



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, March 11, 2021 Remote meeting 7:00 p.m.

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

Member(s) Absent: Susan Steele

Public Present: Kenneth Leitner, Stephen Corbett, Christopher Bordonaro, Mary Rogers, Ben Stevens, Sophie Shipe, Geoff Melhuish, Steve Winnick, Eric Smiley, John Barrone, Kyle Feldman, Jessica Randolph, Mary Marcus, Fernando Correia, Robert Anesse, Andy Mann, Alan Westman

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

Russo opened the meeting as Loukas recused herself from the first 2 proposals due to professional affiliations.

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

After a review of the minutes of the February 11, 2021 meeting, a motion was made.

Motion: Roach made a motion to accept the minutes from the February 11, 2021 meeting. Panto seconded the motion.

Poll: A unanimous poll was reached approving the minutes from the February 11, 2021 Historical Commission meeting.

2. **Vote-** Re-appointment of Susan Steele to the Community Preservation Act Committee- Susan Steele was not present at the meeting. Russo inquired whether it was appropriate to hold a discussion on this item without Steele being present. Jenness explained that this item was posted on the agenda, and Steele was aware of this item for at least 2 weeks in which time she never reported any opposition to the item on the agenda. Russo agreed that was sufficient information for him and proceeded with holding a discussion with the members of the Commission.

All members of the Commission that were present agreed that Steele has been doing valuable research on the CPC for preserving the historical and architectural assets of the town. All members agreed Steele has been reporting valuable information back to members of the Commission regarding the status of business before the CPC.

Motion: Walter proceeded to make a motion to reappoint Steele for the next term on the CPC. Melone seconded the motion.

Poll: A unanimous poll was taken to reappoint Steele to a second term on the CPC as the representative for the Historical Commission.

3. **87 Common St.-** determine if the house and accessory structure at this address is preferably preserved and if a demolition delay will be imposed. Alan and Anita Teig, Owners/Kenneth Leitner. Applicant

Attorney Leitner appeared on behalf of the owners. He reported the house was a Dutch Colonial Revival, with a peak roof on both sides, with substantial modifications that included changing out the original windows, and the addition of vinyl siding. The owners wish to demolish this structure to build a new one they wish to live in as the end users. They have lived in this house 21 years in this house, in its present condition and wish to have a new style construction to give them the comfort and fir they are seeking to live out their years.

Commission members had no initial questions.

Public Comments

Erica Smiley-83 Common St. commented that the new construction seems conspicuously out of place and the new style replicates an office building, and with the recently expanded meditation center next door, it will change the feel of the neighborhood.

John Barroni- Said that he echoed the comments made by Erica Smiley.

Russo who was chairing the meeting pointed out that this public meeting was not about what will happen in the new building, this hearing is about the historical, architectural character of the current building.

Public Comments Closed

Commission Discussion

Walter stated that if the house had not been altered, it may have some intrinsic value, but the period would be a gray area in his eyes. The portico, siding and window which had been altered significantly impacted his opinion. In the context of the neighborhood, he said this new style fits in well as the surrounding neighborhood has become flexible. He said he found the new design refreshing creative and seemed like a good design.

Melone agreed with Walter, elaborating that this is not a beautiful example of this period. He also liked the new proposal.

Roach said the sweep of the roofline is real 1920's style and what you would see in children's book illustrations, but it has accumulated many alterations over the years.

Panto said this was nothing significant in his opinion, and echoed everything stated by Walter.

Motion: Walter made a motion that the house and accessory structure at 87 Common St. were not preferably preserved. Panto seconded the motion,

Poll: A unanimous poll was reached that 5 out of 1 agreed, the house and accessory structures at 87 Common St. were not preferably preserved.

4. **41 French St-** determine if the 2-family house and 2 accessory structures at this address are preferably preserved and if a demolition delay will be imposed. Mark Caso, owner/Stephen Corbett Applicant

Stephen Corbett introduced himself as a local builder, from 14 Irving Park Rd. who is in the process of purchasing this house. He explained the demolition application pertains to the house and the 2 garage structures on the site. He clarified the house is an 1880's style, and Corbett was not aware of any significant history or of any historical occupants who lived on the premises.

Corbett said he is proposing a Colonial structure with an asphalt shingled roof with vinyl siding, 2 units with 4 bedrooms, 3 baths, that he said will be a nice upgrade for the neighborhood and street.

Russo asked to clarify if a portion of the exterior had been demolished. Corbett said it is in whole condition and occupied by renters since the owners passed away. Corbett said it was in somewhat livable condition on the inside. Russo asked if it had exposure to the market at all. Corbett explained he was friends with the family and had been talking with them about the prospect of selling, the group agreed to hire a realtor who appraised the value, and they negotiated a price.

Public Comments

Kyle Feldman said the natural light provided by the size of the building was valuable, and pointed out there are many kids on the street at the playground up the road,

Commission Comments

Walter said he had a hard time seeing the 1880's quality, he imagined it was not elaborate inside, noting how altered it was with not much left of the original form. He said he would most likely find this house not preferably preserved.

Russo said he could not access the tax record, but the 1850's map depicted the layout of the neighborhood, taking shape between 1850-1860s. He said this was a neighborhood with saltbox type structures, like the ones that formed Bacon St.

Roach said she wished there were ways to examine the structure without taking the house apart.

Walter said the house was on the older side, but said he felt the age was not a good enough reason to find it a significant structure.

Russo said that it was up to members of the Historical Commission to decide that together.

Melone said the existing building is rather nice, but he did not see anything remarkable about it. He said he had mixed feelings when he looked at some of the features. He said he did not find the two-family houses on the street offensive.

Panto said he did not think this house is a direct value to the Town, but he did appreciate the simplicity of this house that would need so much work to fix it up.

Russo said his research showed this would have been a basic workers cottage that served the function of providing housing for workers. He elaborated that these types of homes fulfilled their purposes in their own understated and elegant way.

Melone said he thought they should think about if they would want to delay the demolition, it was found preferably preserved.

Motion: Walter made a motion that the house and accessory structures at 41 French St. were found not preferably preserved. Melone seconded the motion.

Poll: A 3 to 2 vote was reached that the house and accessory structures at 41 French St. were not preferably preserved.

Loukas returned to the meeting as the Chair.

5. **85 Walnut St.** determine if the office building located at this address is preferably preserved and if a demolition delay will be imposed. Phase 3 Real Estate Partners, Owners/Sophie Shipe,

Jessica Randolph reviewed the project proposal with members of the Commission.

She said this building was a single-story warehouse built in the 1930's. In the 1950's it became a two story. In the 1980's it became a three- story structure with the site entrance located on Walnut St. which is primarily residential.

A photo of the building with its entrance onto Walnut St was shown. She explained the new structure would give them a chance to do two important things to improve the Town and the immediate neighborhood. The new structure would allow them to add more green space and to reconfigure the entrance of the site, off Walnut St. to alleviate traffic to and from the building using the residential neighborhood to enter and exit the site.

Proposed is a four-story site for mixed use, office space and life science with the loading dock area mostly tucked inside making it mostly not visible. The mechanics of the building are proposed to be screened in and out of site. The style of the building will be reflective of the Watertown Industrial Heritage

Randolf reported they have worked with neighbors and the Planning Department to find the most beneficial proposal for everyone, and they have located the parking on the inside the stie, with a lot of green space that screens in the parking and emphasized the area will be heavily planted with vegetation. The height of the structure is no higher than the height of the Gables and will blend in well in the surrounding area.

Public Comments

Mary Marcus of 68 Walnut St. said she has been in attendance to a fair number of meetings to discuss the development, and she thinks when this is finished, it will look a lot like a college campus. She reported the developers have gone out of their way to be involved with the neighbors throughout this process, and this proposal will increase the value of her property and the other homes in the immediate area.

Commission Discussion

Walter said this project did not need to come before this Commission, and there should have been some administrative process in place to deal with this. He called for change in the Ordinance regarding the Demolition Delay.

Russo stated that this site had at one point been known in Watertown as the home to the Underwood Devilled Ham Company. He said over the years, it has been used as an ordinary industrial site in Watertown. He said what he really wanted to do was to reflect what this building had once been in the history of Watertown.

Motion: Russo made a motion that the office building at 85 Walnut St. was not preferably preserved. Panto seconded the motion.

Poll: A unanimous poll was reached that the office building at 85 Walnut St. was not preferably preserved.

6. **33 Flint Rd.** - determine if the single-family house located at this address is preferably preserved and if a demolition delay will be imposed. Mary Rogers and Stephen Emery Owners/Fernando Carreiro, Applicant

Attorney Robert Anesse appeared on behalf of the owner, and he said that the Fernando Correia was also present to respond to questions.

He explained this house was built in 1960 as a split-level home and the builder had been contracted to convert the structure to a two-story home for the owners. He explained that when Correia went in to prepare for the permitted work, it became apparent there was some rotted materials that rendered the existing structure unsafe and unsound. Anesse explained that a stop work order was issued and in response to remedy the situation, the correct application for demolition was filed, and now the owners and contractor are here before the commission for a determination on the demolition application. Anesse clarified that the other houses on the street were not comprised of other split levels.

Correio explained that he had been hired to restore this house bringing the split level into 2 levels. He explained he intends to use all cedar clapboards to maintain all wood in the integrity of the original structure. He said this is more suitable plan for the owners to raise their growing family in. He said that unfortunately, as we proceeded with preparing the project, we discovered a lot of unsafe structural material, because of water damage. He said this is what resulted in the stop work order.

Anesse explained that they had no intent to go beyond the 50% allowed by the ordinance, but the condition that was discovered when they began to see the wobbly structure, they had to act to restore the structure to safety. He clarified that the result of the new proposal is going to fit in very nicely, and not be some aberration. He summarized that by granting this application, we will be allowed to complete this unfinished project.

Melone asked for photos of the project that showed the condition that led to the demolition. There were not any photos available. Correio explained that the integrity of the structure was just compromised, and we had to safeguard the building fast in the winter weather that was very windy.

Loukas asked if he had ever demolished a house before without a permit issued by the municipality just for the demolition. Correio said this was just a safety issue that arose.

Russo asked what type of permit was pulled and it was determined it was a remodeling permit. Russo pointed out they had a remodeling permit, not a demolition permit. Russo pointed out first one wall

came down and then another wall and then this was clearly more than a remodeling project. Correiro said this was a very neglected structure and we were trying to make the structure safe.

Commission members discussed that this could be a case of voluntary demolition. Loukas clarified the Commission was charged with determining whether the structure as it had been before this, was preferably preserved. She explained if they find it preferably preserved, the Demolition Delay Ordinance would automatically invoke a two-year delay of any work being done to the building.

Panto asked if the damage was from a condition that was there before they took down any of the structure. Correiro said there was a lot of rot, water damage and rot you could not see until you opened it up, so we thought it was safest just to remove the damage because it was so severe.

Loukas pointed out there was only one remaining wall left.

There were no public comments.

Russo addressed members of the Commission, explaining that they have seen this a few times in recent years, and developers need to be aware there is a process to go through in any town regarding the demolition of a structure. This house was built in 1960 and it was in integrity with a lot of original materials. We can recognize the architectural integrity of this house.

Melone said that if the house came to them for a demolition delay hearing, he did not believe they would object to the demolition. It is a split level, without any historical or architectural value. He said he found the proposed building appropriate for the location.

Loukas said the real question here was if we would have objected to the demolition before this happened.

Walter said putting the possible infraction aside, it is a split-level colonial from the 1960's. This speaks to a fault in our ordinance. It is clear this is not historically or architecturally significant.

Panto said that if this came randomly to us for a hearing, he would not find this house preferably preserved. He said he felt a structure like this should come before them for a review, but he would not find this structure preferably preserved.

Roach said because this was a split level, this was troubling to her because this was built in a period when split levels were significant. She pointed out how much was just taken off.

Motion: Walter made a motion that the house at 33 Flint Rd. was not preferably preserved. Melone seconded the motion.

Poll: A unanimous vote was reached that the house at 33 Flint Rd. was not preferably preserved.

7. **47 Maple St-** determine if the garage located at this address is preferably preserved and if a demolition delay will be imposed. Brusa Construction, Owner/Ben Stevens, Applicant

Ben Stevens was present to review the proposal to demolish the garage at 47 Maple St. He said that the house on the site is a beautiful Italianate structure split into a 2 family, but he was here to talk about the garage/carport. He explained that the remodeling plans are for renovation of the house, converting it to a one family and, to remove the carport creating to make room for parking in the back of the house.

Gideon Schreiber, Senior Planner explained that he had been in touch with the owners about this project and, there are plans to remove a small addition off the rear, but they have not yet submitted the materials to the office yet. Loukas said that they would not even be able to discuss that yet.

There were no public comments.

Russo had no comment, Walter said this project should not be in front of them. Panto had no comment. Roach said she had not feelings about this demolition application. Melone said this is the kind of situation that Walter is pointing out.

Motion: Melone made a motion that the garage at 47 Maple St. was not preferably preserved. Roach seconded the motion.

Poll: A unanimous poll was taken that the garage at 47 Maple St. was not preferably preserved.

8. **133 School St.-** determine if the garage located at this address is preferably preserved and if a demolition delay will be imposed. Avatar Construction/Chris Bordonaro, Applicant

Chris Bordonaro appeared from Avatar Construction to review the proposal to demolish the garage at 133 School St. He explained that he was currently working on an interior remodeling project on this site under a separate permit. He characterized this garage as similar as the one just reviewed. It is about 80 years old, in a dilapidated state that looks unsightly and, there was no historical or architectural significance uncovered in his research.

There were no public comments and after a brief conversation among members of the Commission a motion was made.

Motion: Walter made a motion that the garage at 133 School St. was not preferably preserved. Panto second the motion.

Vote: A unanimous vote was reached that the garage at 133 School St. was not preferably preserved.

9. **23 Elm St-** determine if the three buildings at this site are preferably preserved and if a demolition delay will be imposed. Elm St. Partners, LLC Owner/Geoffrey E. Melhuish, Applicant

Attorney Steve Winnick appeared on behalf of the applicant. He explained the hearing would be about a review of one of the three buildings in this new development that was over the age of 50 years of age. He explained that the project was part of the re-development of the East side of Watertown, taking place on Arsenal Street where development had been approved by the Town, for a mixed-use lab and office space bringing cutting edge life science to Watertown in the fashion of neighboring municipalities Cambridge and Boston.

Winnick stated there is a portion of the new development in the 50 foot no build zone, and 200-foot river front area and the Conservation Commission had issued an order of conditions approving the project. The Planning Board has approved the project and the Zoning Board of Appeals ran out of time to review the project at their last meeting, but are expected to review it at the March 24, 2021 meeting.

He summarized that the Historical Commission is here to protect the significant structures in Watertown from being demolished and this building is not one of the buildings that are intended in the Demolition Delay Ordinance. He said he wished this project could have been reviewed administratively to save everyone so much time.

Andy Mann appeared as the Principal Partner in the development. He said that this was going to be a unique lab/office space project that is guaranteed to be a huge improvement to the East End of Watertown. He explained it has been wonderful working with Watertown in this development, and he has been working in this field with over 20 years of experience. He said he is looking forward to bringing wonderful people into the town through the development of this project.

Geoff Melhuish explained that 2 of the 3 buildings on the demolition application were only constructed around 1978, so the Historical Commission did not need to review those structures for the demolition. He clarified this was only the concrete block building in the rear which had gone through numerous updates of the years, as it housed numerous industrial purposes serving as a pizzeria, bakery, and even a clothing store at one time.

Winnick summarized the review of the application and said a delay is either compelled or it is not. This is a case where the building is clearly not preferably preserved.

Russo asked to clarify application for demolition which cited 3 buildings. Loukas clarified that they were only focusing on the 1 building in the rear, which was over 50 years of age.

Attorney Winnick stated he had respect for the Historical Commission and its function and explained when he purchased his office space across the street from Town Hall, he knew it was a building that held unique architectural features having been built in the 1850's. He said he would never suggest to the town that such a building be demolished in good conscience, but this rear building at 23 Elm St.

was not that kind of building the Ordinance should be protecting. He asked the Commission for a finding of not preferably preserved.

Walter said he agreed with Attorney Winnick about this proposal, that this building is not the type of structure the Town would benefit from finding of preferably preserved. Walter said this is like the Tufts Healthcare application, where you have an applicant with large amounts of money, and everyone is going to listen to them. These scenarios that are created by the ordinance lead to situations where we sit through long presentation which are not necessary.

Russo explained that in his years as a member of the Historical Commission, this is and always has been the kind of Commission, when any application comes before us, the history and architectural truth may not be obvious to everyone. We have a very certain charge in my eyes, and that is to be a crucial safety valve to protect the architectural and historical assets of this town, even if they are not apparent from the first look of a site. That is why we are on this Commission, to try to do what we said we would do, which is protect the unique history of Watertown. If we are not doing just that, I believe I would be failing our ordinance. In terms of this building in the rear at 23 Elm St. I do not believe that we should stand in the way of this application for demolition.

Motion: Walter made a motion that the rear building at 23 Elm St. was not preferably preserved. Russo seconded the motion.

Poll: A unanimous poll was reached that the building in the rear at 23 Elm St. was not preferably preserved.

10. Updates- Community Preservation Committee by Susan Steele- Steele was not present at the meeting to give an update. She is expected to make an update at the next scheduled meeting.

11. New Business- Loukas said she had new business to address regarding David Russo, member of the Historical Commission since 1999, serving as Chair and Vice Chair for many years.

Russo explained that he had decided to resign from the Historical Commission at this time. He said he has taken this position seriously over the years, and seen himself as an advocate of all the buildings that are reviewed by the members of the Historical Commission. He explained he has become sad that there is a lack of tools to use during the meetings, to do his job in the fashion he has had in mind.

He closed his update by saying the meetings have taken a toll on him, and it is now time to watch the process from afar for a change.

Motion: Walter made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9: 00 PM. Melone seconded the motion.

Poll: A unanimous poll was reached to adjourn the meeting at 9:00 PM.