

**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE
HISTORICAL COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF WORCESTER
February 23, 2012**

LEVI LINCOLN CHAMBER – CITY HALL

Commission Members Present:

Thomas Constantine, Chair
Timothy McCann, Vice-Chair
Kevin Provencher, Clerk
Peter Schneider
Meagen Mulherin
Andrew Shveda

Staff Members Present:

Edgar Luna, Division of Planning & Regulatory Services

REGULAR MEETING (5:30 PM)

CALL TO ORDER:

Vice-Chair McCann called the meeting to order at 5:30 P.M.

MINUTES:

The Historical Commission accepted the minutes from the February 9, 2012 meeting.

NEW BUSINESS:

- 1. 72 (aka 66-67) Shrewsbury Street (HC-2012-004) – Building Demolition Delay Waiver:** Edgar Luna informed the Commission that Matthew Doyle, representative for J&M Batista Family Limited Partnership, petitioner, submitted a request to continue the hearing to the March 8, 2012 meeting to allow him additional time to submit a restoration proposal regarding the removal and replacement of the twelve (12) mullioned 'Buick' logo windows with mullioned glass insulated windows in the parapet, and to extend the constructive approval date to March 26, 2012.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Provencher and seconded by Commissioner McCann the Commission voted 6-0 to continue the hearing to the March 8, 2012 meeting to allow the petitioner additional time to submit a restoration proposal regarding the removal and replacement of the twelve (12) mullioned 'Buick' logo windows with mullioned glass insulated windows in the parapet, and to extend the constructive approval date to March 26, 2012.

Exhibit A: Building Demolition Delay Waiver Application submitted by J&M Batista Family Limited Partnership, dated January 18, 2012 and received January 19, 2012.

Exhibit B: Request for Continuance/Constructive Approval Date Extension, dated February 23, 2012 and received February 23, 2012.

2. **Economic Development Overview Presentation:** Timothy McGourthy, Chief Development Officer for the City of Worcester thanked the Commission for their work and gave an overview of the economic development initiatives being implemented by the City of Worcester. In summary Mr. McGourthy discussed the City's wayfinding/signage plan; streetscape improvements both underway and planned in the future, as well as the theater district collaboration with Worcester Business Development Corporation. He also discussed the proposed extension of Front St. to Union Station as part of the City's public infrastructure improvements related to CitySquare, stating that the reconnection will position all of downtown as a more transit oriented development. He informed the Commission that despite the MBTA's proposals to reduce trains and service, they have committed to date to retain the proposed increased daily commuter trains. Mr. McGourthy thanked the Commission for their work and input on Worcester State Hospital and design meetings for Lake Quinsigamond Bridge. He informed the Commission that with a new staff member in the Planning Division, efforts will be able to be refocused on Crown Hill. He thanked Ms. Mulherin for her work as an intern with the City on that project.

Commissioner Schneider expressed concern with signage on the outskirts of the City. Mr. McGourthy agreed and indicated that the wayfinding system is a city-wide system focused guiding visitors to destinations as they travel along major arterial thoroughfares and gateways to the city. He stated that a related piece will be to improve side street signage through DPW.

Randall Lomo stated that he had worked with CMRPC on the Regional Mobility Study and stated that he finds the *cultural district* signs along the highway confusing since they do not list what cultural institutions are there. Mr. McGourthy agreed and stated that the wayfinding system would provide more specific information and would look at gateways such as Rt. 9 and 122 as well.

Jo Hart stated that she wished the City could work with property owners to encourage more cohesive efforts with respect to identification signage and preserving historic signage.

Commissioner Provencher inquired about redevelopment or City efforts in the Arctic and Plastic St. areas and along Green Street. Mr. McGourthy stated that the zoning was changed in the Arctic and Plastic St. areas from manufacturing to business to encourage a wide range of redevelopment and that the area is part of a Parking Overlay District which removes parking requirements, thereby removing an obstacle to redevelopment. [Staff

note: this is correct; staff erroneously stated at the meeting that the parcels were not in the parking overlay district; however they are].

Mr. McGourthy also informed the Commission that through the city façade and storefront improvement program, programmatic funds have been invested in redevelopment of Square 1, the Crompton and Knowles Loomworks Building, the Broadway, Blackstone Tap, Tom's Deli and others and that the Canal District has a great pedestrian scale and is essentially an extension of downtown. He also informed the Commission that money set aside for streetscape improvements in the future will be used to improve the islands and crosswalks in Kelley Square to improve the pedestrian experience there. Mr. Provencher asked about the recent demolition on Kelley Square and Mr. McGourthy stated that Bumper to Bumper building had been removed by the City due to safety reasons and there is a lien on the property that the City holds and will use to leverage a development that complements the area.

Randall Lomo also inquired about efforts in North Main related to the Memorial Auditorium and the Courthouse. Mr. McGourthy stated that the City and DCAM are discussing what the City could do to help increase the marketability of the Courthouse perhaps through leveraging funding to remove some of the indoor contaminants. With respect to the Auditorium, he stated that public bids would first call for retention of the entire building with the potential to allow for potential of the main structure with the portico, stairs and mural room.

Mr. Provencher stated that in his opinion one of the major impediments to commercial redevelopment in the City is the commercial tax rate and asked Mr. McGourthy to comment. Mr. McGourthy stated that the administration's role is to inform the City Council of the various alternatives and admitted that it is a difficult process. He further stated that there is great redevelopment occurring in the City and acknowledged that all costs are certainly a factor in someone deciding whether or not to purchase a building or start a business in the City. He stated that where taxes are a factor discouraging redevelopment, the City works through its TIF (tax increment financing) program, the City can reduce some of the initial tax rates in the beginning years. He stated that the City's tax rate is competitive with Hartford, Boston, Providence and Manchester, NH but concurred that Auburn, Shrewsbury and other surrounding towns have lower tax rates.

Jo Hart stated that she hopes some of the nicer museums can be reused for museums and pointed to the success of the Russian Icons Museum in Clinton. She suggested a Fire Museum would be a good choice for the Memorial Auditorium. She stated we need progress, not memorials. She also suggested WPI have a robot museum. Mr. McGourthy stated that the Memorial Auditorium is a massive building and would maybe be more appropriate for a combination of museums.

Exhibit A: Economic Development Presentation, presented by Timothy McGourthy – Chief Development Officer.

OTHER BUSINESS:

3. **Worcester State Hospital Clock Tower Update:** Chair Constantine indicated that he will not be able to attend the Clock Tower signing ceremony on Thursday, February 27 at Preservation Worcester; however, he indicated that Commissioner Schneider would be present and sign the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) on behalf of the Worcester Historical Commission.

MEETING ADJOURNMENT:

Meeting adjourned at 8:45 PM.