



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, February 11, 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: N/A

Public Present: N/A

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

Loukas opened the meeting.

1. Minutes- The minutes for the January meeting were reviewed.

One modification was made of the minutes from the January meeting.

Motion: Roach made a motion to accept the minutes from the January 14, 2021 meeting. Steele seconded the motion.

Poll: A unanimous poll was reached approving the minutes from the January 14, 2021 Historical Commission meeting.

2. Discussion- Demolition Delay Ordinance

Loukas introduced the topic by explaining the current Ordinance protects any building over 50 years of age when a demolition application for substantial demolition of the structure must be reviewed by the Historical Commission. She said that this currently takes place at a public hearing where it is

determined whether the building is preferably preserved, and if so, if a demolition delay will be invoked.

Loukas explained that she has been working with a small group of members of the Historical Commission that includes Walter, who has voiced his opinion that there should be a cut- off date of 1935, for review of all buildings that determines whether the building needs to go before the commission for a public hearing.

Panto interjected that he was not in favor of the cut- off date of 1935, He said he was interested in examining ways that neighborhoods could receive more consideration of historic preservation, and suggested that this could be included in a screening of historic events that may have occurred at a structure.

Loukas explained that she had looked at some model ordinances with her colleagues to gather information about what other communities are doing, and comparing that information with the ordinance in Watertown. She also mentioned that her fellow members conducting this research have been looking at ways to weed out reviews on garages and houses with no significance. She explained that if the suggested cut- off date for all structures of 1935 were in a new ordinance, the HC could have an individual or a small group conduct a preliminary screening of all structures from 1935 onward, to determine whether they warrant a public hearing and review before the commission.

Russo explained that the ordinance was developed back in around 1997 when St. Patrick's Church sought to demolish an 1847 building at the top of the hill. He said at that time, it became apparent something needed to be done to protect the historical and architectural assets of Watertown, or that structures would just be going away.

Walter said he found the model ordinance favorable because it gives more criteria regarding authority that can be used to preserve neighborhoods. He pointed out that many of the structures that are found to be preferably preserved and a delay was invoked, are just waiting out the 1 year, He emphasized that the demolitions are still taking place and they should consider ways to further their reach, using other tools.

Loukas said they should consider they could lose some of their current authority in the process of changing the ordinance. Melone asked to clarify that Town Council could take whatever they liked from the suggested changes and that would become the new ordinance. He pointed out he does not believe neighbors complain about the reviews they do, and that it was the developers who complained about the process. He asked if power had ever been taken away from the commission at other times when changes were proposed to an ordinance.

Roach said she liked the idea raised by Panto to look at the historical events of buildings when looking at the criteria of preferably preserved buildings. Melone said that many of the houses built after the 2nd World War may not appear distinctive but if we had a team to conduct a preliminary screening of the building, we may find someone there is some significant history to the house.

Russo said he was considering if they give up the current ordinance to suggest some changes, they could lose some of what they have to apply now. Walter said they should consider what they have now and ask if they really would be losing anything of value. Walter declared he thought houses that were built in the 1970's did not need to be reviewed before this board but under the current ordinance they would come here. He stated that ordinances should be examined and updated every 20 years or so.

Steele said she was interested in discussing demolition by neglect and said she thought Brookline and Sandwich have ways of dealing with that issue. She said she would investigate communities who are doing something about that issue for the next discussion.

Walter said that he has discussed significant renovation of older buildings with Schreiber on numerous occasions because that is an issue that arises, but may sneak around the current ordinance. He said he felt it could help them to adopt the model ordinance because that would help them with that issue.

Melone pointed out the porch on the house they reviewed on Westminster Ave. He emphasized that they do have some track record of residents who appear before them who take their comments under consideration and it has an impact on what they do when they leave their public hearing.

Russo commented that they had a list of properties with demolition delays and asked if there was anything new to report on the properties on that list.

Loukas asked Field if he had any comments on the houses that were on the list of those that had active demolition delays. He reported that he and Schreiber had reached out to both 56 School St. and 16 Ladd St. Neither of the owners had any plans to consider new proposals that include renovation or restoration. He explained that he and Schreiber met with the owner of 16 Ladd St. and strongly encouraged them to look at some ideas that included at least partial redevelopment. He said that was just not their choice and the applicant said she would wait out the ordinance. They had reached out again just to check in and they still held the same position.

Walter said he was wondering if there was the option to invoke a two-year delay, if that would deter people from buying homes like 256 Common St., knowing they may have to wait out a 2-year delay and potentially lose money in the process.

Loukas asked Field to comment on Walter's comment. Field said it might deter some from buying, but it could also depend on what is happening with the real estate market. He explained that if the value of the house goes up over two years, that might not deter some.

Steele commented that she thinks of the buildings that are in Watertown square and all the older brick buildings in the town. Russo said he agrees and commented he thought the issue tied in with Zoning. The group intends to conduct further research, and the commission intends to discuss this further at a future meeting.

3. **Discussion-** Sites that are under Demolition Delay- This item was discussed in the agenda item for discussing the demolition delay ordinance.

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4. **Updates-** Community Preservation Committee by Susan Steele- Steele reported that the Historic section of the CPA Plan should be completed within another week. She said the CPC hired a graphic designer to get complimentary images and readable material and that they should be finished within 3 weeks. She expects a document to be completed the way it should have been, and that it was a good thing to finish up this work without the consultant after all.
5. **New Business-** N/A

6. **Motion:** A motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Melone. Steele seconded the motion.

Poll: A poll was taken, and it was agreed to adjourn the meeting.