

Minutes
of the
Watertown Historical Commission
Thursday, May 10, 2007
Council Chambers

Historical Commission Members Present:

Russo, Roach, Light, Berg, Lane, O’Looney

Staff Present: Hayward, Collins

Public Present: See attached Sign-In Form

The meeting opened at 7:30p.m.

**1. Informational Item – Brown School, 552 Main Street,
Kaestle Boos Associates**

Kevin Witzell, Kaestle Boos Architects, reported that the meeting was to discuss the present conditions of the building and future plans for the site. He noted that the exterior conditions appear to be in good condition, however, the interior is unsatisfactory for the reuse as a police station. He informed that the building was a wood structure and would not meet seismic and safety requirements. The existing building configuration, type, and size in his estimation was not an asset and should be torn down to make a state-of-the-art police facility. Witzell noted that the decorative elements featured in the handout could be reused in the new facility. He suggested display cases could be installed at the new facility that would pay tribute to the

former school site. He reported that there was no design and that they were in the early planning stages. However, he indicated that the building had to come down due to the structural, mechanical and physical lay-out of the present building which if preserved would restrict it's usage as a police station. He noted that the new design would be sensitive to the neighborhood and more respectful to the abutters. He added that the present building is too big for the police's needs.

Lane inquired if there was any state, federal or homeland security funding for this project. Phyllis Marshall, Town Treasurer, responded that the Town will be borrowing the funding and going to Town Council for the appropriation. She noted that there will be no grant funds.

Lane inquired whether the property was on the National Register or registration eligible.

Berg inquired whether the interior could be demolished and the exterior kept and reinforced. He asked what where the floor height needs.

Witzell responded that the program will need 10' heights floors. The preliminary conceptual may lead to a 3 story building with a full basement. However, he envisions a maximum visible exterior height at 2 stories. He noted that the siting of the building has not been determined and may be located more forward on the lot. He informed that the ball fields are to be protected.

Lane noted that the properties can be retrofitted for public safety usage and that older buildings can be brought to code for different usages.

Witzell noted that the building does not meet code. He identified the seismic concerns of the wood structure especially since it will be the nerve center of the community. He felt retrofitting was cost prohibitive. He indicated that

the \$200,000 cost differential in savings from retrofitting would leave a compromised program. He concluded that the best result would be to take down the building. Lane inquired how the cost was derived. He responded that the cost estimate is the base on the square foot building cost of \$250.

Lane requested that the demolition cost be provided. She also requested that real cost be provided so that the different options could be compared. Witzell noted that maintaining the existing building would be more expensive.

Lane noted that the building was a special building by age and sentiment and that it could be potential historic. She felt having real cost estimates to compare preservation vs. new construction was essential.

O'Looney understood that the Browne School was selected because of cost-effectiveness. She felt it was important to have a conversation about the loss of a historic building. She was concerned that the firing range could mean the loss of the playground. She urged that there be a discussion on the cost differential between the cost of new and preservation.

Lane noted that school buildings are adaptable to other uses. She felt that the Browne School could be potentially a suitable reuse since the police program needs were smaller than the existing square footage. She urged Witzell to the building reconfiguration. She also requested information on what was going into the existing Police stations as it too was in the Town Local Inventory a Town historic asset.

Russo inquired what would happen to the blue light at the Police Station. Witzell said that it will be relocated to the new location and be preserved, as requested by the Police Department.

Russo was concerned about the project on the overall neighborhood. The scale of the building is important as it is located next to a very important historic asset – 562 Main Street. Marshall noted that they have met with NEH to discuss the project. She indicated that landscaping and parking will be enhanced and that parking could be shared with NEH. She indicated that the project was brought to the HC to get their concerns and outreach efforts are being made to address neighborhood concerns. She inquired when they should come back; what timeline was indicated. She requested direction from the HC.

Russo responded that preservation is the gold standard for this building. He requested that information be provided on ways the building could be preserved – retrofitted and reused. He requested that cost comparisons be provided for preservation and reuse versus new construction.

Lane requested that options be explored between the present building and a new one with costing as concrete as possible. She also requested the cost of demolition.

Russo requested that general costs be avoided.

Lane noted that working sessions could be scheduled and that the HC is available as a resource.

Marshall will set up a meeting to have an interior walk through.

2. April Minutes. Approved.

3. 2007 Preservation Award

Lane moved that the 2007 Preservation Awards be awarded to the following nominees:

Nomination Category	Nominee	Comments
Citizenship Award	Proposed Brigham Historic District Study Committee	Organized the neighborhood to consider providing protection for architectural & historical resources. Group developed a proposal and report to MHC.
Citizenship Award	Rachel Sachs Jones	For the efforts on the Historical Plaque Program
Community Spirit Award	Carole Jean Smith	Artist inspired by Watertown culture and natural resources. Installed an art exhibit of "Singers and Huggers: Trees to Love" at Armenian Library and Museum.
Not awarded.	Watertown Library Reading room and historical archives room	For maintaining and restoring some architectural details of the original 1899 Watertown Library and providing a brief glimpse of that original library.
Historical Resources Preservation Award	Mount Auburn Cemetery	The restoration of the Bigelow Chapel's Ballantine & Allen stain glass window and granite pinnacles.
Environmental Preservation Award	Marylouise Pallotta McDermott	For her efforts in preserving Filippello Park as open space and her leadership in educating the Council about how and why it is protected.
Architectural Preservation Award	86 Common Street	For the restoration of this private home.

Roach seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Russo requested that a Preservation Plaque be awarded to the Bigelow Chapel.

4. Street Photography

Russo requested that street photos be sent to him for the library archives. He requested that the street address be included.

5. Before and After Picture

Roach informed that the TAB won't run the contest concept. She'll keep the HC informed on the progress on the program idea.

Meeting adjourned at 8:39pm