yes; Peter McNamee, yes; Joe Morgan, yes; Ron Ziemba, yes).

6. Adjournment

Patricia Peknik moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:14 p.m. Glenn Richards seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.