

**Minutes
Watertown Historical Commission
Thursday,
April 9, 2015
Lower Hearing Room
7:00 p.m.**

Historical Commission Members Present: David J. Russo, Marilynne K. Roach, Elisabeth H. Loukas, Susan Steele, Thomas Melone, J.B. Jones, Donald S. Berg

Member(s) Absent: N/A

Staff Present: Christopher J. Hayward, Susan C. Jenness (Minutes adopted 6-11-15)

Russo chaired. The meeting opened at 7:00 p.m. with a description of the public hearing process by Russo.

- 1) Public Hearing - 65 Grove Street-Request to demolish a 2 story brick warehouse at the rear of the existing building and one story 2 bay metal garage constructed in approximately 1950. Proposed are additional office space and a parking garage. Cresset Grove, LLC, Applicant/Owner.**

Edward Nardi appeared for Cresset Grove, LLC- 3 story 134,000 sq. building which housed GE Ionics and has been vacant for approximately 4 ½ years. He stated that this project would be a significant rehab of the existing building. There were two parts of this demolition for review at this hearing.

Part One: Demolition of the 2 story brick warehouse at the rear of the existing building to make way for a proposed garage structure adjoined to the back side of the office building space.

Commission Discussion: Jones stated that he saw nothing that seemed to be of historical significance about the building.

Public Comments: N/A

Motion: Berg motioned that the building is not preferably preserved. Melone seconded the motion.

Vote: A unanimous vote is reached and the building is voted not preferably preserved.

Part Two: Demolition of the galvanized 2 bay steel shed in the rear of the building that had been used for storage such as lawn cutting equipment.

Public Comments: None.

Commission Discussion: Steele said that she did not think that the building was preferably preserved.

Motion: Berg motioned that the 2 bay steel shed is not preferably preserved. Steele seconded the motion.

Vote: A unanimous vote is reached and the shed is voted not preferably preserved.

Public Hearing is closed.

- 2) **Public Hearing - 570 Arsenal Street-Request to demolish a service building built in approximately in 1948, housing the Charles River Saab Dealership. Proposed is the Marriot Residence Inn, a six story hotel. Boylston Properties, Applicant/Owner.**

Jeff Heidelberg appeared for Boylston Properties.

Presentation of the Plans.

The property is the old Saab Dealership at intersection of Arsenal and Elm St. that we are proposing to demolish and replace with a 148 room Hotel Structure area located at the north western end of the lot which was added onto the original structure in 1986.

There is a parking area around an existing 3 story home and the Saab dealership currently at the site.

Melone questioned if the bulk of the building is being demolished. Heidelberg responded that the whole building would be going.

Jones asked where the project stood on zoning. Heidelberg responded that the project had been approved by Zoning and this was the last stop.

Berg asked if they had spoken to the residents from the three decker home and if there was any discussion about buying that property. Heidelberg answered that there was and that this was not an option at this time.

Loukas stated that this will be a vast improvement.

Public Comments: N/A

Motion: Jones motioned that the building is not preferably preserved. Roach seconded the motion.

Vote: A unanimous vote is reached and the building is voted not preferably preserved.

Public Hearing is closed.

**3) Public Hearing - 92 Hovey Street-Request to demolish a single family home with a detached 2 car garage to build two separate two family homes.
Dellaire Property Holding, LLC Applicant/Owner.**

Richard LeClair, Esq., appeared to represent Dellaire Property Holding, LLC in the application for a demolition permit for this single family home built sometime around 1900.

Presentation of the Plans

The plan is to divide the current plot into 2 and to build 2 separate 2 family homes. The plans contain some elevations where the more prominent architectural details will be kept such as the high peaks.

- a. This current building is tired.
- b. It is not economically feasible to rehabilitate the current structure.
- c. It was not in the business model when the owner purchased it.
- d. There are pictures of the interior which are made of materials made of asbestos, lead paint, other materials we cannot work with.
- e. It is on that note we seek to demolish the entire building and build two brand new structures.

Russo asked if the prominent features will be removed and built in and LeClair replied that they plan to incorporate the features into the plans and the current proposed plans will meet all requirements of zoning going forward.

Russo began a discussion on retaining the current structure and subdividing the lot. LeClair replied that the lot line will end up going through the existing building. Russo and Berg suggested it could go some other way by taking a jog in another direction. Russo mentioned that it might be an unusual shaped lot but we have had petitions create unusual lines in the past. He restated that his question was "have you thought about that option?" LeClair responded no.

Steele asked if the owner of the house was present and LeClair said that his son had an operation so he was not able to be here. Steele stated she assumed he is a developer who turns houses. LeClair replied no he is a home builder. He builds custom homes, Dellaire Property Holdings.

Loukas stated she was seeing some really good bones in the pictures he passed around. LeClair replied that economically it would be cost prohibitive to rehab this building and that this is not what people are looking to buy.

Russo stated that this house never made it to the MSL and must have been purchased privately. He asked if the owner be willing to put the property on the MSL market it publically to make his money back. LeClair did not think so.

Russo suggested that the house could be saved if they shift the lot line more towards Hovey Street or if you left the lot line in place.

Jones stated that the commission is thinking of the house itself and that this is a very important corner and that he did not think this was a good balance here. He stated that this is taking a single family home here and morphing 2 lots together into 2 separate 2 family homes.

LeClair referred to the photos of the abutters and said that they are clearly 2 family homes. This house might have some architectural features that are historical looking, but, the new plan is more consistent with some of the development of the neighborhood.

Loukas asked if they have had an engineer come and survey the home for structural soundness. LeClair responded that his client never intended to work with the house but he offered to take members of the commission on a tour of the house that had not inspected for structural structure.

Public Comments:

Maria Saiz-She is resident and owner of 83 Hovey St. for the last 16 years with her wife. She loves the neighborhoods' character and charm created by so many of the houses. She and her wife went around the neighborhood and knocked on doors because this street represents her ideas of Watertown and what she loves about it. She talked about her neighbors next door and others on the street too who brought their old houses all the way down to the studs and rebuilt it into the character consistent on the street. She said that this house has potential to be rebuilt consistently with the other homes on the street. She knew of a neighbor who had been interested in buying it as well.

She read a letter from Daryl and Pamela Griffin who had to be out of town from 804 Belmont St. into the record delay on the demolition request so that the home can be saved and a solution that is in the best interest of neighborhood both socially and historically can be found.

Ms. Saiz also met with an assistant town planner to discuss options for 92 Hovey St. or which there were a few.

Mary Kelly-806 Belmont St-She bought her home in 1975 and gutted and rebuilt it in consistency with the character of the street. She passed a picture of her home up to share. She stated that 2 separate 2 family condominiums built would mean the parking of around 8 cars on that lot and decrease the integrity of the neighborhood.

Arlene and Frank Ruisi -79-81 Hovey Street. Mrs. Ruisi's family bought her house with a gorgeous yard in 1957. She knows the Plunket family who renovated their home in the grace of its' historical character. She said her family could have built a second home on our lot too in accordance with the zoning laws, but didn't because we cared about our

neighborhood. She knew the original owners of the house the Fulton's and said that they never would have allowed this to happen. She requested a delay so that we preserve the character of the neighborhood she has called home since 1957.

April Bradshaw-108 Harnden Ave- She has been a resident of Watertown for 10 years. More of her neighbors wanted to come but could not on the short notice. She thanked Ms. Saiz for knocking on doors to inform alert the neighbors. She is a realtor for historically designated properties and said there are plenty of contractors who do preservation construction. She feels the trends are changing and in Back Bay neighbors who live in condos are buying their neighbors units and adjoining them to bring brown stones back to their historic character. She said this home has huge potential to be saved and rehabbed by the right contractor.

Tia Tilson- She said you have heard a lot of passion and testimony about people who renovated to maintained historical and architectural detail. Please maintain the historical character of the neighborhood and new home.

Vincent Piccirilli-. This neighborhood has some of the big lots on it. Our own house was a wreck, but we took down vinyl siding, took out asbestos and removed lead paint. My kids went to schools here in the neighborhood. It is possible to buy houses and tear them down and build new ones in place but we have become increasingly interested in the conservation and preservation of Watertown over the last few years. The developer of 65 Grove Street who was just reviewed is going to creatively reuse the building by tearing down the outside of the building and building over that.

The town has an interest in doing this to preserve some industrial or agricultural part of our history. If we take the lot to the west of this one that was a 1 family house, it was developed into a 2 family house that is very creative re-adaptive use of a historical building. He urged for creative and re-adaptive use of the building and compared this house with what a nice 2 family home it could be and that it could also make them good money while also taking into consideration the rest of the neighborhood and town.

John Kelly and Mary Kelly- 804-806 Joint family letter opposing the project in the form of a written letter. Joanne Kelly Arsenault from 808 Belmont St, Kathleen Kelly Lapierre at 810 Belmont St., and William Lapierre from 810 Belmont St. none of whom could attend the meeting because of short notice and unalterable plans. They wanted to oppose the demolition of 92 Hovey Street and urged the town to take measures to preserve the historical character of the neighborhood.

Public Hearing Closed.

Mr. Leclair returned to the podium. He states that while this house may be old, there is no historical value to the home and if the project were to get delayed for a year to discuss options, there would be no dialogue. He clarified that the owner has no intentions to do anything other than what was in the proposed he plans. He reiterated that what his client

proposed was much nicer than what was there and what people would be willing to pay money for today.

Arlene Ruisi returned to the podium and stated she could have left Watertown, she could have sold, but stayed in this neighborhood because she loved it. She reminded everyone that she has been living on this street for 58 years and has her pride in Hovey Street. Putting this house on this corner will change the character of the neighborhood so it no longer looks like Watertown.

Russo questioned the agent what is on the hearing tonight. Home building, garage and but not the shed-The agent informs Russo that there will need to be an application to demolish the shed filed and then that would be heard next month.

Commission Discussion

JB Jones stated that Mr. LeClair's client needed to come talk to us and work with us. LeClair replied that even if the lot is not sub-divided this building is going to be knocked down.

Loukas asked if they had sat down and did figures on what it would cost to rehab the building and LeClair replied that I can ask him to put together a spread sheet. She then urged him to go look at the corner of Spring and Summer at the home the commission tried to save but the contractor wanted to knock it down. She said a monstrosity was built there and it is still sitting on the market. We have a history of helping people with rehabbing.

Berg said that he does this work himself and knows what it costs to do this kind of rehabbing. We try to have the dialogue so that we can preserve the character of the homes here in town.

Russo read some historical details about the first owner. He discussed that the house has a lot of land around it with a nice lawn which is an important marker of the property and the neighborhood around it. You can see how this neighborhood developed and how it works. If you put the two family homes here on this property, this will be a significant change.

JB Jones said that the public should know that there is a wave of contractors finding homes that never get listed on the MLS and there is this new wave of development occurring. He said Mr. Piccirilli raised good point that there is a scale of these neighborhoods and now with this zoning evolution this is able to occur. This does not strike me as a good way to do this. It is disappointing that this developer would not even entertain a discussion about this.

Steele stated that she feels strongly about protecting our heritage here in Watertown to help make sure these types of situations do not occur.

JB Jones said that with a little different design advice, you could get a better plan, then he, Melone and Berg discussed the possibility of an addition and or building a second home on the lot.

Steve Magoon, Director of Community Development and Planning and the Assistant Town Manager rose offered that if the applicant would meet with the agent and continue the vote on this matter for a month, and maybe some commission members could visit the house and we could engage in some discussions here to create some solutions and options here.

Russo and the commission discussed alternatives on handling the vote.

Motion-Melone motions to continue the vote for one month. Loukas-Seconded the motion.

Vote-A unanimous vote is reached to continue this vote until next month.

Public Hearing Closed.

- 4) **Old Business - Steve Magoon, Watertown Community Development and Planning Director/Asst. Town Manager discussion on meeting with City of Somerville Planner to speak in regards to the measuring/preserving character of the Town's neighborhoods.**

Steve Magoon took the podium to discuss the meeting he attended with the City of Somerville planner George Proakis that was arranged by and attended by Susan Steele. Also present at that meeting was City Council Member Tony Palomba. Magoon invited Susan to begin the discussion on what she thought was important at that meeting.

Steele stated that so much has been going on in Somerville for so long that it was hard to get to how they all determined what matters in Somerville.

She mentioned zoning reform and she mentioned a series of whole 3 day community charrettes so that participants can figure out what they like and do not like about the neighborhoods. She also said that "Measuring What They Care About" came about as a result of a HUD Grant that allowed two students to go around and survey the community.

Neighborhood Conservation Districts came up at the end of the meeting. If there was something we could put into place but that the historical commission would not start this up.

Magoon said he wanted to offer a couple of things about the meeting and expressed his interest in hearing what direction the commission would like to go.

He said that he thought that Neighborhood Conservation Districts offers opportunity for protection without giving as onerous an appearance as a Historic Preservation District which Watertown had tried but did not work.

Magoon discussed Design Guidelines which he said does a lot of what talked George Proakis talked about in "Measure What you Care About" by crafting a version of some form based code that would address particular areas. He said Watertown's first version of Design Guidelines were meant to address larger projects but that there was always an intention to do the same for smaller projects. He summarized that while zoning tells you what you can put in your box that you build, the guidelines are designed to take you beyond and give you a process that deals with what you are building and how that will affect those around you and the environment.

He said that while there was a lot of community engagement in Somerville, there is still a lot of disagreement between RA & RB zones and that there were very little changes made in the zoning.

Tony Palomba of the Watertown Town Council also attended the meeting and rose and opened by thanking Susan Steele for getting this meeting together with two very busy leaders in planning.

He said that much of what has happened in Somerville was federally funded.

He said that Neighborhood Conservation Districts were discussed and were something he thought could work here in Watertown. He said that Somerville is a much different town than Watertown so we might not want to do 3 day long charrettes to start. As an alternative he suggested getting the Design Guidelines out to the neighborhoods and starting a Pilot Program to address some of the issues here, and using interns and graduate students in the process as well.

Jones added in that it might be helpful to get the Hersom Street folks together for a Pilot Program whom he described as a good size, cohesive group who did their homework. Other commission members mentioned that the Hovey Street folks should be considered as well.

Vincent Piccirilli rose and he urged everyone to recognize preserving the neighborhoods as we have seen tonight has to do with protecting the homes that anchor the neighborhoods now. He emphasized protecting the homes from being sold and developed into something that does not resemble the historical character of the neighborhoods as we know them.

Magoon said that the late summer early fall should give us enough time to explore the Pilot Program idea for the Neighborhood Conservation Districts and to look into getting some interns and students from some graduate schools to work with us on this.

5) Invitation to Comment-Proposal to locate Verizon communication antennas at the building at 124 Watertown St. - EBI Consulting.

Russo agrees to have the agent respond to the request to comment with a letter he had written for a former request.

Meeting is adjourned at 10:00 PM.