



CITY OF WATERTOWN
Historical Commission
Parker School
124 Watertown St.
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: Thursday, September 11, 2025, Remote Meeting only 7:00 p.m.

Historical Commission Members Present: Elise Loukas, Marilynne Roach, Matthew Walter, Joseph Panto, Richard Glenn, Jamie Gordon

Member(s) Absent: Edward McCourt

Public Present: Valerie Barsom, Mariana Dagatti, Abbey Koplovitz, Mark Palmer, Kate Rabinov, Cara and Joshua Coller, Nathalie Highland, Katie Horne, Meghan (no last name), and Andrew (no last name).

Staff Present: Larry Field, Senior Planner; Susan C. Jenness, Administrative Specialist; Erika Jerram, Director, Community Design

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1. **Call to Order**
 2. **Roll Call**
 3. **Acceptance of Minutes-**

A. Review and acceptance of Minutes from July 10, 2025, Historical Commission Remote Meeting

The minutes from July 10, 2025, the Historical Commission Remote Meeting were reviewed. There were no modifications requested.

Motion- A motion was made by Roach to accept the minutes from the July 10, 2025 meeting as written. Walter seconded the motion.

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

4. Public Hearing

Chair Loukas noted that the first two cases on the agenda are continued to the October 9, 2025 meeting:

A. **18-20 Washburn St.**

B. **45 Mt. Auburn St.**

The Chair opened the public hearing on the third case:

- C. To determine if the house at **19 Stoneleigh Rd.** is preferably preserved and if a demolition delay will be imposed.

Applicant presentation

Owner Valerie Barsom and Marianna Dagatti, Architect, presented the proposed demolition to the Commission. Dagatti said the proposed demolition is to replace the existing home with a new single-family residence that would be respectful to the evolving neighborhood. Dagatti said the existing house's condition requires significant work to bring it up to current standards. She cited the engineer's report in the record and said professionals were consulted about the cost of the renovations needed and that such renovations were not cost-effective.

With respect to the building's history, Dagatti said that there was no notable person or event or architect associated with the house. She noted that it was a colonial revival home with a modest appearance, with no characteristics that make it unique, nothing significant about the architect and not part of a community identity. The neighborhood has evolved organically, with a mix of architectural styles now. The owner is proposing a new house on a scale that works with the neighboring houses, will have high quality materials and provide energy efficiency and sustainability.

Commission Questions

Glenn asked if they explored working with the current structure. Dagatti said yes, explaining that a large addition was considered, but it was important to the Owner for the house to be fully accessible and that there was no way to connect the addition with rooms on the first floor.

Panto inquired whether there was any issue with the house's structural integrity. Dagatti said the foundation is very dated and they could not guarantee it would stand up through the substantial interior demolition required by the Owner's desired layout. Loukas pointed out this is not a problem with the structure; the issue arises because of the Owner's desired layout.

Roach asked if these issues were pointed out when the house was purchased and, if so, why would the Owner want to buy this particular house. Loukas, noting that the purchase price was \$1.5 million dollars, asked why not buy a house that would provide what the Owner needed. Barsom said she loves the neighborhood and that it was important to have a house that could also accommodate her 90-year-old mother. The latter required an open floor plan and proximity to Boston hospitals. Barsom said that she would have renovated the house if she could, but it would cost more to renovate than to demolish and build new. She said historical research was done and she didn't see any significance to the house.

Gordon said there is a MACRIS Form B for the house and that it discusses the history of the house and neighborhood. Loukas said she was surprised they did not find this Form B when they said they had researched city and state records for history of the house. Gordon asked if they had considered creating an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) for the Owner's mother, which might be an alternative to demolishing the house. The Owner said that was not considered and was not a solution because they wanted her mother to live in the house, not in a separate unit. Gordon, noting that the proposed house would be double the square footage of the existing house, asked if that would change the neighborhood. Dagatti said no, as most of the additional massing would be in the rear. Gordon asked if the engineer's opinion about the structural issue is based on interior demolition to create an open floor plan; Dagatti said yes. Gordon asked if that was a matter of her client's preference and Dagatti said yes.

Loukas asked why the Owner would purchase older home with smaller rooms if she wanted an open floor plan and wasn't sure that a renovation was feasible. Gordon asked why the new exterior design was not a colonial revival to fit the neighborhood. Barsom said that the existing house's look is just okay and that the proposed design is beautiful. She emphasized that she has lived in Watertown, wants to live here, and there aren't many single-family homes available.

Public Comments

Mark Palmer, from 14 Stoneleigh Road, said he has lived here for 33 years. He said there was discussion in 2013 about a historic designation for the neighborhood and that, by his estimate, 100 people were against it. He acknowledged that there were some historic homes in the neighborhood but said many have different styles and have been expanded over the years.

Josh and Cara Coller said they live at 14 Amherst Street (behind 19 Stoneleigh Road). They said increasing the massing at the rear would affect their property. They noted that the subject house was built by a known architect and that there was a beautiful

preservation job done on a nearby house. They said many others in the neighborhood have updated their homes rather than demolish them. They also said that while the neighborhood has a mix of styles, they are all the same 1920s vintage.

Abbey Koplovitz from 14 Stoneleigh Road said she is an interior designer and has worked on many older homes. Koplovitz has seen the slow decay of this house, noting there was a lot of water leakage through the roof. In her opinion, this is not a house that is historically significant. She lives in a 1910 house but many of the nearby homes are from the 1920s and she doesn't think they are special. She thinks it will be more expensive, by far, to renovate than to build new. The new design will allow for more insulation and be healthier. She thinks the new design will fit the neighborhood.

Kate Rabinov said she lives at 59 Bailey Road. While she has no information about 19 Stoneleigh Road, she has seen another property deteriorate and hopes that the neighbors near 19 Stoneleigh Road don't have to experience that.

Deliberations

Loukas said the Form B reports this as an excellent example of the Colonial Revival style and, when written, the house had a high level of architectural integrity. The form discusses the history of Stoneleigh Road and Stoneleigh Circle. The house was first owned by Walter C. Stone and the architect was Fred Gowing.

Walter said he is focused on whether the house is historically significance. He thinks the Applicant has done a good job in applying the ordinance's standard for significance to the facts here and he is satisfied that it is not significant. In his opinion, this house is not sufficiently interesting to focus on preserving it.

Gordon said she lives in a 1926 house and sees her home and this home as significant in speaking to Watertown's development as a "streetcar suburb." The fact that there is a mix of styles in the neighborhood is not a barrier, as they are from the same time period. She thinks an ADU is a good option, as there is enough space in this large lot and the new state ADU law opens new possibilities.

Glenn read the structural engineer report and, as noted by Loukas, the issue is that the foundation cannot support removal of the interior walls. However, many 1920s houses could not support removing interior walls. Glenn stated the existing house fits into the neighborhood well and he would not encourage demolition.

Roach said there is history to this house and, while not fancy, it is interesting.

Panto said he agrees that we should not save all old buildings and that owners should not be forced to live in homes they do not like. However, this house does contribute to the neighborhood and the new owner did not need to make the purchase if they thought the house was falling apart.

Loukas said that having a Form B on the house showing its history is an important factor. A house doesn't need to be an ornate Victorian design to be considered historically significant. Loukas then outlined the options for an initial vote, i.e. whether the house is significant and preferably preserved (or not).

Motion- Glenn made a motion this house is significant and preferably preserved. Gordon seconded the motion.

Roll Call- Walter voted no; Roach, Panto, Loukas, Glenn and Gordon voted yes (5-1).

Loukas said the next issue is whether a demolition delay should be imposed and, if so, for how long. The purpose of the delay is to allow time to work with the Applicant on preservation options.

Walter said he was against a delay as it is unlikely to result in preservation. Gordon thought that six months was not enough to develop an alternative and suggested one year might be appropriate. Glenn said the applicant would just wait six months while two years would provide a better chance that it would be preserved. Panto said he was not sure what a delay would accomplish in this case. Roach suggested 18 months, noting that the period could be shortened at a later time.

Motion- Glenn made a motion to put an 18-month delay on the demolition of the house at 19 Stoneleigh Road. Gordon seconded the motion.

Roll Call- Walter and Panto voted no; Roach, Glenn, Gordon and Loukas voted yes (4-2).

5. CPC Update

Walter reported that there are three new CPC members. He also reported that no new funding applications have been filed. He asked whether the Commissioner should discuss how to encourage the Department of Community Development and Planning to submit a funding application for the Commander's Mansion. Erika Jerram said the Department is working on an application. Field said that he and Jerram would talk about whether it would be helpful to put this application on the Commission's agenda at a future meeting.

6. Agent Report

Field reported that the Southside survey will be the subject of talk by the consultant on September 25, 2025, at 6 pm. The event will be at the Watertown Savings Bank Room at the Watertown Free Public Library. Loukas and Field agreed that discussion of the preliminary review process would be tabled to a later meeting.

7. Memorial Day Parade

Panto reported that the weather was good and there was a great turnout for the parade which he said was a success.

8. Historic Preservation Awards 2025

Loukas said the awards ceremony in June was a success and she thanked members of the Commission and thanked Jenness and Field for organizing and planning the event.

9. Adjournment

Motion- A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Gordon and seconded by Panto.

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