



Committee on Economic Development and Planning Meeting

Tuesday, September 15, 2026 at 6:00 PM
Philip Pane Lower Hearing Room - Ground Floor

Agenda

Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2025, the meeting and public hearing will be conducted with remote opportunities for participation. Remote participation and access methods include:

ACCESS INFORMATION:

- A. This meeting will be held on Tuesday, September 15, 2026 at 6:00 P.M. Location: Philip Pane Lower Hearing Room - Ground Floor - 149 Main Street, Watertown, MA 02472
- B. The in-person meeting will also be televised through WCATV (Watertown Cable Access Television) on Comcast Channel 22 or RCN Channel 13 and can be streamed online at: <http://vodwcatv.org/CablecastPublicSite/watch-now?site=3>
- C. The Public may join the virtual meeting online: <https://watertown-ma.zoom.us/j/83549340015>
- D. Public may join the virtual meeting audio only by phone: (877) 853-5257 or (888) 475-4499 (Toll Free) and enter Webinar ID: 835 4934 0015
- E. Public may comment through email: lfeltner@watertown-ma.gov
- F. Please Visit the Committee on Economic Development and Planning Webpage here: https://watertownma.portal.civicclerk.com/?category_id=78

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- 1. Call to Order
 - 2. Roll Call
 - 3. Discussion
 - A. Continued Discussion of Amendments to the Demolition Delay Ordinance
 - 4. Adjournment

ELECTED OFFICIALS

John G. Gannon,
Chair

Vincent J. Piccirilli, Jr.,
Vice Chair

Lisa J. Feltner,
Secretary

WHEREAS: The City of Watertown adopted a demolition delay ordinance on October 28, 1997 (Ordinance 97), and amended it on September 12, 2006 (Ordinance 57), and August 8, 2023 (Ordinance 24) for the purpose of preserving and protecting significant buildings outside designated local Historic Districts and to encourage owners of the buildings to seek out persons who might be willing to purchase, preserve, rehabilitate or restore the buildings rather than demolish them; and

WHEREAS: The Honorable City Council is seeking to make adjustments to preserve and protect significant buildings in a way that best serves the community,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT ORDAINED by the City Council of Watertown that Title XV, Chapter 153 of the Watertown Code of Ordinances, Demolition of Historic Buildings, is hereby amended, by deleting the existing chapter in its entirety and replacing it with the language below, as follows:

Chapter 153 Demolition of Historic Buildings

§ 153.01 PURPOSE

This chapter is enacted for the purpose of preserving and protecting significant buildings within the City of Watertown ("City") which constitute or reflect distinctive aspects of the architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City, and which are outside designated local Historic Districts and to encourage owners of the buildings to develop strategies to preserve, rehabilitate, or restore the buildings rather than demolish them; or, in the alternative, to seek out persons willing to purchase and to preserve, rehabilitate, or restore such buildings rather than demolish them. To achieve these purposes, the Watertown Historical Commission (the "Commission") is empowered to make certain determinations related to the issuance of permits for demolition of significant buildings, as defined herein. The issuance of said permits for significant buildings is regulated as provided in this chapter.

§ 153.02 DEFINITIONS.

For the purpose of this chapter, the following definitions shall apply unless the context clearly requires a different meaning.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT--A development in which fifty (50) percent or more of its units qualify as an 'Affordable Housing Unit' with an 'Affordable Housing Restriction' as these terms are defined in Title XV, Chapter 155, §5.07.

APPLICANT- For the purposes of this chapter: any person or entity who files a permit application with the Building Commissioner (as defined herein).

BUILDING- A combination of any materials, whether portable or fixed, having a roof, to form a structure for the shelter of persons, animals or property. For the purpose of this definition, "roof" shall include an awning or any similar covering, whether or not permanent in nature.

BUILDING COMMISSIONER - The person occupying the office of Building Commissioner or a designee. The Building Commissioner is also the Inspector of Buildings under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 143.

COMMISSION – The Watertown Historical Commission.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN – the City’s Master Plan adopted by the Planning Board under the provisions of M.G.L. Chapter 41 §81 D

DEMOLITION-For the purpose of this Section 153, Demolition includes:

1. Complete Demolition as defined below:
 - a. Any act of pulling down, destroying, removing, dismantling or razing a building; or,
 - b. Commencing the work of pulling down, destroying, removing, dismantling or razing a building with the intent of completing the same
2. Substantial demolition as defined below:
 - a. Removal of a portion of roof or wall that exceeds the standards delineated in the Demolition Delay Regulations per §153.04.
3. Illegal demolition as defined below:
 - a. Demolition or substantial demolition undertaken by any person without an application having been reviewed and approved by the Watertown Historic Commission and/or without building or demolition permits.
4. Demolition does not include:
 - a. Routine maintenance as long as the maintenance undertaken does not fit the definitions of demolition contained in this ordinance
 - b. Interior renovations
 - c. Shutting off utilities, including but not limited to water, electricity and gas
 - d. Removal, replacement or installation of siding, roof shingles, gutters, downspouts or windows performed for the purpose of maintenance or replacement

Commented [EJ1]: For discussion per 6/22 meeting

PERSON-an individual, partnership, trust or association, with or without transferable shares, joint-stock company, corporation, society, club, organization, institution, estate, receiver, trustee, assignee or referee and any other person acting in a fiduciary or representative capacity, whether appointed by a court or otherwise, or any combination of individuals acting as a unit

PERMIT APPLICATION-An application for the demolition of a building or for renovations or alterations that constitute a substantial demolition as defined herein. For purposes of this ordinance, a permit application seeking solely to undertake items identified herein per item #~~3~~ 4 under the definition of demolition do not constitute a Permit Application.

PERMIT - The Building and/or Demolition permit issued by the Building Commissioner or a designee approving a permit application as defined herein.

PREFERABLY PRESERVED BUILDING - Any significant building which the Commission determines, following a public hearing, is better preserved than demolished per §153.06

PREMISES - The parcel of land upon which a building is or was located or any adjoining parcels of land under common ownership

SIGNIFICANT BUILDING – Any building or portion thereof which is fifty years or more old and which has been determined by the Commission to be significant based on the factors established per §153.05.

ZONING ENFORCEMENT OFFICER-The person occupying the office of Zoning Enforcement Officer or otherwise authorized to make administrative determinations of zoning compliance.

§ 153.03 APPLICABILITY

- (A) No person may undertake demolition or substantial demolition outside of the provisions of §153.03
- (B) Applicability. No building may undergo demolition as defined in §152.02, except through the provisions of this ordinance.
- (C) Demolition is only permitted if one of the following apply:

1. The building is exempt, by way of being in one of the following categories:
 - i. Buildings less than 50 years old
 - ii. Buildings proposed for demolition as a part of an affordable housing development as defined in §153.02
 - iii. Buildings owned by the City of Watertown or any of its political subdivisions after completion of review by Historical Commission §153.15
 - iv. The building is within the by-right overlay Transit-Oriented Development Overlay in the Watertown Square district on the Watertown Zoning Map.
 - v. Buildings within a local historic district, which is subject to the jurisdiction of the Historic District Commission
2. Within a three-year period prior to filing of a building permit or demolition permit, a complementary application was filed consistent with 153.07(A) or 153.07(B) and one of the following has occurred:
 - i. The building was determined by the Commission or its designated preliminary review committee, as outlined in §153.08.A, to not be significant
 - ii. The specific alteration/renovation work was determined by the Commission or its designated preliminary review committee to not be significant
 - iii. The building was determined by the Commission that it is not to be preferably preserved
 - iv. The Commission determined a building to be preferably preserved but chose not to set a demolition delay period
 - v. The Commission, instead of setting or maintaining a demolition delay period, established conditions upon which no delay would be set, and the conditions established by the Commission have been satisfied
 - vi. The commission lifted the demolition delay period
 - vii. The demolition delay period expired

Commented [EJ2]: Typo corrected

Commented [EJ3]: New language here and new §153.15 at the end describing Commission review process for City-owned buildings.

Commented [EJ4]: New language to specify Transit-oriented development overlay and specify on the Zoning Map

§ 153.04 ESTABLISHMENT OF REGULATIONS

The Commission may adopt regulations and guidance as are necessary to administer the terms of this chapter, such regulations subject to approval by the City Manager.

§ 153.05 DETERMINING A SIGNIFICANT BUILDING

- (A) The Commission may determine a building to be significant based on the following criteria:
1. The building is importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City or the Commonwealth; or,
 2. The building is historically or architecturally important (in terms of period, style, method of building construction or association with a recognized architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings.
- (B) The determination of significance shall occur by one of the following processes:
1. Determination of significance by the Commission at a public hearing per §153.09, except that a preliminary review committee under §153.08 may determine that a building is NOT significant; or,
 2. Pre-determination of significance per §153.05.C
- (C) The Commission may develop a list of significant buildings based upon studies that establish architectural, historic, cultural, political, economic, and/or social history of a building or group of buildings. To add or remove a building from the list shall require a public hearing with notice provided to the property owner. Buildings on the list shall not require a determination of significance upon an application of a demolition permit but will require a public hearing to determine if the building shall be preferably preserved and if a demolition delay period should be set.

§ 153.06 DETERMINING A PREFERABLY PRESERVED BUILDING

- (A) The Commission may determine a building to be preferably preserved after considering the following factors:
1. The extent to which demolition of the significant building would be detrimental to the historical or architectural heritage or resources of the City;
 2. The extent to which preservation or demolition of the significant building would advance the City's goals as set forth in the most recent Comprehensive Plan; and,
 3. The feasibility of preserving all or part of the building, including an assessment by the Commission and/or their staff liaison on the likelihood that an owner who is motivated to preserve the building would find it likely or possible to do so.
- (B) A preferably preserved building may be subject to the imposition of the demolition delay period as set forth in § 153.09 and § 153.10.

Commented [EJ5]: For discussion per 6/22 meeting

§ 153.07 PERMIT APPLICATION

- (A.) Demolition Application. When the City receives an application proposing complete demolition of a building that is not exempt per § 153.03 the Zoning Enforcement Officer shall forward the application to the Commission's staff liaison who shall proceed to follow the preliminary review steps as set forth in § 153.08.
- (B.) Renovation/Alteration Application. When the City receives an application proposing to renovate and/or alter a building that is:
- not exempt per § 153.03; and,
 - includes exterior alterations,
- the Zoning Enforcement Officer, within two business days of receiving the application will determine whether the proposed work constitutes demolition as defined in this chapter, as follows:
1. If the Zoning Enforcement Officer determines, pursuant to this ordinance and the regulations per § 153.04, that such an application constitutes demolition, the Zoning Enforcement Officer shall within five business days of receiving the application notify the Building Commissioner of the determination and forward relevant project information to the Commission's staff liaison to follow the preliminary review steps as set forth in § 153.08.
 2. If the Zoning Enforcement Officer determines, pursuant to the regulations, that the application does not constitute a demolition, the Zoning Enforcement Officer shall within five business days of receiving the application notify the Building Commissioner of the determination. Upon being notified of such determination the Building Commissioner may issue the permit if all other requirements pertaining to the requested permit are met.

§ 153.08 PRELIMINARY REVIEW

- (A) After receiving notification per § 153.07, the Commission's staff liaison shall determine if the building is on a pre-determined list of significant buildings:
1. If it is on a pre-determined list, the building shall be immediately forwarded to the Commission for a determination if it shall be Preferably Preserved
 2. If it is not on a pre-determined list, the staff liaison shall inform the Chair, and the Chair shall form a preliminary review committee, consisting of the Chair (or Acting Chair if applicable) and a second Commission member designated by the Chair. The preliminary review committee shall meet within 15 days to either:
 - i. Make a written determination that a hearing is required as outlined in § 153.09 and notify the Building Commissioner in writing of such action, or
 - ii. Make a written determination and notifying the Building Commissioner in writing that no hearing is required, if it agrees either that:

1. The building is not significant; or,
2. The proposed scope and/or specific exterior changes in the building permit application for renovation/alteration do not significantly compromise the building's significance.

Upon such determination, the Building Commissioner may issue the demolition permit or building permit for the renovation/alteration if all other requirements pertaining to the requested permit are met.

§ 153.09 COMMISSION HEARINGS

- (A) Upon referral of a building per §153.08, the Commission shall hold a public hearing at its next regularly scheduled meeting after time for adequate notice. Public notice of the time, place and purpose of the hearing shall be disseminated as follows:
1. written notice posted at City Hall and on an internet website operated by the City of Watertown at least 14 days before the hearing; and
 2. written notice mailed to the applicant, to the owners (as they appear on the most recent local tax list) of all property abutting the subject property and all abutters to the abutters within three hundred feet of the property line, at least 7 days before the hearing.
 3. In addition to the above requirements, the Commission's staff liaison may also require that applicants post a written notice at the Watertown Free Public Library and/or on an internet website offering local news and public notices online at least 14 days before the hearing.
- (B) The Commission may request that an applicant for a permit for demolition that is the subject of a public hearing under sub-section (A) provide additional information about the building, including but not limited to:
1. the reason for proposing the work;
 2. the building's condition; and,
 3. a description of the proposed reuse, reconstruction or replacement of the building or exterior elements that would be demolished.
- (C) Unless the building is on a pre-determined list and therefore already determined significant, the Commission shall decide at the public hearing whether the building is significant. If the Commission determines that the building is not significant, then no demolition delay period will apply.
- (D) If a building is significant, the Commission shall determine at the public hearing if the building is preferably preserved. If the Commission determines that the building is not preferably preserved, then no demolition delay period will apply. The determination of significance and determination of preferably preserved may, at the discretion of the chair of the Commission, be completed as a single hearing and vote.
- (E) If the Commission determines a building is preferably preserved, the Commission shall then determine if a demolition delay period shall be set, up to the maximum period as provided in §153.10. In setting the duration of the demolition delay, the Commission shall consider:
- a. The criteria used in determining that a building is preferably preserved per § 153.06(A).
 - b. Whether the owner has already made bona fide and reasonable efforts to preserve all or part of the building,
 - c. Whether the placement of conditions on the demolition of the building will more effectively serve the public interest than imposing a demolition delay period.
- (F) The commission may determine that a preferably preserved building may be demolished after the completion of conditions. These conditions shall require an applicant to provide one or more of the following to the Commission-staff liaison prior to demolition:
- i. photographic documentation of the building to be demolished;
 - ii. architectural renderings of the building to be demolished;

Commented [EJ6]: For discussion per 6/22 meeting.

Commented [EJ7]: Changed to reflect the role of the staff liaison in ensuring conformance with conditions.

~~iii.~~ iii. architectural plan set of a building to be renovated;

~~iii-iv.~~ iv. completion of the Massachusetts Historical Commission Form B, with relevant documentation;

~~iv-v.~~ v. identification of materials for salvage; and/or,

~~v-vi.~~ vi. a plan for installation of historic or interpretative signage at or near the site.

If the Commission places conditions on a demolition, then no demolition delay period will apply, except for that which is necessary to complete the conditions that must be completed prior to demolition.

Commented [EJ8]: Added to reflect the concern raised that decisions are sometimes made on preliminary designs to avoid requiring applicant to prepare full plan sets prior to historical commission. Staff will review to ensure conformance with conditions set in historical commission meeting.

- (G) The Commission shall notify the Building Commissioner and the applicant in writing of its decision at this public hearing.
- (H) The determination of the Commission may be postponed by action of the Commission with written approval from the applicant.
- (I) A determination that a building is significant, a determination that the building is preferably preserved and the application of a demolition period may be appealed to a court of competent jurisdiction.

§ 153.10 DELAY PERIOD

- (A) The duration of the demolition delay period shall not exceed twenty-four months.
- (B) If the Commission makes a determination that the building is subject to a demolition delay, the Commission Chair and staff liaison will invite the owner of the building, the applicant (if different than the owner), to work with the Commission's staff liaison to consider alternatives to demolition including but not limited to full or partial preservation, seeking a new owner willing to purchase and preserve the building, or moving the building. The Commission's staff liaison will report the results of this investigation to the Commission at a subsequent meeting and may recommend a mutually agreeable alternative plan with respect to the demolition delay.

~~(C) At any time during a demolition delay period, an applicant may request in writing that the Commission may hold a public hearing with notice to lift the delay. The Commission shall schedule a public hearing with notice as specified in 153.09(A).~~

During a demolition delay period, an applicant may request reconsideration of the imposed demolition delay in writing under the following conditions:

- a. 60 days have elapsed since the demolition was imposed.
- b. The applicant has new plans or proposals to present to the commission for consideration.
- c. The applicant has requested to meet with staff and Chair to discuss alternatives

~~(C)(D)~~ (D) The Commission shall schedule a public hearing with notice as specified in 153.09 A, within 60 days of receipt of such written reconsideration request and may lift the delay upon determination that one or more of the following have been met:

1. The Commission is satisfied with an alternative developed in conjunction with the Commission Chair and staff liaison, even if that alternative still incorporates complete or substantial demolition;
2. The Commission is satisfied that for at least 6 months the owner has made continuing bona fide and reasonable efforts to preserve, rehabilitate and restore the subject building, and that the efforts have been unsuccessful; or,
3. The Commission is satisfied that for at least 6 months the owner has made continuing bona fide and reasonable efforts to locate a purchaser to preserve, rehabilitate and restore the subject building, and that the efforts have been unsuccessful; and/or,
4. The Commission determines that there is no reasonable likelihood that either the owner or some other person or group is willing to purchase, preserve, rehabilitate or restore the building and, to

Commented [EJ9]: New text reflecting the discussion at the 6/22 meeting about adding criteria for applicants to request demo delay reconsideration.

Commented [EJ10]: Created new section 153.10 D by separating out previous section C for clarity.

the satisfaction of the Commission.

~~(D)~~(E) At the time of a determination by the Commission to lift the delay, the Commission may require ~~of~~ the applicant to complete one or more of the conditions outlined in 153.09(F).

§ 153.11 FEES

The Commission is authorized to adopt a schedule of reasonable fees to cover the costs associated with the administration of this chapter.

§ 153.12 VOLUNTARY DEMOLITION

- (A) Upon evidence that a building has been demolished in violation of this ordinance, the Commission shall hold a public hearing with notice as specified in 153.09(A) to determine whether a violation has occurred, which may include the need to determine (if such determination has not already been made) that the building is significant. At that public hearing the owner and/or applicant will be given the opportunity to be heard.
- (B) During this hearing, if if the Commission determines that a demolition has occurred in violation of this ordinance, no building permit shall be issued with respect to any work on the premises upon which a significant building has been demolished for a period of up to three (3) years after the date of the completion of the demolition unless the building permit is for the faithful recreation of the demolished building. The Commission, in its discretion, may, at the public hearing, consider a delay period of less than three years, if necessary for the penalty to be proportionate to the violation.
- (C) The property owner shall be responsible for properly securing a building during the demolition delay period to the satisfaction of the Building Commissioner. Should the owner fail to secure the building, the Commission may determine through §153.12(A) and §153.12(B) that a loss of the building (by fire or any other cause) is a demolition in violation of this ordinance.
- (D) A determination that a building has been demolished in violation of this ordinance, and any penalty resulting from the determination, may be appealed to a court of competent jurisdiction.

Commented [EJ11]: Added to clarify this is the violation hearing, not the original demolition delay hearing. There is no process to appeal this violation decision.

Commented [EJ12]: For discussion from 6/22 meeting.

§ 153.13 ENFORCEMENT

The Building Commissioner is further authorized to institute any and all actions and proceedings, in law or equity, as they may deem necessary and appropriate to obtain compliance with the requirements of this chapter or to prevent a threatened violation thereof. The Commission may, in a duly advertised public meeting, request such action of the Building Commissioner.

§ 153.14 EMERGENCY DEMOLITION

Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to derogate the authority of the Building Commissioner derived from Mass. Gen. Laws Ch. 143. However, before acting to demolish a building pursuant to that chapter, the Building Commissioner shall make every reasonable effort to inform the Chair of the Historical Commission of the intention to cause demolition.

§ 153.15 CITY-OWNED BUILDINGS

1. The following process applies for properties owned by the City or any of its political subdivisions:
- viii. Historic commission review. Prior to the demolition of any building owned by the city or any of its political subdivisions, the city administration shall submit information about the demolition to the commission for a non-binding review and comment.
- ix. Comment meeting. The commission shall schedule, at their next available public meeting, for

Commented [EJ13]: Section added to reflect discussion above in 153.03 C to specify process for Commission review of City-owned properties.

the city administration to present the building to be demolished and the purpose and need for the demolition.

- x. Commission role. After the presentation by the city administration, the commission may, within 35 days, issue comments on the demolition. Comments will be provided to the city administration and the city council. Those comments may include, but not be limited to: suggestions for documentation prior to demolition as found in §153.09 (F)

City council action on demolition. The city council may not approve any order, including appropriation of funds, that will permit the demolition of a building owned by the city or any of its political subdivisions, until the building has been submitted for review by the commission and either a) the commission has provided comments to the city council or; b) 35 days have elapsed after the date of the presentation to the commission, with no comments submitted by the commission to the city council.

§ 153.99 PENALTY

Demolition of a building without complying with the provisions of this chapter will, in addition to City Ordinance §35.05 and any other remedies available under City or state law, subject a property owner to a fine of up to \$300 for each day that the violation continues, in addition to any fine that may be imposed for failure to comply with the State Building Code.

Council Member

I hereby certify that at a regular meeting of the City Council for which a quorum was present, the above Ordinance was adopted by a vote of ___ for, ___ against, and ___ present on _____.

Brendan McCarthy, Council Clerk

Mark S. Sideris, Council President