

**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE
HISTORICAL COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF WORCESTER**

January 7, 2021

CITY HALL*

Commission Members Participating:

Mark Wamback, Chair
Devon Kurtz, Vice-Chair
Randolph Bloom
Diane Long
Tomi Stefani
Janet Theerman
Erika Helnarski, Alternate

Commission Members Not Participating:

None

Staff Members Participating:

Stephen Rolle, Division of Planning and Regulatory Services
Michelle Johnstone, Division of Planning and Regulatory Services

*Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, and the Governor's March 23, 2020 Order, as amended, imposing strict limitation on the number of people that may gather in one place, this meeting was conducted through remote participation. The meeting was livestreamed from the City of Worcester website and via the local cable access channel and is available for streaming online. Public participation was facilitated through a call-in number, 415-655-0001 (Access Code: 1608081191#), which was publicized on the posted meeting agenda and during the video broadcast.

CALL COMMISSION TO ORDER

The Commission was called to order by Chair Mark Wamback at 5:35 PM.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

December 17, 2020: The approval of minutes was held until the January 21, 2021 meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

Building Demolition Delay Waiver

1. 20–22 Bowdoin Street – HC-2020-094 (MBL 02-033-12+49)

Petitioners: Scott Goddard

Year Built: 1877

Historic Status: MACRIS listed, FKA George Kendall Double House

Petition Purpose:

- Repair, or replace in-kind where needed, elements of the soffits, gable ends, and rear porch system
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Josh Webster, the general contractor in charge of the project spoke in regards to the application. He briefly stated the intent of the project, which is to repair and seal damage to soffit and trim elements in-kind, and to repair elements of the deck, also in kind.

The Commission did not have comment on the application.

No public comment.

On a motion by Commissioner Long and seconded by Commissioner Stefani, the Commission voted 6-0 to close the public hearing.

On a motion by Commissioner Long and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 6-0 that the proposed demolition at 20–22 Bowdoin Street would not be detrimental to the historical or architectural resources of the City of Worcester, and thus approved the Building Demolition Delay Waiver.

List of Exhibits

Exhibit A. Building Demolition Delay Waiver application, dated November 14, 2020, and received December 3, 2020.

2. 1059 Main Street – HC-2020-096 (MBL 08-037-0005E)

Petitioner: Janelle Wilson o/b/o Jeremiah’s Inn

Year Built: ca. 1859

Historic Status: MACRIS listed; Positive National Register Opinion of Eligibility, FKA the Elmwood Hotel

Petition Purpose:

- Remove the existing wood clapboard siding and water table and replace with vinyl siding
- Repair fascia, corner boards and window and door trim and wrap with aluminum
- Repair soffits and install vinyl soffit on main block; beaded soffit on porch
- Replace dentils and brackets along façade cornice and replace with vinyl or PVC replicas
- Replace gutters and downspouts

Janelle Wilson, Executive Director of Jeremiah’s Inn, joined by Michael Christopher, general contractor, spoke in regards to the application. Ms. Wilson gave an overview of the project, which includes the installation of vinyl siding, given rot on the existing wood siding, and to install vinyl or PVC decorative elements. She stated that the organization is a non-profit and the upkeep of the wood siding is a drain on their resources. She also mentioned that much of the wood materials are replacement materials, and that over the years, much of the historic fabric has been removed. Many elements were replaced during a restoration in the 1980s. Additionally, the organization has made some other changes to the building in recent years with appropriate permits, but the issue of the building being historic never came up. She stated that the intent of the project is to make the building look better.

Commissioner Bloom inquired as to where the rot on the building that has occurred so far has happened. Ms. Wilson stated that there has been rot in both the clapboards and trim. Commissioner Bloom also stated that he was disappointed that the organization would decide to install vinyl, and asked if there was a reason why there was such a problem with rot. Ms. Wilson stated that the building needs continuous repair, and the installation of vinyl siding would remedy some of that problem because it is low maintenance.

The Commission and the applicant talked about the price differential between vinyl siding (approximately \$75,000) and the installation of new wood siding where there is rotted wood, as well as lead abatement (\$118,000). They also talked about whether there is any grant funding that may be available, but Ms. Wilson told the Commission that all the funding for the project will come from grants as it stands.

Michael Christopher, the contractor stated that about 40-50% of the siding is rotted. He stated that they would not be opposed to James Hardie (fiber cement) siding.

Commissioner Stefani asked if the clapboard is original to the building. Ms. Wilson stated that to her knowledge, the siding is not original, although she can’t know with 100% certainty.

Mr. Rolle agreed that it is difficult to determine whether the wood siding is original.

Commissioner Stefani also asked whether the applicants had a quote for fiber cement. Ms. Wilson stated that they do not.

Commissioner Bloom asked whether another material than vinyl would give a similar look to wood but be more cost effective. Ms. Johnstone stated that Hardie board (fiber cement) is an option that is more cost effective than wood.

Mr. Christopher stated that Hardie board (fiber cement) siding is about 30% more expensive than vinyl, and is more labor intensive. Mr. Rolle stated that that seemed like an accurate estimate.

Mr. Christopher stated that there is foam insulation underneath the existing clapboards that goes through the sheathing, so the wood siding has been replaced at some point.

Commissioner Long asked for confirmation that the dentils and brackets would be retained. Ms. Wilson stated that replicas would be installed, but they would not be wood. Commissioner Long asked why wood would not be used.

Mr. Christopher stated that the intent is to install PVC replicas because PVC is maintenance free. Ms. Wilson stated that is also difficult to work around the existing wood elements. Mr. Christopher agreed, stating that J-channeling around the existing elements would not provide a tight moisture barrier, and would not have the cleanest look.

Commissioner Long noted that given that the building underwent such a drastic restoration in the 1980s, it seems like it would be going backwards to install vinyl.

Commissioner Long asked if the clapboards would be retained or removed under the new siding. Mr. Christopher stated that the clapboards would be removed to get to the bottom of the issue.

Public Comment

Karen Nugent of Crown Hill stated that she has seen the transformation of the building over the years. She stated that she would like to know the longevity of fiber cement. She also stated that the programs offered by Jeremiah's Inn are enhanced by the fact that they are in a beautiful historic building. She suggested that the organization try to do more fundraising to be able to better preserve the building.

Mr. Christopher stated that the longevity of fiber cement is about 50 years, but all the trim must be done in fiber cement or PVC as well, which makes the project more expensive overall.

Jonathan Ostrow of Worcester and the Save Notre Dame Alliance stated that he has taken walks around the building and photographed it, and found that most of the siding is intact and in excellent condition. He stated that there are rot spots on the trim. He mentioned that there is beautiful scroll brackets and trim on a prominent façade. He stated that rot on the siding is not evident. He stated that he has never seen a plastic, vinyl, or PVC product capture all the crisp details of wood. He asked if the brackets are original.

Ms. Wilson stated that they are not original, but they are beautiful.

Mr. Ostrow stated that he thinks preserving the building would enhance the mission of the organization.

Mr. Ostrow and Ms. Wilson spoke about the reasons why wood trim is not being retained or replicated with wood.

Mr. Christopher stated that an Azek product, which is made of 40% reclaimed wood fibers and 60% thermal plastic polymers, would be used to create the replicas.

Mr. Ostrow asked Mr. Christopher why he didn't see extensive rot when he visited the building. Mr. Christopher stated that there are multiple areas of rot. He stated that the Cambridge Street side of the building is the worst.

Ms. Wilson stated that the water has also penetrated the interior of the building.

Mr. Ostrow asked if wood could be maintained on the front to the building. Mr. Christopher stated that that could be done, so long as the water table be replaced with PVC. Ms. Wilson stated that that is not something she would want to do, because it would defeat the goal of having the building look its best for the longest amount of time.

Mr. Ostrow stated that he hopes the organization can get creative to preserve some elements of the building.

On a motion by Commissioner Wamback and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 6-0 to close the public hearing.

Commissioner Wamback asked Ms. Johnstone if the scroll brackets were original. Ms. Johnstone stated that she is of the opinion that the dentils are small enough that they were likely kept in place underneath the aluminum siding that was previously on the building. The brackets may have been taken off and kept in storage, which does happen; or are wood replicas from the 1980s. Mr. Rolle stated that it is very difficult to determine what is original.

Commissioner Long stated that the Commission had previously asked a homeowner to maintain the façade of a building with wood siding but allowed vinyl siding on the side elevations, and it looks beautiful.

Commissioner Stefani stated that he would prefer to see fiber cement siding, and that he would like to see a quote for that product. Mr. Christopher gave a quote for the project of \$139,500.

Mr. Rolle noted that if the siding was, in fact, installed in the 1980s, it would not be under their purview.

Commissioners Wamback and Bloom noted that they felt as though the mission of the organization may overshadow the preferred preservation of the building, especially not knowing if the siding is original or not. Commissioner Bloom stated he would feel better if the project was approved on financial hardship. Commissioner Wamback agreed.

Commissioner Theerman stated that she would like to see a new estimate of the costs associated with repairing the wood siding. Commissioner Wamback noted that if the estimate was \$118,000 two years ago, he wouldn't expect it to be less now, considering the increase in costs due to COVID and natural inflation. Mr. Christopher stated that given the underlying damage, the wood siding needs to be removed regardless.

Commissioner Stefani also touched on the mission of the organization. He stated that if he could get a definite answer on whether the clapboards had been replaced, he would be in a position to make a decision. He also asked if the wood estimate given was for replacing the siding on the whole building, or just the rotted sections. Mr. Christopher stated that the estimate only considered replacing the rotted wood and painting it.

On a motion by Commissioner Long and seconded by Commissioner Kurtz, the Commission voted 0-6 that the proposed demolition at 1059 Main Street would not be detrimental to the historical or architectural resources of the City of Worcester, and thus denied the Building Demolition Delay Waiver.

On a motion by Commissioner Long and seconded by Commissioner Kurtz, the Commission voted 6-0 that the proposed changes at 1059 Main Street are necessary to avoid an undue economic hardship to the property owner, and thus approved the Building Demolition Delay Waiver.

List of Exhibits

Exhibit A: Building Demolition Delay Waiver application dated December 18, 2020 and received December 21, 2020.

Certificate of Appropriateness & Building Demolition Delay Waiver

3. 19 Oxford Street – HC-2020-095 (MBL 03-025-19-03)

Petitioners: Jennifer Lachambre

Year Built: 1856

Historic Status: MACRIS listed; State Register of Historic Places (SR); National Register District (NRDIS); Positive National Register Opinion of Eligibility; Crown Hill LHD, FKA Elijah F. Brooks House #1 – Worcester Society of Friends Parish House

Petition Purpose:

- Replace 6 windows with grilles-between-glass Fibrex windows with grid patterns and color to match existing

The applicant was not present on the call.

On a motion by Commissioner Wamback and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 6-0 to postpone the item until the January 21, 2021 meeting.

COMMUNICATIONS

- A. Request from VHB for an updated letter of support for state tax credit allocations for the Joseph R. Torrey Razor and Strop Company, 128 Chandler Street.

On a motion by Commissioner Wamback and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 6-0 to provide an updated Letter of Support.

- B. Request from Anser Advisory, LLC, for an updated letter of support for state tax credit allocations for the Worcester YWCA, 1 Salem Square.

On a motion by Commissioner Wamback and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 6-0 to provide an updated Letter of Support.

- C. Communication from the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), conveying the MHC's inability to concur with the FAA's finding of "No Historic Properties Affected" in regards to the proposed demolition of two hangars at the Worcester Regional Airport.

The Commission did not comment.

- D. Postcard from MHC announcing the 2021 round of the Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF).

The Commission did not comment.

OTHER BUSINESS

- A. Election of Commission officers.

On a motion by Commissioner Wamback and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 5-0, with Commissioner Kurtz abstaining, to re-elect Commissioner Kurtz to the position of Vice-Chair.

On a motion by Commissioner Kurtz and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 6-0, with Commissioner Long abstaining and Commissioner Helnarski voting, to elect Commissioner Long to the position of Clerk.

On a motion by Commissioner Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Kurtz, the Commission voted 6-0, with Commissioner Wamback abstaining and Commissioner Helnarski voting, to re-elect Commissioner Wamback to the position of Chair.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by Commissioner Wamback and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the meeting was adjourned at 7:03 PM.