

## **Newburyport Historical Commission**

August 27, 2020

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 Christopher Fay, Glenn Richards, Patricia Peknik, Peter McNamee and Joe Morgan. Ron Ziemba was absent. Malcolm Carnwath was present intermittently but did not participate in the meeting. Also in attendance were Planner Katelyn Sullivan and note taker Gretchen Joy.

### **3. Request for DCOD/DOD Historical Report**

#### **21-23 Walnut Street**

In the Demolition Control Overlay District, a Special Permit from the ZBA is required when more than 25% of the walls are to be demolished on a structure that is listed as a contributor to the Newburyport Historic District. The Special Permit shall not be granted unless the structure retains no substantial remaining market value or reasonable use, taking into account the cost of rehabilitation to meet codes for historic structures. The ordinance is not intended to regulate the mere alteration of the structure, even the demolition of character-defining exterior architectural features. The Historical Commission shall prepare a report on the historical significance of the structure and its importance relative to its context.

Patricia Peknik asked about a determination that the structure is historically significant and preferably preserved, as was referenced in the cover letter from the applicant. Katelyn Sullivan explained the applicant originally filed both a Special Permit application and a Demolition Delay application. The Special Permit process is the overriding one for structures where over 25% of the exterior walls are to be removed.

Lisa Mead represented the applicant, who is proposing to revert a two-story structure to its original one-family use. The house was constructed around 1850. Its rear addition appears to have been constructed at a later date, but it is present on the Sanborn map of 1900. The addition comprises 36% of the exterior walls of the structure. The applicant contends that the addition, which has no cellar, is unsafe and unstable. Its beams have been cut and the collar ties too high. Engineer Joe Fix submitted a written report on the condition of the addition. The report states the addition has no remaining market value or reasonable use and the amount of rehabilitation necessary to harmonize it with the original structure would not be feasible.

Aileen Graf said the applicant wishes for a master suite to be located on the back of the house, where it is more private. She said the framing and foundation of the existing addition are marginal and a new addition must be constructed. The proposed addition would be lower in height than the main house. The new addition would be longer than the existing one, but it would be of the same width and on the same wall plane. Two-over-two windows would replace the existing one-over-one sashes. The siding material would be compatible with the existing clapboards. The side entrance and

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window above it would be removed. Board and batten siding would be added in this area to break up the monotony of the clapboards. A dormer over the stairs would be needed to create living space in the attic. The dormer would extend to the ridgeline. Ms. Graf said that in order to make the dormer in compliance with the ordinance, the staircase below would need to be altered, which would impact the second and third floors. Attorney Mead said the dormer would be of a low profile. It would be set back and screened by trees.

Patricia Peknik said the other structures in the neighborhood were constructed between 1845 and 1875. Many have rear additions that are harmonious with the main structure. The house in question is set higher than the others on the street, giving it a position of prominence. The existing addition is a good one, in that it is set back and simple. It is subordinate to the main part of the structure. She would like for it to be restored and rehabilitated. She said the ZBA, and not the NHC, would be the appropriate board to make the determination that the addition has no value and is unsafe. She said the dormer would alter the structure and would be visible when the trees have no leaves. Joe Morgan said it would not be appropriate for the board and batten siding to be coplanar with the wall on the main house and the pilaster at its corner, which is a feature of its period. The five bays should be preserved on the side wall from which the door is to be removed. Christopher Fay said the Commission should be consistent with regards to its position on dormers. While he does not doubt that the structure is in poor condition, the farmhouse addition would seem strange on a Greek revival house. Peter McNamee said the board and batten siding is an abrupt departure from the remainder of the structure. He agrees the five bays should be preserved and asked if the side door and window above it could be retained, even if they were not functional. Attorney Mead said the side entrance and window are not under the purview of the NHC because they are not located in the portion of the structure that is to be demolished. Glenn Richards responded that he does not agree with her interpretation of the ordinance.

The meeting was opened to comments from the public. Steve Dodge said the addition is a mess and must come down. He said the framing is bad and it cannot be brought back. Tom Kolterjahn, 64 Federal Street, said more demolition would take place than is obvious and it would exceed the amount of preservation. The Greek revival chimney should be retained. Its removal would have an impact on the neighborhood. The early clapboards are to be removed when they could instead be repaired. Hardy plank is a synthetic material, the longevity of which has not been determined. It is flat and provides less of a shadow than clapboards. The side door is original and should be retained. He said it would be a mistake to leave an empty bay. The board and batten siding would not fit with the house. Six-over-six windows would be more appropriate. He said it would be more beneficial to the neighborhood for the existing features to be retained. Aileen Graf said the trim would not be removed but would be repaired when possible. Jeff Dodge said his intention is to restore and repair the features of the structure whenever possible. Harold Short, 25 Walnut Street, said other houses on the street have dormers and the proposed one would be hidden by the trees. He said the Dodge family would build a safe, single-family house. Stephanie Niketic, 93 High Street, said it would be disruptive for the board and batten siding to be on the same plane as the main part of

the structure. She said the architectural features of the addition should be retained. In her opinion, the removal of the side door and window would constitute demolition and the Commission would have purview over this. She added the dormer would be inappropriate. Its addition would create a roofline change and the Commission should impose a demolition delay. Glenn Richards responded the Commission does not have the authority to impose a demolition delay but it is within its purview to comment on the appropriateness of the proposed plans. He asked for a site visit, which was scheduled for Sunday, August 30 at 4:30 p.m.

Glenn Richards moved to continue the request to the September 10 meeting to allow for a site visit. Christopher Fay seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 5-0 vote (Glenn Richards, yes; Patricia Peknik, yes; Christopher Fay, yes; Peter McNamee, yes; Joe Morgan, yes).

#### **4. General Business**

##### **National Alliance of Preservation Commissions**

Patricia Peknik reported on the annual conference of the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions that she attended virtually. The organization provides a forum for members of historical commissions across the country to share strategies and discuss mutual problems. Emphasis was placed on the importance of protecting outbuildings, which are often the subject of demolition by neglect, but which are an important part of the landscape. She found the sessions on the interpretation of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards especially valuable. Standard #9 received the most attention. She said she learned a great deal from the sessions and was impressed by the organization, which produces many publications.

#### **5. Approval of Minutes**

Joe Morgan moved to approve of the minutes of the August 13, 2020, meeting. Peter McNamee seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 5-0 vote (Glenn Richards, yes; Patricia Peknik, yes; Christopher Fay, yes; Peter McNamee, yes; Joe Morgan, yes).

#### **6. Adjournment**

Peter McNamee moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:04 p.m. Christopher Fay seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.