

Newburyport Historical Commission

August 12, 2021

Online Meeting

Minutes

1. Call to Order

Vice Chair Patricia Peknik called an online meeting of the Newburyport Historical Commission to order at 7:02 p.m.

2. Roll Call

In attendance were members Peter McNamee, Patricia Peknik, Malcolm Carnwath and Joe Morgan. Glenn Richards, Christopher Fay and Marc Cendron were absent. Also in attendance were Planning Director Andy Port and note taker Gretchen Joy.

Malcolm Carnwath moved to change the order of the agenda. Peter McNamee seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 4-0 vote (Peter McNamee, yes; Joe Morgan, yes; Patricia Peknik, yes; Malcolm Carnwath, yes).

3. General Business

386 High Street

Heather Brooks is requesting permission to paint the trim on a house that is under a preservation restriction. Painting has been identified in the restriction as a major alteration beyond regular maintenance and repair. The proposal indicates the house would be pressure washed, but the applicant stated it would be a hose rinsed. The Secretary of the Interior recommends against pressure washing historic structures.

Malcolm Carnwath moved to approve the request with the condition the historic house shall not subject to power washing. Joe Morgan seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 4-0 vote (Peter McNamee, yes; Joe Morgan, yes; Patricia Peknik, yes; Malcolm Carnwath, yes).

4. Demolition Delay

11 Bromfield Street

Patricia Peknik gave a brief overview of the history of the structure, which appears to be a part of a group of buildings related to the ship-building industry and constructed between the 1830s and 1860s.

Peter McNamee moved the house is historically significant and considered for preservation. Malcolm Carnwath seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 4-0 vote (Peter McNamee, yes; Joe Morgan, yes; Patricia Peknik, yes; Malcolm Carnwath, yes).

Jeff Solomon said the goal of the project is to create additional living space. He said the structure has been substantially changed over the years and the original character of structure no longer remains. A second story would be added over the enclosed front porch, which was not original to the structure. The shed roof at the rear of the structure is also not original. He said the staircase is not up to code and must be rebuilt. To accomplish this, the ridgeline would be raised three feet.

Project architect Joel Gagnon said the house could not be restored to its original appearance. It would require that more of the structure be demolished. A new home would be built to look like the historic one. He said the original front wall and roofline

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no longer exist. The new front wall would be 1.5 stories high. The new ridge would rest on the existing rear wall. A third floor would be framed to allow for future expansion. The front entrance would be returned to the middle of the wall and would be recessed. Small triple windows would be placed on either side of it. The main profile of the house would be a reverse saltbox. He said the proposed structure would be 2,215 square feet, which is average for the neighborhood.

The hearing was opened to comments from the public. Tom Kolterjahn, 64 Federal Street, said he is stunned by the extent of the proposed changes. He had hoped that the owners would restore the historic aspect of the property. Instead, the proposed changes would obliterate the original structure and it would no longer be recognizable. The style of the front would be Greek Revival, which would be paired with a Georgian roofline and center chimney. He recommended that the Commission impose the Demolition Delay and work with the applicant to design a more plausible plan for the structure.

Stephanie Niketic, 93 High Street, said a part of the character of a structure is its form and massing. Many small historic homes have been upsized. The city is losing its modest-sized homes and therefore its diversity. The structure is in a historic part of the city. She said the applicant should be asked to add dimensions to the drawings.

Malcolm Carnwath asked if the framing is post and beam. Mr. Gagnon said there are two timber posts in the corners of the front room.

Joe Morgan asked about the amount of proposed demolition. Mr. Gagnon said 23 to 24% of the structure would be demolished.

Peter McNamee said he likes the design of the proposed structure, but he thinks it is inappropriate. It does not look at all like the original structure. He said there are few houses remaining in the city that are reminiscent of the fishing community. The porch should be removed and a return to the plain, flat front should be made.

Joe Morgan said his objection to the proposal is the loss of the historic structure. He wants more information on the scope of demolition to determine if the proposal is an appropriate response. The drawings should show the walls that are to be demolished and detailed demolition calculations should be provided. He said he has been in the house and the first floor is charming. The porch, while not original, might be considered to be historic. The changes should be focused towards the rear of the property.

Malcolm Carnwath said he also likes the proposed design, but it has nothing to do with the preservation of the historic house.

Patricia Peknik said there is beauty in a district that juxtaposes the large and the small. Despite the changes, the structure is close to looking like a 1750s house and it belongs in that context. The proposal would be an overwhelming transformation of a simple house to a large contemporary structure. The roof would be demolished to such an extent that the scale and massing would be changed. The alterations should be unobtrusive from the street. She said there is room to expand to the rear of the property. She would favor the expansion of the footprint and said the raising of the ridge three feet would not be appropriate. The building code would not require that the staircase be rebuilt.

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Malcolm Carnwath moved the structure is preferably preserved and to impose the Demolition Delay. Joe Morgan seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 4-0 vote (Peter McNamee, yes; Joe Morgan, yes; Patricia Peknik, yes; Malcolm Carnwath, yes). The applicant was invited to return to the Commission with revised plans that take the comments of the members and the public into consideration.

430 Winter Street

Patricia Peknik said her deed research showed the house was built in the 1700s. The rear addition appeared on the Sanborn map of 1888.

Peter McNamee moved the house is historically significant and considered for preservation. Malcolm Carnwath seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 4-0 vote (Peter McNamee, yes; Joe Morgan, yes; Patricia Peknik, yes; Malcolm Carnwath, yes).

Eric Primack said the shed roof would be removed and the height of the second floor walls would be increased to improve ceiling height. The rear of the structure is stepped down from the front section and the ceiling height is no more than six feet. On the front façade, the height of the second-floor windows would be increased to meet code. They would be changed from 12-over-8 to 12-over-12. No other changes would be made to the front façade. The locations of the doors and windows on the right side of the structure would be changed. The clapboards would be retained and repaired as necessary, as would the side and front doors and their trim. The original windows would be replaced as necessary. Replacement windows would be simulated divided lights with flat stock casing. The middle chimney would be removed.

The hearing was opened to comments from the public. Tom Kolterjahn, 64 Federal Street, said the change to the front windows would throw off the proportions of the structure. It would not be required by the building code and would distort the structure. The existing openings are the proper size. He said the proposed rear elevation is unnecessarily high. The pitch of the roof should be steeper. He encouraged the Commission members to request more information on the proposed building materials. They should not be synthetic. He said the middle chimney should not be removed and asked if the house would be converted from a one-family structure to a two-family house.

Stephanie Niketic, 93 High Street, said the building is in poor condition but is beautiful. Its rear is highly visible to the public from the Rail Trail. She encouraged the Commission to impose the Demolition Delay and work with the developer. She also said the proposed materials should be highly specified and the Commission should require a conditions report.

Judith Picket, 4 Taylor Street, said the developer did a good job on the house of a friend. Project architect Jean Allen said the proposal would improve the appearance of the rear of the structure from the Rail Trail. Eric Primack said the structure would remain as a one-family house.

Peter McNamee asked about the necessity of changing the windows on the front façade. Mr. Primack said the rooms would be used for bedroom egress and must be made larger due to the fire code. He said he would prefer to retain the existing windows if possible because it would spare him an expense.

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Patricia Peknik asked about the square footage. Mr. Primack said the building is 2,532 square feet and would not be changed. The only change would be the addition of headroom on the second floor. He said 170 square feet, or 6.7% of the structure would be demolished.

Peter McNamee said he does not want the size of the windows on the front façade to be changed. The original materials should be retained and synthetic materials should not be used. Dimensions should be added to the plans. He does not object to the addition of headroom on the rear.

Joe Morgan said he would like to receive a conditions report from a structural engineer before approving the modifications to the roof. More demolition might be needed than expected due to the existing conditions. He said the front façade should be preserved. The raising of the rear roof would cover more of the gable, which is a feature of the historic structure.

Malcolm Carnwath is concerned about the proposal changes to the front façade but is not opposed to the raising of the roofline at the rear. He encouraged the applicant do more research on the building code. He thinks the windows would be exempt.

Patricia Peknik said the windows on the front façade should not be replaced and should remain as 12-over 8. Owners of historic homes are not required to demolish character defining features. She would like to impose a condition that the applicant shall consult a window restoration expert to determine which of the original windows should be retained. She said the change to the roof should not be so extreme so as to lose the gable. The slope of the roof should imitate the existing profile. She would prefer that true divided light windows be installed on the rear addition. She said dimensions must be added to the plans and the applicant should provide a conditions report. The existing clapboards and door and window trim should be retained and restored.

Peter McNamee moved the structure is preferably preserved and to impose the Demolition Delay. Joe Morgan seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 4-0 vote (Peter McNamee, yes; Joe Morgan, yes; Patricia Peknik, yes; Malcolm Carnwath, yes).

4 Taylor Street

Patricia Peknik said the structure was built in the early 1900s as bungalow style beach house. It is one of the few remaining intact Plum Island cottages.

Joe Morgan moved the house is historically significant and considered for preservation. Peter McNamee seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 4-0 vote (Peter McNamee, yes; Joe Morgan, yes; Patricia Peknik, yes; Malcolm Carnwath, yes).

Ken Savoie represented the applicant, who is proposing to demolish and rebuild the cottage. As the owner intends to be a year-round resident of the cottage, it must be made energy efficient and additional headroom would be needed on the second floor. Due to the amount of proposed work, it would be necessary under the Newburyport Wetlands Ordinance to place the structure on pilings. Mr. Savoie said the cottage is not structurally sound enough to accomplish this. He said the new building would maintain

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the character of the cottage. The footprint would remain the same and the gingerbread trim would be replicated.

The hearing was opened to comments from the public. Katie and Justin Ponting, 11 Barker Street, gave their full support to the project, as did Ashley Bakhtiari, 8 Barker Street. Elaine Nickerson said the applicant intends to preserve some of the materials from the structure. Judith Pickett said she would reuse some of the beams in the dining room, but only as a design element. A stained glass window would be restored.

Patricia Peknik asked if it would be possible to donate the cottage for use in a location that would not require it to be placed on pilings. Mr. Savoie said the framing is substandard and the structure is too deficient to be moved.

Malcolm Carnwath said the neighborhood no longer looks as it did in 1900 and the proposal would not adversely impact it. Joe Morgan and Peter McNamee commented that the primary consideration of the Commission is the preservation of the structure rather than the impact of its replacement on the neighborhood. Mr. Morgan said a decision is being made about the demolition of a historically significant building. If the Commission were to approve the action, the replacement structure would not be relevant. Mr. McNamee said it would be a shame to lose the building, but if it is not salvageable there would be uses for the site.

Peter McNamee moved the structure is preferably preserved and to impose the Demolition Delay. Joe Morgan seconded the motion. The motion failed by a 0-4 vote (Peter McNamee, no; Joe Morgan, no; Patricia Peknik, no; Malcolm Carnwath, no).

5. Updates from the Chair

None

6. Minutes

Peter McNamee moved to approve the minutes of the July 22, 2021, meeting. Malcolm Carnwath seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 4-0 vote (Peter McNamee, yes; Joe Morgan, yes; Patricia Peknik, yes; Malcolm Carnwath, yes).

7. Adjournment

Malcolm Carnwath moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:17 p.m. Peter McNamee seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 4-0 vote (Peter McNamee, yes; Joe Morgan, yes; Patricia Peknik, yes; Malcolm Carnwath, yes).