

Minutes
Watertown Historical Commission
Thursday,
January 14, 2016
Philip Pane Lower Hearing Room
7:00 p.m.

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

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 for the Historical Commission (HC) by Russo.

1) Public Hearing Continuance – 9 Myrtle St – Request to demolish a wood framed 2-family house built around 1900. Proposed is a new construction 2 story town house with a rear garage. Brendan Morrisey, applicant/owner

Russo explained to the public that the Conservation Office had received an email from Hezekiah Pratt, the architect on this project stating that the applicant was cancelling the site visit that was planned for at the December 14th meeting. Pratt's email also stated that Morrisey was asking the HC to enter a decision at the January 13th meeting based on their findings without having paid a visit to the site.

Russo read historical information on 9 Myrtle St. into the record that found the home was built in 1842, but may date as far back as 1832. The original owner was a man named Mr. French who was a town official of Watertown, as well as a mason and builder. He was a master mechanic at the United States Arsenal and was instrumental in building many of their large brick buildings. He received the title of Captain after serving as the fire warden for Watertown during the years he spent as a member of the volunteer fire department.

Russo asked commission members to take a few moments to review their notes and their unofficial minutes from the previous meeting to refresh their memories of the prior discussion.

Loukas stated that a site visit would have helped them make their decisions and that without being able to see the site, she felt they were all back to their original thoughts about wanting to save the house.

Melone agreed with Loukas and further stated that his general thoughts, based upon seeing the outside of the building, would incline him to want to preserve the structure.

Jones felt it was a shame to have no way to judge the practicality of attempting to save at least parts of the structure by maybe even adding one or two wings onto the existing structure.

Roach agreed with Jones and further stated that she thought this was a nice looking house. She elaborated that it was from a period when workers housing was being built into the formation of actual neighborhoods. She commented about the owner, Mr. French and his ties to the town and having built many of the buildings at the arsenal

Jones considered that this was additionally significant because it was an example of the history of the neighborhood and how that developed into the history of Watertown. He said that it did not need to be a fancy house but it deserves to be protected and that there certainly were not many of these houses left.

Russo clarified that at one time, everyone lived on the main road in Watertown. These types of homes were the first actual neighborhoods in the town that we would remember.

Public Comments:

The owner of the home, Brendan Morrissey appeared before the HC and refreshed the board of what Mr. Pratt had written about in the email to the Conservation Office. He further stated that he just wanted to find out if they would impose a delay without a site visit.

Motion: A motion was made by Jones that the house at 9 Myrtle St. was preferably preserved. Berg seconded the motion.

Vote: A unanimous vote was reached that the house at 9 Myrtle St. was preferably preserved.

Roach stated that she was in favor of a one year delay to give the owner and architect time to try to find an alternative to what they were initially proposing.

Morrissey replied that he had no comments to make at this time and only wanted to find out if the commission was going to enter a delay on the demolition of the house.

Loukas asked the owner if he had considered the options that had been offered to him at the December meeting by commission members.

Morrissey said he had not drawn up new plans yet but wanted to see if a delay would be imposed. Once that was established, he said that he could discuss options with his architect.

Russo mentioned that he was surprised and happy that the house was still standing today. He said he felt strongly that the integrity of the structure and its significance to the history of the town were worth saving.

Berg said he hoped for continued dialog with the owner in the future and expressed his desire to protect both this building and what it represented to the foundation of the town.

Loukas explained to the owner of the building that if a delay were imposed in this case, that he could draft up new plans for the house and then come back and review them with the board. She explained that the HC would be able to entertain lifting the delay at any time should new plans be submitted.

Roach stressed that of course there is always the potential to lift the delay if the applicant returned with a new plans.

Motion: A motion was made by Berg to impose a one year delay on the demolition of 9 Myrtle Street. Melone seconded the motion.

Vote: A unanimous vote was reached to impose a one year delay on the demolition of 9 Myrtle St.

A letter of determination will be issued by the Conservation Office.

2) Public Hearing – 297 Waverley Ave - Request to demolish a single-family colonial house built around 1880. Proposed is a new construction 2 family town house. Robert LeBlanc, applicant/owner

Robert LeBlanc, applicant and owner of 297 Waverley Ave. appeared before the HC for the continuance of the public hearing.

He reviewed the modifications of the proposed plans and discussed with HC the difficulties of attempting to work with the existing structure in a good faith effort to save the building. In light of the extensive repair work that would be needed to the existing structure, it was apparent that a hardship would be faced by both the owner and the structure in doing so. He countered his initial plan with a plan to replace the current structure with proposed plans he said thought the town would see as a nice fit into the neighborhood.

LeBlanc reached out to the neighbors with his proposal and submitted a copy of a letter of support.

The HC discussed with the owner the excessive costs, monetarily and structurally, of any potential renovation. It was decided that any renovation would not leave much of the existing house.

Commission Discussion

Loukas commended the owner for having worked so hard with the HC in an effort to see what could be done to save the structure. Commission members overall were very appreciative of the efforts made by Mr. LeBlanc.

Motion: Jones made a motion to lift the delay imposed on 297 Waverly Ave. Berg seconded the motion.

Vote: A unanimous vote was reached to lift the delay imposed at the December meeting for 297 Waverly Ave.

A letter of determination will be issued by the Conservation Office.

3) Public Hearing - 35 Bacon St. - Request to demolish a 1 family cape style house with a detached garage built around 1880. Proposed is a new construction 2 story town house without a garage. Gerard Mazzeo, applicant/owner

Gerard Mazzeo applicant and owner appeared to ask the commission to find the building not preferably preserved.

Mazzeo characterized the house as having multiple, various additions layered onto the original structure and that it was covered in vinyl siding. He said that he was unable to find any historical significance to the property in his town research.

He said that the second floor was non habitable and that there was inadequate ceiling height as well. The garage was also unusable.

The character surrounding the house was that there was 72 units of mixed use development that it was located less than 5 feet from 35 Bacon St.

Public Hearing:

Laurie Wessler of 32 Bacon St. said that she moved into the neighborhood because she liked the character of the area. She was very upset to think that the house next door was being turned into a duplex. She said that she found this to be just another statement that the community was becoming a commercial entity with very high rents.

Melone said that this was another example of it being desirable to see the property and what it is like inside. It could be a simple house but it has its' own significance.

Steele stated very clearly that in order to make a good decision, it was important to see the inside of the house.

Motion: A motion was made by Jones to continue the public hearing until after a site visit has been conducted with HC. Melone seconded the motion.

Vote: A unanimous vote was reached that the public hearing for 35 Bacon St. was continued until after a site visit.

A site visit was scheduled for the HC for Monday January 25th at 4 PM.

4) Minutes – December 10, 2015

The minutes of December 10, 2015 were adopted as modified.

5) Old Business

a. HC December site visit Branch Libraries continued discussion

A site visit was conducted with HC and Agent Hayward in December. They discussed the findings of the visits and proposed steps moving forward in preparing to make future use of the library buildings.

The East Branch was found to be widely used for storage of a broad range of old documents related to town operations. There was water damage discovered in the top level in an environment with a lot of potential.

There was discussion around harnessing additional man power to shed light onto the document storage with plans to appropriately catalog or dispose of contents with consent from authority.

The North branch was found to be in less favorable shape. There was an electrical short in the basement and the bathroom and break room were in bad shape. There is no parking but adequate land around the building.

Commission members proposed an additional site visit with Steve Magoon the Director of Community Development and Planning, and Assistant Town Manager when his schedule permitted to discuss their ideas.

Meeting Adjourned at 9:00 PM