



TOWN OF WATERTOWN

Historical Commission

Administration Building

149 Main Street

WATERTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS 02472

Elise Louikas, Chair
David J. Russo, Vice Chair
Marilynne K. Roach, Member
Susan Steele, Member
Thomas Melone, Member
Joseph Panto, Member
Matthew Walter, Member

Minutes: Historical Commission Meeting, Thursday April 9, 2020 at 7 PM remotely by Zoom Link <https://zoom.us/j/454877888> and dial in number 1 (646) 558-8656

Members Present- Elise Loukas, Chair, David Russo, Vice Chair, Marilynne Roach, Thomas Melone, Susan Steele, Joseph Panto, Matthew Walter

Members Absent: N/A

Town Staff Present: Steve Magoon, Assistant Town Manager, Gideon Schreiber, Senior Planner, Susan Jenness, Assistant

Others Present Remotely: Richard Doherty, Jody Zussman, Dan Campagna, Councillor Piccirilli

(adopted 6.11.2020)

Loukas opened the meeting and briefed all attendees of the following information regarding the format of the meeting.

The Historical Commission of the City known as the Town of Watertown will hold a public hearing on Thursday, April 9, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. In accordance with the Governor's Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G. L. c. 30A, § 20, relating to the 2020 Covid-19 emergency and to avoid group congregation, this meeting will only have remote opportunities for participation with public access provided as follows:

- 1. The meeting will be televised through WCA TV (Watertown Cable Access Television).**
- 2. Public comments may be provided during the meeting utilizing virtual meeting software for remote access. <https://zoom.us/j/454877888>**

For those interested in attending the meeting by phone, call 1 (646) 558-8656 and then enter the Meeting ID 454-877-888#. Alternatively you can send email comments to gschreiber@watertown-ma.gov to be read at the meeting.

1. **Public Hearing Continuation- 88 Galen St.-** to review the demolition application for a 1 family home built in 1948 including accessory structures. Jody Zussman, Applicant/ Galen St. Development, LLC, Owner

Mr. Doherty was present with Ms. Zussman for the hearing that was continued for a site visit to occur at the April meeting. Doherty reported he had gone on a site visit with Schreiber and Melone and he was surprised at the poor condition of the interior of the structure. He explained that there had been two squatters who lived on the premises and had broken windows. He said there had been substantial mold and asbestos removal, and the rear of the house that was an addition became open to the elements, creating more damage to the structure.

Doherty said he was very appreciative of the historical review process and was deeply appreciative of the town staff and commission members time, but he saw no historical value of the building that was taken over to create a right of way into a new development. He summarized that he saw this as a non-descript building with a poor interior that had little to no period detail, that a lot of money was paid for.

Commission Comments

Russo thanked Doherty for his comments and asked if he had any reports from the Building Inspector or an engineer that speak to the conditions of the building. Doherty replied he did not contemplate needing reports. Russo asked if there was a chance of moving the building or if he had any ideas for re-use. Doherty said that reuse would be expensive and offered to show photos of the inside of the building taken by Schreiber.

The photos depicted a roof rotted through the rear, where some floor and ceiling tiles were removed to clear the site of asbestos. Vandalism was pointed out by Doherty caused by squatters who took over the building. Schreiber pointed out daylight streaming in on all sides of the structure, and described the floor as very wet and moldy.

Loukas and Russo asked when the asbestos removal was done. Doherty explained that they closed on the house around September 2019, and the asbestos removal took place in December or January. Schreiber pointed out there was substantial wood damage and that ended the questions for the applicants.

Commission Discussion

Russo brought up the research that was done by Roach from a 1916 Sanborn map-Sheet 29. It depicted that the town had renumbered the houses and in 1904 this house was #70. In 1916 it was a grocery store documented by Sanborn Insurance. Russo explained that the house that had burned down next store a few years ago, was a side house and part of the Owen Murray plot. Nora Murray the wife of Owen was born in Ireland and said that this building was a saloon at one time that became a grocer until 1919. He said that this was an outbuilding that served a commercial purpose at one time according to the O.H. Bailey Map of Watertown, 1879.

Melone spoke on the site visit and said there were steps to take down into the basement and he was surprised by the condition. He said the many walls and ceilings had been taken down, and there was no toilet or sink in the bathroom. He said that if anyone was to use this building it would have to be completely gutted, and he pointed out that the ground slopes behind, so there would be no place to park for a commercial use. He explained that the extent of restructuring would be so great but maybe someone could buy the front part and move it. He said he was not sure they should put a delay on the property.

Roach said she thought that the front of the building might be re-used, but not in this location.

Russo said the property would need to be gutted but he was hoping that someone could reuse it for commercial purposes. Melone reminded him of the slope in the rear of the building.

Walter thanked Roach and Russo for their research and agreed the house was an interesting and old building. He said in this situation he did not think it was enough to justify a delay. He said he did not see any aspects he would want to preserve, while he did say it is part of the fabric of the town that would be missed. He said that Russo's suggestion would be better in other circumstances.

Panto said he thought this was an interesting house with potentially interesting stories, and he appreciated Roach and Russo's research. He pointed out that to reuse this house would mean bringing it down to the bones and in doing so, the essence of the house would be lost.

Steele agreed with Pantos and Walter and said she wished they found out about this house before it was irreparably damaged. She said she would love to have had pictures of the details before it got into this condition. She said that while she wished it could have been preserved, she would not likely seek a delay on it.

Roach said this was one of those humble buildings that gets overlooked, and unfortunately this commission usually does not see these houses until they are in bad shape.

Russo said this is what was prevalent in Watertown during this era, and it is a last structure of a particular type. He said he was always interested in working with applicants to take a step back if it is in the best interest of the fabric of the town.

Loukas pointed out that one of the things this commission does is to work with the applicant and explore if there is something they can do to preserve the history. She pointed out this was part of the last 140 year history of Watertown, and I wish that all this damage never occurred. She said she was interested in asking the applicant if they could work with the front piece of this house as a way of saying to Watertown that they are seen and their history is important.

Motion: Melone made a motion that the property was preferably preserved. Steele seconded the motion.

Vote: a 5 to 2 vote was reached to preferably preserve the building. Panto and Walter voted the structure was not preferably preserved.

Steele said she did not believe they should impose a delay, but the developer should make an attempt to preserve the structure in some way.

Russo said they should delay the demolition as a window of time for options to be created. He said he was sorry the building was left open by the developer and the commission should not allow the demolition to occur as a reward.

Walter said he thought the roof was a long-term problem created by the previous owner.

Melone said that maybe they could determine some use for the front of the building that could be incorporated into the plans.

Roach said she agreed it was worth using the time to think about incorporating part of the front into the design.

Steele said she had no further comment.

Magoon pointed it that while the vote had not officially been completed, he suggested giving the developers time to review options for incorporating reuse of parts of the structure into their developing plans.

Loukas asked Doherty if they would like an opportunity to evaluate what could be done. He replied that he could try to work with this space that was meant to be access to the rest of the development.

Russo said he would be in favor of waiting until next month to continue the discussion about opportunities that are available. He said he would also like to know more about what the Town Building Inspectors thought about this this situation.

Motion: Russo made a motion to continue the discussion in a hearing until the May Historical Commission meeting. Roach seconded the motion.

Vote: A vote was reached to continue the hearing until the May meeting.

Doherty offered that he could get access to the interior of the building for anyone who wanted to get inside to see it.

2. Discussion Items

- a. Proposed letter of support for a grant, Mount Auburn Cemetery, Washington Tower. Loukas requested staff to continue this item until the next meeting.

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- b. Section 106 Letter- World Tech regarding Mass. DOT proposed project to rehabilitate Mt. Auburn St.- After a brief discussion, Russo said that not nearly enough information came though in the letter to the commission that helped them to understand the scope of the project. Russo asked staff to obtain additional material in order that members could have a conversation about the substance of the project the next time they met.
 - c. Update on HPA Awards 2020- After a brief discussion Russo suggested keeping the nomination process open for the HPA 2020 Awards as there might be potential for holding the ceremony in the fall around September.

Motion: Russo made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 PM. Roache seconded the motion.

Vote: A unanimous vote was reached to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 PM.