

Newburyport Historical Commission

September 10, 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, Joe Morgan and Ron Ziemba. 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

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. It is present on the Sanborn map of 1900. The work would result in the removal of 36% of the exterior walls, which requires a ZBA special permit. The Historical Commission is charged with the preparation of a report on the historical significance of the structure and its importance relative to its context.

At the August 27 meeting, the Commission members stated their concerns about the way in which the proposed changes would negatively impact the original structure. These concerns included the addition of a shed dormer that would be visible from the street, the incorporation of board and batten siding, the alignment of the addition with the wall of the original structure and the removal of a side door and window. Members of the public were concerned about the loss of original trim and the chimney.

Aileen Graf presented the changes that were made to address these concerns. She said the dormer would be set back eight inches from the wall below it. Shingles would be used in place of the board and batten siding. The addition would be set back six inches from the main structure, which would expose the pilaster at its the corner. The window to be removed from the side façade would be replaced with a smaller, oval window and a trellis would replace the door.

Glenn Richards said that he visited the site and he does not question the findings of the engineer. He said he has looked at other houses of this period. While some have a four-bay configuration, the middle space is not as wide as the one that would be created in this instance. He said it would be preferable to save the door and window, retaining the five-bay rhythm of the structure. He said the shed dormer would not be compatible with the Greek revival architecture. The use of a doghouse dormer should be explored.

Patricia Peknik agreed with the comments on the dormer. She said the Commission has been consistent about its recommendation that dormers should be limited to facades that are not visible from public ways. The size and placement of the proposed dormer are incorrect. It would have an impact on both the structure and the streetscape. She advised that the door and window should be retained. Their removal would result in

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a stark plane. She added that the focus should be on the preservation of the original features of this historic structure.

Joe Morgan said the removal of the door and window would weaken the façade. The chimney should be preserved. He does not oppose the demolition of the ell or the design of the proposed addition. He said a shed dormer would be inappropriate for the structure, especially as it would extend to the ridgeline. He is not opposed to the addition of a dormer but rather to the design of the one that has been proposed. A dormer should be of a design that fits with the style of the house while meeting the programmatic needs of the applicant.

Christopher Fay said the dormer would break the symmetry that is a key feature of the Greek revival style. He would like the applicant to explore an alternative design. He also said it would be a shame to lose the side door, which is a unique architectural feature.

Ron Ziemba said the proposal is well conceived and well designed and would improve the neighborhood. He said the dormer would be inconspicuous. While he might prefer that it not be added, it should not interfere with the approval of the project.

Peter McNamee said he understands the need for a dormer, but the integrity of the design must be protected. A shed dormer would detract from the structure. He said visited the site to view the way in which the dormer would be experienced from the street. While currently this section of the roof is hidden by foliage, limbs would be trimmed to accommodate the addition of the dormer, which would make it more visible. He said the dormer would negatively impact the view of the house from the front and would not be consistent with the Greek revival design sensibility. The proposed oval window on the side would be too small and the beautiful door should not be removed. The door does not have to be functional; it could be walled over.

Aileen Graf said the width needed for the dormer makes its design challenging but she will discuss the alternative with the owners. Lisa Mead added that the house would not be a museum, nor would a preservation restriction be placed on it. The elements are not just for show. They must function.

The meeting was opened to comments from the public. Skip Short, 25 Walnut Street, said the change would be tastefully done and would fit in with the neighborhood. Steve Dodge, 22 Union Street, said when he was on the Historical Commission, projects which saved old structures were viewed as being favorable. He said the structure must be brought into the current century.

Glenn Richards will prepare a DCOD Historical Report for the ZBA, which is the permitting authority. The report will indicate that the NHC does not dispute the condition of the addition. The Commission does not object to the plan for the new addition and is pleased that it would step back from the main part of the house. The members remain concerned some elements of the plans for the original structure. The side window and door should not be removed. The wood trim should be restored where possible. The chimney should be preserved. The style of the dormer should be compatible with the Greek Revival architecture.

4. Demolition Delay

Crane Properties LLC

123 State Street

Partial Building Demolition

Lisa Mead represented the applicant and said additional time is needed to review the calculations. She requested a continuance. Glenn Richards moved to continue the application to the September 24 meeting. 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).

5. General Business

Preservation Restrictions

MHC has conditionally approved the preservation restriction for the Central Congregation Church. Glenn Richards thanked Joe Morgan for the work he is doing on the preservation restriction for the Newburyport Public Library.

6. Approval of Minutes

Christopher Fay moved to approve of the minutes of the August 27, 2020, meeting. 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).

7. Adjournment

Joe Morgan moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:05 p.m. Peter McNamee seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.