

Minutes
Watertown Historical Commission
Thursday, February 13, 2017
Philip Pane Lower Hearing Room
7:00 p.m.

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

Member(s) Absent: Donald Berg,

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

David J. Russo chaired.

- 1) **Public Hearing - Building 221 located at 485 Arsenal Street (Arsenal Project).** To consider the demolition permit application submitted for a one story, former powder storage magazine built around 1900 that was encapsulated in new construction in the 1980's. Open space area is proposed. BP Watertown Retail LLC, Applicant/Owner Jeff Heidelberg, representative

Jeff Heidelberg-Boylston Properties introduced the following team members that were to present the project for the review of the Application for Demolition of Building 221 located at 485 Arsenal St.

Architects

Eric Brown- Prellwitz Chilinski Associates and
Laura Portnoy-Prellwitz Chilinski Associates from the architectural team.

Historical Preservationist

Albert Rex- MacRostie Historic Advisors, LLC

Heidelberg introduced the history of the project and explained that Boylston Properties has been collaborating with the Town of Watertown in this project which has been a model for the Mixed Use Corridor portion of the town's Comprehensive Plan.

The proposed use is for development of retail, restaurant and residential mixed use with a more current concept of the shopping mall. The configuration is meant to improve circulation and create a safe environment suitable for pedestrian and bicycle and slow moving traffic. Demolition of this building would allow for the development to flow as desired and also create a direct line of sight and access to the open space in the rear of the development.

Heidelberg introduced Brown to come forward to review the architectural aspects of the proposal.

Brown reported that the mall had been built in the 1980's with an orientation towards the interior but over time he explained that malls have evolved. The proposed plan which has been adopted by Master Plan Process in Watertown has been designed to be pedestrian friendly with a focus on welcoming users on bicycle and foot. He said it is also oriented to offer a community experience which includes direct access to an open space located in the rear of the development.

In its existing condition Brown explained that one must drive in and around and through the parking lot to shop in the stores. If this demolition were allowed for Building 221 this would clear a direct path for a roadway that would allow for pedestrians, bicycles and slow moving traffic to connect directly into the site for shopping, dining and out to the park if so desired.

Albert Rex, Partner of the firm MacRostie Historic Advisors, LLC explained that he was contacted to look into researching the history of the building for tax credit purposes. He reported that while attempting to update the Form B's for Mass. Historic as a requirement in this process, he found that the building was no longer eligible for registration on the Historic Registry due to the condition of portions of the building.

Rex explained that a number of the former building facades will remain intact along with the original window cut outs in order to allow for the definition of the historic character of what had previously been to be integrated into retail and residential portions of the multi- use development.

Russo asked the team if they had considered moving Building 221 to an alternative location for use as a coffee shop on the interior. Heidelberg explained that they had explored moving the building which would be cost prohibitive as it would require disassembling and moving the bricks, then replacing them brick by brick back to its original integrity and form.

Public Hearing

Robin Trial from 39 Marion Rd. asked what the building had been built and used for initially. Russo explained that according to his research, the building was built around 1900 for about \$3,500.00 and used for a powder storage and then became a print shop.

Public Hearing Closed.

Melone said that as he walked around the building, out to the rear and he was surprised that the park was visible from the south side. Melone also made mention of the copper roof on the building

Roach commented on the copper roof as well and wondered if there was some way it could be integrated into the new configuration of buildings.

Melone said that opening up this space would improve the flow of the site and create a direct access out to the green space in the back.

Steele looked at the north elevation and said she was encouraged that so many of the historical elements of the old buildings would be repurposed. She said that they did a good job with this development by revitalizing what was there and allowing Watertown to bring its history with us all as we move forward into the future.

Loukas said she felt that this could be a conundrum finding the building preferably preserved, and to not be sure about whether or not imposing a delay would encourage the finding of an alternative to demolition.

Melone said he wanted to make a motion to move the process forward.

Motion: Melone made a motion that Building 221 is preferably preserved. Roach seconded the motion.

Russo said he was going to take a vote on imposing a delay.

Vote: Three voted not to impose a delay. Two voted to impose a delay. No delay was imposed on the demolition of this building.

2) **Minutes** - January 12, 2017

Motion: Roach made a motion to approve the minutes from the January 12, 2017 minutes with minor modification. Melone seconded the motion.

Vote: A unanimous vote was reached to approve the minutes from the January 12, 2017 meeting.

3) **Discussion** – 101-103 Morse Street redevelopment – Historical Commission to discuss the proposed redevelopment at subject address in order to issue comments to Planning Board and the Zoning Board of Appeals

Russo had become aware of the details of the redevelopment being proposed to take place at 101-103 Morse St. He shared some research material he prepared with maps and photographs to depict his various concerns and put them into proper context for the HC about what is being proposed to convert this commercial/institutional complex into residential units.

Of the several concerns Russo had, a significant one was blowing out the roof and increasing the current height of the two story portion of this structure into a 4 story structure.

Russo proposed writing a joint letter from the HC and inviting members to add to his comments asking the Planning Board to scale the project back from where it is now.

Russo said he would write an outline and send it to the Conservation Office to be sent out to HC members to read and add comments as well. He said he would work with the Conservation Office to create a timeline.

- 4) **Review** - Mass. Historical Commission's January 20, 2017 letter to Guy Fraser, Director of Preservation and Facilities at Mount Auburn Cemetery regarding Preservation Grants for Veterans Collections, Monument and Memorials Project

Russo indicated that he would like to make comments which he would send with Hayward to submit to MHC.

5) **New Business**

On February 6th Russo submitted his 226 Inventory forms that he completed on the Watertown portion of the Mount Auburn Cemetery. He was told to call MHC in the summer to check on the status for their entry onto the state wide database.

Russo also wrote a cover letter to Peter Stott the Preservation Planner at the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) detailing his three years of work on this project. He will send a copy of the letter to the Conservation Office for filing and distribution to town officials involved in Conservation and Preservation of the town.

Joyce Kelly of The Historical Society has asked Russo to speak at their Annual Meeting on May 24, 2017 at 7:30 PM at the Watertown Free Public Library about his experience writing inventory items for Mass. Historical.

Russo said he will also appear at Fairhaven Public Library on Monday May 8th to speak to them about determining the value of their historic buildings and the steps they would need to take to get them registered with MHC, as he has done on behalf of Watertown.

Russo requested making time to discuss the coming of the Historical Preservation Awards coming up in May of 2017. Hayward said that the Conservation Office would get that moving forward by next month.

Russo showed the group a stack of copies of the book Contributions to Science written by Deborah Gray that he had obtained from the basement of the Commanders Mansion on a recent visit to explore the conditions of the basement. He explained that when the Army signed the Mansion over to the town in 1998 many of these types of holdings were inherited as well.

Steele asked if there has been any discussion about finding a place where the town could showcase Watertown's many contributions to science and technology.

Steele and Loukas said that they both thought it would be great to use one of the vacant town libraries as a museum to display and showcase such featured items.

Russo explained that Tammi McKenna who is the manager of the Commander's Mansion has expressed interest in getting some qualified assistance with the process of assessing the contents and conditions of the mansion. Russo said he is interested in creating a sub-committee to work with McKenna at the Commander's Mansion to get this process underway.

Kelly, of the Historical Society urged Russo to look into getting a qualified professional to assess the conditions in the basement to be sure that it and the contents are environmentally safe for everyone to be working in.

Steele, Loukas and Melone, volunteered to be on the sub-committee for the mansion.

Hayward gave a status report on replacing Shary Berg who was working on getting the cemeteries onto the Historic Register. He said he found out that Minxie Fannon is not available but she recommended Hayward speak with Erik Dray. Hayward has been in the process of trying to meet up with him soon and that he will keep the HC advised of the status.

Meeting adjourned.