



TOWN OF WATERTOWN
Historical Commission
Administration Building
149 Main Street
WATERTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS 02472

Elise Loukas, Chairperson
David Russo, Vice Chairperson
Thomas Melone, Member
Susan Steele, Member
Marilynne K. Roach, Member
Joseph Panto, Member
Matthew Walter, Member

Minutes: Thursday, January 14, 2021 Remote meeting 7:00 p.m.

Historical Commission Members Present: Elise Loukas, Chair, Thomas Melone, Marilynne Roach, Matthew Walter, David Russo, Susan Steele

Member(s) Absent: Joseph Panto

Public Present: Kenneth Leitner, Samantha Henry, Tara Gohlmann, Michael Rak, Brian Gurney, Debra Shapiro, Amr Setouhi, David Barnett, Bob Bloomberg, Elodia Thomas, Joyce Kelly, Cynthia Westermann, Michael Albano, Gloria Miner, Jason Walsh, Judith Major, Jennifer Price, Brian Guay, Lynda Borucki, Jason, Walsh, Matt Stevens, Amr Setouhi, Marjorie Wayne,

Staff Present: Gideon Schreiber and Larry Field, Senior Planners, Susan C. Jenness, Assistant

Loukas opened the meeting.

1. Minutes- The minutes for the October, November and December meeting were reviewed.

The minutes from the October, November and December meeting were approved.

Motion: Russo made a motion to accept the minutes from the October, November, and December Historical Commission meetings. Melone seconded the motion.

Poll: A unanimous poll was reached approving the minutes from the October, November, and December meeting.

2. **Public Hearing- 256 School Street-** determine if the single-family house and garage located at this address are preferably preserved and if a demolition delay will be imposed. James Nestor, Applicant/Amr El Setouhi, Owner

Loukas recused herself from the proceedings on 256 School St. and Russo stepped in to chair the proceedings.

Kenneth Leitner was the legal representative for the owner Amr. Setouhi. He described the structure as a Victorian that was built in around 1902, and owned by Amr Sethouhi, who purchased the property in October after sitting on the MSL listings since May. The property was purchased for around \$830,000.00 with the intention of becoming the home of the new owner who wishes to be the end user. Leitner explained that the quandary Setouhi has now, is what to do with the house to make it a home he wants to live in. Leitner confirmed there was no buyer who stepped forward to purchase the house to renovate it while on the MSL, and asked if the Historical Commission would invoke a demolition delay that was less than 12 months, if they found the structure preferably preserved.

Commission Questions

Roach asked what house was lacking for Mr. Setouhi, and Leitner said the house lacked nothing, but his client wants to turn it into something he wants to live in. Walter asked if anyone had investigated having someone move the house. He also commented that if they put a delay on the house, they might be able to find someone to buy and renovate it. Melone asked why the owner could not just fix up the house and live in it. Leitner said he wanted a chance to build what he wanted to live in. Steele said she was wondering why someone would buy a house that was under this jurisdiction, in a neighborhood with so many other lovely older homes, if they knew commission members would seek to protect it this home from demolition.

Public Comments

Gloria Miner lives at 277 School St and spoke about how beautiful the neighborhood was and indicated her neighbors would welcome Sethouhi as their new neighbor. Miner's shared that her son lives at 276 School St. She summarized the neighborhood, and it is character by saying there was a lot of history in this house, in the neighborhood and in its connection to the Greek Orthodox Church.

Linda Borucki of 287 School St. spoke about moving into her house in 2001 and how much her family loves all the old houses built in the 1900's. She said she would like to see the house stay.

Deb Shapiro from Adams St. spoke about the Bell Tower Condos and pointed out how that is in keeping with the nature of the historic feel of these old buildings. She said that Jason Walsh would be talking later regarding the historic nature of this house, and that many of these old houses are being bought in this area by people who are not tearing them down. She said they are restoring the historic nature of these houses and buying plaques to hang on the outside of the houses, so that they can share their homes' history with those passing through the neighborhood.

Jason Walsh spoke at length about how prominent the style of this house was on the corner of School and Mt. Auburn St. He said that he was sure there were ways to put effort into finding a solution other than tearing down the house.

A woman named Judith spoke about asking the owners why they would buy a historical house in a neighborhood like this one, to build a modern house. She said she has grown in appreciation of the architectural heritage of Watertown and surely there was someone out there who was interested in preserving this house.

Micha Zack: 272 School St. has lived her for 20 years and said they agreed 100% with his neighbor's comments about the houses and the neighborhoods, and that someone could buy this home and rehab it to live in.

Russo said he agreed with Mr. Walsh's comments and said that preservation of this house could be very successful. He thanked all the speakers for expressing their thoughts and opinions before closing the public comments.

Commission Comments

Melone said there are many people interested in Victorians are they quite in demand and selling high now. He summarized that someone could buy this house who wants to rehab it and then live in it. Steele said that all the people who spoke on behalf of this house spoke so eloquently, and that she had nothing further to add. Walter said the question right here is whether this house is historically significant and preferably preserved. Roache agreed with Walter.

Russo read off the building cards into the record. He said this was the first of the Adams Estate that was subdivided for commuters going into Boston, and that this was the entrance going into the neighborhood.

Motion: Walther made a motion that the house at 256 School St. was preferably preserved. Roached seconded the motion.

Poll: A unanimous poll was reached that the structure at 256 School St. was preferably preserved.

Motion: A motion was made by Steele to impose a 12-month delay on the structure at 256 School St. The motion was seconded by Melone.

Poll: A unanimous poll was taken by the 5 members of the commission participating in the hearing to impose a 12-month delay.

3. **Public Hearing- 190-196 Summer Street-** determine if the detached garage/barn located at this address is preferably preserved and if a demolition delay will be imposed. Ben Stevens, Applicant/Trash Inc., Owner

Ben Stevens spoke and said he purchased the house which sits off the back of Linear Park, and the previous owner had this vinyl sided garage in the back of the lot. He said he was renovating the home now and this accessory structure is in the wrong place to be utilized as it is now. He said he would be happy to create some off- street parking on its site.

His research showed that the house was built in 1925 and there was an expansion of the property in the 1970' when this structure was thought to have been built. He explained that electricity was run from the house outside to accessory structure converting it to a garage/workshop. Stevens found no historic significance of the structure which is now obstructing plans for the back yard he would like to have access to. He said that upon evaluating the materials used to build the structure, it looked like it was built around 1968-1971 and had no historical significance.

Commission Comments

Roach explained that this site was not visible from Summer St. Members of the board all agreed he had done a good job researching the site and thanked him.

Public Comments- N/A

After a brief discussion around the Sanborn maps which indicated it was built in the 1960's a motion was proposed.

Motion: A motion was made by Walter that the structure at 190-196 Summer St. was not preferably preserved. Melone seconded the motion.

Poll: A poll was reached that the structure at 190-196 Summer St. was not preferably preserved.

4. **Public Hearing- 183 Grove Street-** determine if the house (Shick House) located at this address is preferably preserved and if a demolition delay will be imposed. David Barnett, Applicant/Mount Auburn Cemetery, Owner

Tara Gohlmann the Chief Financial Officer of BB & N appeared and said BBN and Mt. Auburn Cemetery were excited to present the last 15 months of work with Watertown. She explained that BBN had an agreement with Mt. Auburn Cemetery to purchase this land that is 3 parcels, and containing some rich history. She clarified that the presentation at this meeting is on the parcel of 183 Grove St. which is the site of the Shick House.

The presentation team included the following.

Jen Price- Head of School at BB&N
Cynthia Westermann- Architectural Historian
David Barnett- President of Mt. Auburn Cemetery
Michael Albano- CFO of Mt. Auburn Cemetery

Cynthia Westermann was the historic preservationist reviewing the project, and explained she would present slides of the history of the Shick House and the site it stood on.

The site of the Schick house is adjacent to Filippello Park neighboring on Coolidge Hill Rd. and it stands next to a 300-car lot that has a 10-year lease cycle. The Shick house was built by an unknown architect for Abner French for use as farmland in an Italianate style which was a splendid building in its time. It was purchased in 1880 by Joshua Stone who did a lot of farming in the area at that time. In 1914 it was sold to the Shick family who lived in the house and leased a lot of the rooms out to farmhands who came to find seasonal work in the area. In 2001 the property was surveyed in anticipation of Mary Schick getting ready to sell the parcel, which was sold to Mt. Auburn Cemetery at that time. The Shick has remained unoccupied since around 2001-2004.

A slide show of the interior was shown of the details and original moldings of the interior of the house. She brought up a structural engineering report that found the house to be in poor to bad condition.

Jen Price the Head of BBN spoke about the fact that she lived in a restored house and had experience with these types of homes and a lot of respect for such structures. She said the school was proposing an athletic complex with 2 fields and 2 field houses which would give access to the residents of the town and school children which it was not scheduled for use by the children of BB & N. She referred to a memorandum of understanding which would give the town residents use of the facilities in the evening with each party to maintain their own parts of the facilities in their own budgets.

Price said Town council agreed to move this proposal forward on 11/24/2020 and the bond closed on January 4, 2021. The closing of the deal is anticipated to be by January 29, 2021.

She said she was happy to give anyone who wished a chance to move the house off the site for them a site visit, and said BB & N hopes to have shovels in the ground by the spring of 2022.

Tara Golhlman spoke once again to say that the school loves working with Watertown. She said that they understand the significance of the house and their team is happy to donate the house to anyone who wishes a chance to move it and restore it.

Commission Questions

Loukas called on members of the commission to speak up. Russo said he was disappointed that the head of BB & N would speak of living in her beautifully renovated old Victorian but seemed to be perfectly okay with demolishing this one because the Cambridge School was looking to move west. Russo apologized for sounding judgmental but said he simply had to voice what he was feeling about this house being reviewed by the Historical Commission for Watertown who he said is after all charged with evaluating the historical and architectural significance of all structure under their jurisdiction.

Price apologized for how her comments may have sounded, and explained she was trying to articulate to members of the HC that members of this team were familiar with the subject of historic preservation.

Commission Questions

Melone asked if there would be any room for the Shick House on the site of the new plans. Gohlmann explained that field house configuration that was designed would not allow for the Shick house to remain. She explained the field configuration was up on an elevation, and that children would be in danger of falling while at play on the fields if the house remained on the site below the field configuration.

Loukas asked what other options they had investigated when planning their field design on this site aside from just moving an old piece of architectural history of Watertown. Loukas said she understood that this house did not fit in with their plans for fields and field houses, but wanted to know what else they thought about doing. She said she wondered if the house could remain on the lot. Gohlmann replied that they had a significant investment in this project, and they would not be able to maintain the field and field configurations with the house still on the site. She said the children would be safer playing with the house on the site, and it would be an extraordinary expense to do anything other than offer the house to be passed on to a buyer who wished to move it off the site. She claimed it would be a hardship to do anything other than try to achieve a plan to give the house away to someone willing to move it.

Public Comments

Bob Bloomberg referred to a letter written by the Historical Society stating that this house is significant on a variety of levels. Bloomberg asked what they would be able to do now that this has been made into a deal. Price responded BB & N would be happy to gift the house to anyone wanting to restore it. She recapitulated that BB & N had leveraged a significant number of resources to make this happen and said if everyone is on the same page, they could find a solution. Bloomberg said the trustees of preservation or other organizations should be included in this conversation. He said he has been reaching out and others are looking for solutions to save this house which is a piece of Watertown history.

Sharon Shumack said that there should be many preservation trustees who would be interested in restoring this house. She also suggested that BB & N should investigate new field configurations. She said she wondered if any of those options had been seriously explored.

Bloomberg said he has been reaching out and there are conversations taking place searching for solutions.

Magoon, said it is important for the town that we all look at every option available to preserve this house. He said he has been speaking with others and would soon reach out to speak with Bloomberg as he has planned to do.

Public meeting closed.

Walter urged fellow commissioners to vote on the significance and then on the vote. Steele said it is significant with all these lovely details so let us find a way. Melone said clearly the house is significant and he referred to the site visit of the commission about 8-10 years ago. Roach said Shick House was definitely significant.

Russo thanked Thomas Melone for all the photos he took of the house back in 1973. He said the site visit was in 2009 and he said he was disappointed the town was part of this demolition delay proceeding. He said he was happy to hear that there is so much interest in helping the Historical Commission find an option for preserving this architecturally and historically valuable structure.

Motion: A motion was made by Roach that the structure of 183 Grove St. was preferably preserved. The motion was seconded by Steele.

Poll: A poll was reached that the 6 members of the commission agreed that structure at 183 Grove St. was preferably preserved.

Russo said he was surprised a school would demonstrate this kind of cultural statement. Walter said he could see David Barnet from Mt. Auburn Cemetery who must have been trying to unload this house over the years. He said he thought if there was a way to do this, it would have been found by now. He also said he thought the playing fields would be a benefit to the town.

Gohlman spoke up and said if the commission did invoke a delay BB & N would appreciate it being shorter than one year. She suggested no more than 8 months so that they could keep the project moving forward on the schedule they had set up.

Motion: A motion was made by Roach to impose a 12-month delay on the demolition of 183 Grove St. Melone seconded the motion.

Poll: A poll was taken that 5 members of the 6 members agreed to impose a 12-month demolition delay.

5. **Public Hearing- 705 Mt. Auburn Street-** determine if the rear one-story portion of the building is preferably preserved and if a demolition delay will be imposed. Michael Rak, Applicant/Spear Street Capital, Owner

Michael Rak of State Street Capitol introduced the proposed plans. Nicole Benjamin would review the first part of the project on the historic preservation aspects, and David Manfredi would review the architectural plans.

Benjamin explained the building had been historically known as the Western Electric Building and that this project proposes demolition that includes only the rear ell portion of the structure which is located where the site would be crossing with the new bike trail. She began with the history of the existing structure which had been developed in the following stages over the years.

1931- The New England Telegraph and Western Half of the building
1958- Expanded Rear Ell used for storage and warehousing activity
1997- Rear Ell altered by removing 20,184 sq. ft.

Benjamin reported that the art deco façade was responsible for creating the rhythm of the structure which created a specific presence seen from Mt. Auburn St.

Manfredi offered an overview of the collaborative process explaining this was a Class B Office they hoped to convert to a Class A Science Technologies Space in a building, in a building that was formerly owned by New England Telephone, giving it a civic presence that is of value to the history of the whole community.

He outlined the major changes on the sides of the structure as followed.

Mt. Auburn St- Elimination of surface parking and drop off lane, and the addition of landscape features.

Grove St- Elimination of black top and addition of green space.

Southeast Corner- Exit of the building- Addition of a new structure to house the mechanics of the building, to lessening the sight and redirecting the noise, for the benefit of all the abutters.

He explained that Elkus Manfredi Architects created the new structural designs and the tree and garden plans had been created by VHB.

Public Comment

N/A

Commission Comments:

Steele complimented the team saying they had done a very sensitive job with the additions and the demolition. Walter stated there was no significance to the portion of the building they were reviewing. Roach said they did a great job. Melone said they did a great job, and he was in favor of moving on. Russo said this was a sensitive site and they had been very sensitive in how they handled it.

Loukas thanked the team for protecting this resource so close to the cemetery.

Motion: A motion was made by Steele that the structure of the rear ell of the building at 705 Mt. Auburn St. was not preferably preserved. The motion was seconded by Roach.

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Poll: A poll was taken, and it was unanimous that the rear ell of the structure at 705 Mt. Auburn St. was not preferably preserved.

6. Updates- Community Preservation Committee by Susan Steele

Due to the length of the meeting, this item was continued.

7. New Business

Due to the length of this meeting, this item was continued.

Motion: A motion was made by Melone at 9:45 to adjourn the meeting. Roach seconded the motion.

Poll: A unanimous vote was reached to adjourn the meeting at 9:45 PM.