



CITY OF WATERTOWN
Historical Commission
Parker School Building
124 Watertown St.- Room 2-A
WATERTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS 02472

Elise Loukas, Chair
Marilynne K. Roach, Member
Joseph Panto, Member
Matthew Walter, Member
Richard Glenn, Member
Edward G. McCourt, Member
Jamie Gordon, Member

Minutes, May 8, 2025, Remote Meeting 7:00 p.m.

Historical Commission Members Present: Elise Loukas, Marilynne Roach, Edward McCourt, Matthew Walter

Member(s) Absent: Richard Glenn, Joseph Panto

Public Present: Rasko Ojdrovic, Peter Ojdrovic, Christine P., Julie White, Mark Kraczkavicz, Nika Falkner

Staff Present: Larry Field, Senior Planner, Susan C. Jenness, Assistant

- 1. A. Acceptance of Minutes-**April 7, 2025, Historical Commission Meeting (continued for updates at the March meeting).

The minutes were not ready and will be reviewed at the next Historical Commission meeting.

- 2. Public Hearing**

- A.** To determine if the house at 12 Wheeler Lane. is preferably preserved and if a demolition delay will be imposed. Miyana Bovan, Applicant/Peter and Rasko Ojdrovic, Owner

Peter Rasko said the proposed plans, to construct a new multifamily building, have not been submitted for permitting yet. The project will be under the new zoning for Watertown Square.

Ojdrovic said the original house was designed and owned by Horace Wheeler and was one of four rental houses on the street. The house is listed on the Massachusetts Historic Commission's MACRIS database as a Victorian Eclectic, and it is believed to have been built between 1860 and 1874. It appears on the Sanborn maps by 1898. Ojdrovic checked with the Watertown Free Public Library's reference librarian and could not find any notable individuals associated with the building. Ojdrovic does not believe the house is historically significant based on its architecture or connection with Watertown social history.

Commission Questions

McCourt asked about the proposed new building. Ojdrovic said the new building would contain 5-6 units. He said the plans are only preliminary and may change based on input from the Planning Department. McCourt said he was concerned that the design would not fit the neighborhood context and create neighborhood impacts. Ojdrovic said that the proposed building would comply with the new zoning in Watertown Square.

Gordon asked if the house was occupied and about the conditions inside. Ojdrovic said the house was occupied until December 2024. Ojdrovic said there are issues with the building's water, sewer and electrical systems. Gordon asked if they considered preserving some of the structure. Ojdrovic said they considered a number of options, and the very steep stairs would have required significant renovations just to get the structure into Building Code compliance. Gordon pointed out several distinct building features (e.g., the window style and use of brick in the façade's lower portion) and asked if they considered using similar features in the new building to echo the historical design of 12 Wheeler and the other Horace Wheeler buildings on the block. The owners said they did consider incorporating a few details from the existing home but said the style was very simple.

Roach asked about the building height and whether making the building wider (rather than taller) would allow it to fit the other Horace Walker buildings more. The owners explained the difficulties of widening the existing structure.

The Ojdrovics said they purchased the home around 5 years ago and in that time, they had electrical issues, domestic violence and a fire.

Loukas asked if there was any way to fix the stairways. The owners said they would have to remove the roof, and when they considered bumping out the building to the street, but that interfered with two neighboring homes.

Public Comments

Julie White from 4 Wheeler Lane lives on the corner in a home built 20 years ago. White was concerned about safety on the block because 6 new units would make blind corners more dangerous; she was also concerned about density.

Mark Krackiewicz of 77 Riverside St. said he and his wife are the owners of a historic landmark home and familiar with historic houses. Krackiewicz said he would like to see the echoes of the 12 Wheeler Lane house so it fits into the neighborhood context. He also voiced concern about parking with a 6-unit structure.

Commission Discussion-

Loukas noted that the demolition delay ordinance allows the Commission to request further information. Given that the applicants described their plans as preliminary, she thinks the Commission would benefit from having more information as to how the new structure would impact and fit into the neighborhood's historic fabric. Walter said he agrees that the proposed building doesn't match up well with the neighboring homes but is not sure how to weigh these factors as the Historical Commission is not planning and zoning. McCourt said he is concerned with the proposed building design and parking. McCourt would like to see some of the historic features retained in a building sized more like the existing home.

Gordon found in her research that the Wheeler had some connection to the DPW in Watertown and that the four structures on the street were built as a group in the late 19th century with the same design ("utilitarian") and use (as rental properties). The three remaining homes retain that look and have seen only modest alterations since they were built. Gordon said she would like to see retention of features that echo the existing style. Roach said she was also concerned with how the proposed building would fit the neighborhood context.

Loukas noted that the Commission had received no documentation indicating that the house is in poor condition. She would like to obtain more information about the building's structural integrity.

Field asked to provide background on the permitting process. Field said that the applicants have discussed their plans with the Planning Department but have not filed an application for a special permit. It is typical at this stage for plans to be preliminary so that feedback from the planning department can be incorporated. The Commission's conundrum is that if a demolition application comes early in the process, the plans are still preliminary but if the applicants wait to have firm plans, the Commission is the last body that considers the matter. Field added that he is not suggesting the Commission should decide without requesting more information.

Loukas outlined four options: 1) continue the case and request more information, 2) a motion that the building is not preferably preserved, 3) do a site visit if the applicants request, and 4) a motion that the building is preferably preserved.

Gordon said she would like continuation with a request for the applicants to come back with a partial preservation plan. Loukas said she would like to hear more about structural integrity.

Motion- Gordon made a motion that the public hearing is continued so that the applicants can provide more information, with specific requests to come from the Chair and staff. McCourt seconded the motion.

Roll Call- All members agreed with the motion made by Gordon (4-0).

3. 9-11 Boyd St- Request for letter supporting tax credit application.

Nika Faulkner from Heritage Consulting Group said that the owner of 9-11 Boyd Street is applying for federal and state historic tax credits for interior improvements to the building. The exterior will be preserved. Faulkner said the building will be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Faulkner presented slides on the building's history (the front building dates from 1916 and the rear addition was built in 1925). It was a printing company from 1916 to 1953 and is known as the University Prints building. The slides also showed proposed interior improvements, with the rear space converted to a day care facility and the front four residential units (two existing and two converted from offices). Faulkner explained she was appearing before the Commission seeking a letter that would support the tax credit application.

Field noted that the rear building is substantially complete, and the day care is operating with a temporary certificate of occupancy.

Loukas noted that the Commission's letter can focus on the building's historic significance. Walter said for clarification whether the letter would add weight to the application or whether it was a yes/no for the application. Loukas said the application does not require a local historic commission to find that the building is historic.

Motion- Walter made a motion that the Historical Commission submit a letter supporting the historic significance of the 9-11 Boyd Street building. Gordon seconded the motion.

Roll Call- All members agreed with the motion made by Walter (4-0).

4. CPC Update- Walter reported that this is the time of year for CPC members representing a board or commission to ask their body about unmet needs for funding. Walter asked whether Commissioners have eligible projects to suggest. He noted that the Commander's Mansion and cemetery preservation projects were already on his list.

Gordon and Loukas agreed that the North Branch Library should be on the list. Gordon also suggested funding historic surveys, using administrative CPC funds. Walter said the CPC has not looked favorably on using administrative funds on historic surveys or plans but will pass it

on. Loukas asked when these ideas should be submitted; Krackiewicz said it would be helpful to submit them to the CPC by the end of May.

Loukas asked Commissioners to send any ideas to Field and Jenness so they can compile the list for the CPC.

5. Commission Discussion-

A. Promotion of historical preservation recommendations outlined in the Commander's Mansion and Old Burying Ground/Common Street Cemetery studies funded by the Community Preservation Committee.

Walter reported that Bob DeRico/DPW said there have been internal DPW discussions on recommended projects relating to the cemeteries. However, no one has been officially designated to lead on the recommended projects for the Commanders' Mansion. Walter said that the city needs to designate a lead and start work on implementing the recommendations. He asked whether it is the Commission's role to advocate for the city to take those initial steps.

Walter asked whether a letter to the Department of Community Development & Planning (DCDP) would be helpful; Loukas wondered what a letter would accomplish.

Krackiewicz provided background about the Commander's Mansion study funded by the CPC. He said DCDP is aware of the many recommendations, but implementation is not high on its priority list. In his opinion, it would be helpful for the Commission to review the report and discuss the specific recommendations.

Gordon said that Liz Helfer, who took the lead on requesting CPC funding of the study, does not have the bandwidth to work on further implementation. Members discussed several ideas as to who could lead implementation (e.g., Commander's Mansion staff, a community group or a short-term hire). Krackiewicz noted that it may be easier to address the recommended landscape projects.

Loukas said she would like to review the report and have the options discussed at a future meeting.

B. By email to the Commissioners, staff provided a nomination to fill an award category that is currently vacant. The Commissioners briefly discussed the candidate and agreed (4-0) that this individual be named the 2025 Mastrangelo Award winner.

6. Agent Report- The Economic Development Committee (Councilors Feltner, Piccirilli, and Gannon) met on May 7 to discuss the demolition delay ordinance. Magoon, Loukas and Field (remote) provided information about demolition delay statistics and potential measures relating to the ordinance and regulations, as well as planning and historic surveys. Walter spoke during

the public comment session. There were 11 potential measures shared in a memorandum the City Manager submitted to the City Council. The Committee asked staff to provide specific language and details for all 11 measures. Updates will be provided to Commissioners when they become available.

Field reported Phase 3 of the Southside survey has been completed by consultants. Among other things, Phase 3 identified ten areas/buildings that qualify for the National Register of Historic Places.

Motion- A motion was made by Walter to adjourn the meeting at 8:45 pm. Roach seconded the motion.

Roll Call- All members agreed with the motion made by Walter.