

Minutes
Watertown Historical Commission
Thursday, July 12, 2012
Lower Hearing Room
7:00pm
Adopted September 13, 2012

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

Staff Present: Christopher J. Hayward, Daphne M. Collins

Public Present: See attached Sign-In Form

David Russo chaired. The meeting opened at 7:00p.m.

1. Public Hearing – Demolition Permit Review – 27 Quincy to demolish a 1-car detached garage not to be replaced. James Muldoon & Barbara Ryan, owners; Stephen Corbett, applicant.

James Muldoon and Barbara Ryan are proposing to demolish the existing single family and the existing deteriorated single garage to be replaced by a 2-family structure to accommodate their expanded family. The property was built in 1926-1927 and owned by the family since 1954. The neighborhood consists of other 2 family structures. Steele found the property to have no historic merit.

Vote: Jones moved to find 27 Quincy Street not preferably preserved. Berg seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

2. 917 Belmont Street – Demolition Permit Review – 917 Belmont Street to demolish an 1840 Greek Revival style educational building for green space. Walker School, owner; Steven Tannenbaum, applicant.

Steve Tannenbaum reported that the 1840 Greek Revival structure was home to the Beacon School, a school for 60 students. He informed that he had applied for a partial demolition in 2006 for an intended addition. However, with the 2007 economic downturn the school was unable to raise the funds for the project. He was asking for a demolition of the entire property due to the lack of success for raising funds to save the building. He indicated that there was no replacement project intended. He noted that he had checked into tax credits and grants, but it was too costly to restore the building. He was open to removal and relocation of the structure. He did not believe the school could raise funds for student programming and the cost of the restoration. He noted that the building has been kept closed and unused without repairs. He indicated that the building is inspected once a month and that the water pipes had burst damaging the ceilings on the first floor. Loukas inquired why was the water left on when the building was vacant.

Tannenbaum informed that the application was to demolish the building for green space and the building footprint would be left vacant. There were plans for the school to locate classroom trailers on site.

Russo inquired why not leave the building. Tannenbaum responded that the school has plans for a gym, art space and meeting space. The school has a waiver from the state for not providing these spaces. They plan to place trailers on site and raise money for a future art room and gymnasium.

Melone was concerned about the lack of plans for the trailers or gym to review. Melone asked if they had considered leasing the building. Tannenbaum responded that it could be a possibility but the tenants would be limited to those who are sensitive to the historic property.

Berg suggested that they postpone the consideration of demolishing the building until they raised the monies for their proposed capital projects.

Loukas inquired if the history of the building was included in the history curriculum. Staff representatives said it was not.

Russo raised the issue about responsibility of the applicant to their mortgage holder to keep the property in good condition as required by the deed restriction.

Jones was troubled by the applicant for buying an inventoried historic property that so clearly did not fit their school needs and for letting it deteriorate over the years. Tannenbaum argued that the building did suit their needs but they are unable to raise the needed funds.

In response to Loukas' question, Tannenbaum said it would cost \$400,000 to restore the building. Loukas asked how much have they raised for the needed space. Tannenbaum responded that they were running at a deficit.

Loukas asked about the cost of the trailers. Tannenbaum responded that the trailers are for class and art space and that a restored 917 Belmont Street would never be useful programmatically.

Russo inquired if any preservation options had been sought. He suggested that they model Mt. Auburn Cemetery in their exploration of financial viable preservation options for the Schick House, a similarly historic building at Mt. Auburn Cemetery. Tannenbaum responded that he was flexible to listening to options. Loukas inquired if they had reached out to the community.

Albert W. Hobson, 885 Belmont Street, wanted more information on the proposed green space. Hobson urged that a demolition not be considered without plans. He was also concerned about the lead paint and asbestos that would be involved with a demolition.

Town Council President Marc Sideris, 30 Union Street, thought the applicant was not prepared. He thought that \$400,000 was a reasonable amount to restore such an important property. He felt that the applicant did not demonstrate attempts to restore the property. He suggested that with a demolition delay the applicant could market the property for a preservation solution similar to the Coolidge School redevelopment. He strongly supported a demolition delay.

Joyce Kelly, representative of the Historical Society of Watertown read a letter in support of the demolition delay and preservation of the property. She also reported that the White family, former owners of the property were important to Watertown's history and the Abolition Movement nationally. She noted that the property was a high style Greek Revival example and an agricultural farmhouse.

Councilor Angie Kounelis said Watertown can't make the property appropriate for the owners at such a high negative historic cost to Watertown. She urged the applicant to retain the building.

Eleanor Donato, 15 Knowles Road, noted that since 2006 the property has not been maintained. She felt the demolition was inevitable due to the lack of preservation efforts demonstrated by the applicant lack of pursuit of grants or historic tax credits.

Councilor Cecilia Lenk, urged a demolition delay. She was concerned by the applicant's lack of replacement plans. She was troubled by the demolition of such a historic property for trailers. She believed the building was of longer duration and more permanent than the present owners.

Bob Erickson, 27 Lloyd Road, supported saving the building. He thought the historic merits of the building were of value to the students attending the school.

Councilor Vinnie Piccirilli, stated that the building was iconic and that Watertown needed to be vigilant about preserving its history. As property owners of such an important historic property, he urged their stewardship. He was concerned about the statement made by Tannenbaum that the demolition of the property "was inevitable." He noted that the Watertown's Economic Development Plan of Watertown established the creative adaptive reuse of its historic buildings as a priority to Watertown's future economic health and attractiveness. He urged the applicant to be a good neighbor and to add value to its Institution by preserving the structure. The demolition of 917 Belmont Street would be a loss to the Town, he said.

Barbara Ruskin, 140 Spring Street, was unclear why the applicant needed to demolish the structure when the location of the trailers would not be on the buildings footprint, or the reason for the urgency to demolish when funds needed for a replacement have not been raised or the plans produced?

Councilor Steve Corbett, urged the HC to impose the longest delay possible for such a historically significant structure. He also urged the applicant to meet with the Magoon and find an alternative to demolition which is permanent in comparison to the impermanence of the financial market.

David Smith, Civil War Round Table of Greater Boston, advised the applicant to work with preservation organizations to find available funding for restoration before considering demolition.

Joe Levendusky, 13 Templeton Parkway, insisted that the demolition of the building would be a loss to the Town's historic legacy and failure to future generations. He noted that the purchase of a historic building comes with stewardship responsibilities.

Anne Louise Hittle, 109 Barnard Avenue, thought that the demolition would result in a profit for the non-profit applicant. As a school funded with tax payer support they are responsible to taxpayers concerns.

Tannenbaum responded that they have attempted to save the building. He denied that they had let the building deteriorate but that the building is aging. He informed that they are not abandoning the building. He noted that the \$400,000 restoration estimate is for cosmetic improvements and not for academic or access ones.

Rena Baskin, 15 Franklin Street, urged that the applicant search for grants to restore the building.

Eileen Chew Balser, 897 Belmont Street and Chair of Watertown School, asked the applicant if they wanted to preserve the house. "If you do, the Town will help you," she counseled. Tannenbaum responded that they were "committed to save the house." She recommended that he communicate and work with the community as the community is eager to work with him to find preservation options. She advised the applicant to be prepared with specific plans with real financial estimates.

Ruskin asked the applicant to withdraw the demolition permit since there was common ground to preservation.

Harvey Steiner, 18 Marshall Street and Chair of the Historic District Commission, pleaded with the applicant to work with the community to find solutions other than demolition.

David Russo read into the record letters from Thomas Scalon in opposition to demolition and from Mark and Ernesta Krackiewicz, owners of the first landmarked property in Watertown, urging the applicant to preserve such an important historic building with so many original architectural Greek Revival details still intact.

Berg thought the building should be preserved.

Loukas advocated the withdrawal of the permit to allow a collaborative preservation solution. Tannenbaum rejected the withdrawal of his petition.

Russo submitted his research on the building and tax records dating back to 1832 which indicated that the building was built for \$2200.

Roach submitted an in depth research on the historic figures associated with the structure (see attached).

Jones noted that the house is not only a fine architectural example with a deep and significant history, but also a rare survival of the New England connected farm house, a type of organization of farm buildings that is unique to New England. He read a passage

from the book Big House, Little House, Back House, Barn that underlined the development of this building type that New England farmers developed in response to the opening of new lands in the west, and to industrialization. Jones said that the impulse that produced this farmstead is still part of our shared culture and might serve as a reminder of the reform and self-improvement that still "typifies the New England enterprise in which local farmers "reformulated their traditionally ordered buildings into a powerful image of a shining classical dwelling". He did not see how the demolition of such a significant historic resource would be good for fundraising. He urged the applicant to withdraw his petition.

Russo submitted an updated plan of the house indicating the dates of each addition.

Vote: Tom Melone moved to find 917 Belmont Street as preferably preserved. Steele seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Loukas suggested that the HC hold issuing a delay to investigate whether Citizen Bank, the mortgage holder of the property, approves the demolition. Tannenbaum rejected this suggestion. He would be contacting the bank after the one year had expired and they were ready for demolition. Jones opposed contacting the mortgage holder.

Vote: Jones moved to impose a 6 month demolition delay with a progress review at the December 13th HC meeting. The HC reserves the right to impose a delay of up to 12 months. Melone seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

3. Public Hearing – Demolition Permit Review – 74 Lincoln to demolish a 1927 1-car detached garage to be replaced with an attached wood 1-car garage, Daphne Schneider, owner/applicant.

Daphne Schneider reported that the 1927 garage was deteriorated and that the roof was unsafe and that a replacement garage was proposed.

Vote: Berg moved to find 74 Lincoln garage not preferably preserved. Jones seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

4. May Minutes – Approved.

5. Old Business

- a) Signage Replacement of Stolen Markers & Arlington Street Cemetery Signage – item to be continued to next meeting.

The Meeting adjourned at 9:45pm.