

**Minutes
Watertown Historical Commission
Thursday,
May 14, 2015
Lower Hearing Room
7:00 p.m.**

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

Member(s) Absent: N/A

Staff Present: Christopher J. Hayward, Susan C. Jenness

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

1) Public Hearing – 92 Hovey St –Hearing Continued from April 9, 2015- 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.

Russo requested a status report from Agent Hayward on discussions which were expected to take place between the owner and his representatives, town planners and officials when the April 9, 2015 public hearing was continued.

The Agent reported that the owner modified the proposed plans during a meeting with Town Planners which call for picking up the building and moving it to the west plot. The house will remain intact with the exception of the demolition of the kitchen portion of the house. The architectural features of the house will remain intact and an addition will be built on the rear of the building.

Russo clarified that the commission is no longer hearing a demolition delay issue and stated that no vote will need to take place on the demolition of the house.

Mr. LeClair, counsel for the owner rose and reviewed the following events.

- a) Last month the commission met for a public hearing and refused Mr. LeClair's proposed project submitted for a public hearing at last months' meeting.
- b) Since then his client has met with the planning staff and created the modified plan which includes demolishing less than 50% of the building which is no longer under the jurisdiction of the Historical Commission (HC) Ordinance.
- c) A reasonable compromise was reached for all parties.

The commission discussed the procedural issues at hand.

Jones clarified that the board does not vote on this project but what needed to be done is to approve a renewed motion on the garage. He clarified for counsel and for the public that the contest at the previous months hearing was not about simply saving this house. He restated that in addition to the house, the contest was about was keeping the house on the corner which the commission saw as an anchor for the whole neighborhood.

Russo asked the Agent if he could follow up with the Building Department about whether or not the garage will be condemned in order to resolve all the issues here for the HC. Mr. LeClair asked the commission to approve the modified project to avoid any future dispute.

Public Comments:

John Kelly the owner from 804-806 Common Street stepped up for comment. He said he was reading his concerns on behalf of other members of the neighborhood as well. He spoke about a large tree of which 99% of the trunk is on his property and 1% is on the property line of 92 Hovey St. He said that the tree is an important part of his property and he will not allow it to be taken down.

He further stated that if the project was allowed to go forward to build two separate two family homes on this lot he would be looking out of his house into a parking lot with a big square building that had very little open space. He suggested that the owner build 2 units inside the building and do a really nice job which would give just as much value to the project as the four units.

He closed by stating that the tree is on his property and he will not allow it to be removed and that he would take further action to protect the tree as well.

Assad Hamad the owner from 86 Hovey St. He said he came here out of sympathy for the whole street when he said he was against the four units going into the lot at 92 Hovey Street.

He reported that he asked the former owner not to sell to a contractor. He begged the town not to allow the 4 units to be built on this lot of land. He closed by asking for a better proposal to keep the neighborhood in the character it is in now.

Mary Kelly the owner from 806 Belmont St- She pointed out that the builder has paid no taxes to Watertown ever. She said she does not understand how a builder can come into Watertown and build four units such as was proposed here without ever paying any taxes. She closed by asking what the benefit of paying taxes in Watertown was.

Maria Saez the owner from 83 Hovey-She stated that she really appreciated the commission for putting the hearing off for a month and that she appreciated the planning department for meeting with the applicant and urging the owner to go in a more positive direction. She said there are still pieces of this that are very positive and also negative. Moving the house to subdivide the lot is not solving the problem. If we had two houses

on that lot, the house may not need to be moved, trees would not be destroyed, and the sense of the neighborhood would not be as affected.

She stated that when the house is moved, some of that excellent detail may be significantly damaged. She felt strongly that the owner needs to go back to the planning department for more meetings. She feels that the owner should not make money at everyone else's expense.

She closed by stated that we need better Design Guidelines here in town and one day we will have them.

Public hearing Closed.

Commission Discussion

Russo stated that the new plan called for no voting from the commission.

Berg stated that we had hoped to save this house and we have accomplished that.

Jones pointed out that this is all a zoning issue.

Roach clarified for all who might need it that because this whole building is not being taken down, this commission has no jurisdiction over this matter. The commission has no say in these issues here tonight because this is about zoning and we have no jurisdiction on that or over the trees.

Motion: Berg-Motioned that the garage is not preferably preserved. Jones-seconded the motion.

Vote: Unanimous. The garage is not preferably preserved.

2) Minutes- March 12, 2015 Minutes-Minutes Approved

3) Single Family home demolitions in Two Family Zoned areas discussion

Steele had submitted some notes to the conservation office which were emailed out to members for sharing although the documents were not present that night. She worked from her memory in her discussion.

She shared that one thing that came out at a couple of meetings is that communities, even single streets can get together and create Neighborhood Conservation Districts. Some neighborhoods have a lack of interest in the beginning of forming one, but over time, others decide to join up.

Steele reviewed some maps during her presentation and remarked about some recommendations zoning could be changed.

Jones pointed out that while you can change the zoning, it still does not stop developers from coming in and looking for the lots that are desirable to develop on.

Steele reviewed some maps printed out by the planning department and highlighted the single family homes on lots over 5000 sq. ft. because those are the homes that are susceptible to being bought out by developers. She said there were quite a few.

Jones pondered what the answer could be and mentioned that there are town council members who are sympathetic to the issue.

Steele stated that she believed the answer is in meeting with larger groups to discuss these issues. She mentioned measuring what you care about; what you value; what you do and do not want in your neighborhoods. She reminded the group that Steve Magoon, the Town Planner and Assistant Town Manager had said that late spring and early summer would be a good time to begin looking towards starting some public meetings.

Berg asked the group about how long the process took for Beacon Park to do what they did. Russo recalled it took about one year.

Steele urged that it might be a great idea for others to join in helping Russo inventory the houses and while we are at it, we can meet some of the neighbors and create opportunities to educate the public and build additional awareness. She said they could also plan to work with Steve Magoon as he makes movement towards developing meetings about Historical Preservation that are opened to the public.

Russo stated that they should focus their efforts in alignment with the Comprehensive Plan which has one mission designated for the preservation of the character of the neighborhoods. Both he and Steele agreed that the Design Guidelines are meant to serve the purpose of preserving the quality of the neighborhoods.

Steele passed out a document that she became familiar with through the Comprehensive Plan Review that was used to guide the processes of achieving the tasks associated with creating the plan. She pointed out that under Historical and Cultural Resources and Natural Resources, the Historical Commission was named. She discussed the details of the categories which would lend themselves to making movement towards the goals of the Comprehensive Plan. She suggested that the commission members continue to assist the planning staff and contribute to the task of inventorying the houses as discussed.

4) New Business-Agent Report-

The agent discussed a resident who had hired a contractor to demolish his garage and build a larger one in place. The resident had been personally directed by the Building Inspector

Kenneth Thompson to come and see the Conservation Office and that a public hearing would need to be held to get approval from the Historical Commission before the demolition could occur.

The garage was erroneously demolished by the contractor without the consent of the owner. The resident expressed remorse and the town fined the resident and banned him from building anything in the town for the next two years in accordance with the authority of the Town's Ordinance.

The Agent discussed the potential outcomes for resolution to the matter. He informed the commission members that it looked very possible that a public hearing would be held on the matter in the month of June.

Meeting is adjourned at 8:30 PM.