



CITY OF WATERTOWN
Historical Commission
Administration Building
149 Main Street
WATERTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS 02472

Elise Loukas, Chairperson
Thomas Melone, Member
Susan Steele, Member
Marilynne K., Member
Joseph Panto, Member
Matthew Walter, Member
Richard Glenn, Member

Minutes: Thursday, July 14, 2022, Remote meeting 7:00 p.m.

Historical Commission Members Present: Elise Loukas, Joe Panto, Susan Steele, Marilynne Roache, Matthew Walter, Richard Glenn

Member(s) Absent: Thomas Melone

Public Present: Christine Arico, John Arico, Mr., and Mrs. Russ Arico, Avo Assadourian

Staff Present: Larry Field, Senior Planner, Susan C. Jenness, Assistant

1. Review- Minutes from June 9, 2022.

The minutes from the June 9, 2022, meeting were reviewed. There were no comments from the members, and a motion was made to accept the minutes.

Motion: Roach made a motion to accept the minutes from the May 9, 2022, meeting. Glenn seconded the motion made by Roach.

Poll: A poll was taken, and members voted to approve the minutes from the May 9, 2022, meeting.

2. Public Hearing- to determine if the house and garage at 51 Fayette St. are preferably preserved, and if a demolition delay will be imposed. Christine Arico, Applicant/Owner

Arico appeared before the Historical Commission and explained that they would like to demolish the structure at 51 Fayette St. which has been in her family since 1988. She explained that she and her brother would like to build 2 townhouses on the lot, to replace the old structure in a state of disrepair, so they can live next door to her parents and be there caretakers in their elderly years. She said there was no historical or architectural significance of the house she was able to determine.

Loukas asked members of the commission if they had any questions. Roach said she had a comment to make. There was siding on the house, but she was not able to find from the building cards when the siding went on. She remarked that this is one of about 4 Greek Revival Style cottages on the street that are all in one cluster. Loukas remarked that the letter from the structural engineer was not what the commission normally has to work with. She noted it made statements that were consistent with what might happen and made no statements about what would happen if they tried to build over the foundation. Arico and her brother said they could follow up with the engineer who was not available to attend the hearing on Zoom. Steele said she felt she needed more information about the structure and its condition. Loukas said that Jenness had sent out information from MACRIS earlier in the day. Field confirmed.

Public Comments

Russ Arico from 49 Fayette St. spoke. He said if you looked at the Southeast side of the structure you could see that side sinking. The foundation is not in good shape and the house is out on the sidewalk. He explained in the winter, icicles hang off the gutters and pose a threat to the public walking by. He said he piles snow on both ends of his sidewalk to dissuade people from walking on the sidewalk to protect passersby from the hazards. The bathroom on the 1st floor does not work, the house suffers from deferred maintenance. The heating system is old and could be dangerous. He said his wife was hospitalized for weeks in January and both he and his wife are disabled. He is a disabled US Veteran, and they bought the house in 1988 to plan to have their whole family around them in their elder years. Both he and his wife required 24-hour care and to put a delay on the house would hurt the whole family.

Loukas explained the purview of the Historical Commission and the Demolition Delay Ordinance and said she entirely sympathized with Arico's statements which are would all be part of the record.

Commission Discussion

Roach said the Building Inspector could go and condemn the house if it is that bad. Loukas clarified it is not that bad. Roach said the house architecture is interesting and so it the fact that it is part of a cluster of houses, although this one is right on the sidewalk. Glenn said he got this was a very old building part of an era, but he found Mr. Arico's story persuasive. He said he also related to the letter from the contactor who said it would be challenging to make the house livable for the people who have lived there for so many years and plan to stay there. He believes the structural condition would prohibit making the building livable. Steele said she is used to seeing a structural engineer reports and would like one. She said she thought the building had charm and is part of the history of the formation of Watertown, but she was just not sure if it was preferably preserved. Walter said this was a difficult case, and that he agreed with Roach and Glenn. While it was part of a Mid-Century cluster, most of the cluster was not well preserved to the degree the house across the street was. He pointed out the private and public hazards brought up by the position of the house on the site. His inclination is that it is significant, but he was not sure he would delay it. He felt that was not something they should do to these people. Loukas said a report would tell us officially what would need to be done to bring this house up to a good condition. She said she felt she knew Walter and Glenn's position but asked Roach and Steele if they needed a report to decide. Roach said she wants to know how much it would cost to repair or build new. Loukas said it is the job of the members of

the HC to work with residents to see what could be done to preserve structures that warrant saving. Steele said the members have an obligation to know more about the structure. Walter suggested they vote on Preferably Preserved and go from there. Steele was not comfortable enough to vote without an assessment. Glenn suggested the house may have been built in 1830 or 40's long before the street was built. He summarized the city would never allow for a house to be built so close to the sidewalk like this. Loukas pointed out if the structure was preferably preserved, they could move it back to comply with Zoning.

Field was asked for his thoughts. He said they could ask for a structural report and continue the hearing to a future meeting.

Arico said they would prefer not to spend extra money on the report for a house in such deteriorating quality. Her brother explained the house had been in the family since 1988 and shared some memories of riding through the neighborhood on bikes. He said they did not come to this decision easily and they talked to many contractors about the potential to repair and make additions. He explained over time it became apparent that it would be cost prohibitive to do anything other than knock this house down and start from scratch.

Loukas said she wished they had informed her either at the hearing or through the material they had gone through great lengths to examine ways to save the structure. She recapitulated that it was the job of the commission to work with residents who came before them, to try to do what can be done to save structures that are preferably preserved.

Steele said it would be so helpful if they had more information and that a site visit could even be helpful.

Loukas asked if a walk through was possible and Arico said it was. Members agreed they could have an unscheduled meeting in August and the 4th seemed to work for everyone.

Avo Assadourian was present who is an architect. He stated he has worked with the family the last 2 years. He has extensive knowledge of the house, and it would be cost prohibitive to rehabilitate the house to bring it up to code. He said that they would not be able to create a 2-family house on the foundation and it would need to remain single family. The upgrades would be very costly, and they would not be following the current Zoning.

Elise asked how this Greek Revival differed from others in the cluster. Assadourian stated if they had to alter the structure to make it more livable, it would drastically change the character of the Greek Revival.

Walter said this was the most diminutive of the Greek Revivals and the Architect was on to something. He said they should take a vote at this meeting and potentially discuss whether a delay is appropriate. Loukas polled to ask if members were able to state whether the house was significant. Roach was ready. Steele was not. Glenn was ready.

Motion: Walter made a motion that house is preferably preserved. Roach seconded the motion.

Poll: The motion passed 4 to 1.

Walter said he felt it was wrong to impose a delay. Steele said if she could see the condition of the house, she thought she could decide. Glenn was not in favor of a delay.

Motion: Steele made a motion to continue the hearing to schedule a walkthrough of the property and continue the public hearing to August 4th on Zoom. Glenn seconded the motion.

Poll: A poll was taken, and 3 agreed with the motion made by Steele while 1 was against it.

The house was found preferably preserved and now they had to decide whether the house should have a delay. The applicants were asked to work with Jenness to schedule the site visit and to attend the continuation of the meeting on August 4th.

3. CPC Update

A. Update on CPC Business by Matthew Walter

Walter updated commission members that Mt. Auburn Cemetery has a very significant proposal coming up, which was the only prospective project he was aware of seeking CPA funds from the Historic Preservation CPC funds. He said he felt strongly this was a project that should be supported by members of the Historical Commission. He said that Jenness should get them on to the schedule of an upcoming meeting to come before the Historical Commission to present their project.

4. Agent report

Field reported that the Demolition Delay Ordinance and Procedural Proposal had gone to City Council and was now referred to Planning. There is no meeting scheduled for August and so September would be likely for the next meeting. A public hearing would be held and then it would be referred to City Council.

Field confirmed that there is \$20,000.00 in the planning budget for consulting projects. There is a grant program that would match that money available. He suggested the next step would be for the members of the commission to discuss in an open meeting what the scope of the project would be that they would apply for. Steele asked if there was a document to help them get ready to apply for the grant. He said he had one available and that Jenness could send it out to the members the following day.

Motion: Walter made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:45 PM. Roach seconded the motion.

Poll: Members agreed unanimously to accept the motion made by Walter.