



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

Thursday, March 23, 2023

Worcester City Hall - Levi Lincoln Chamber,
with remote participation options available via Webex online at
<https://cityofworchester.webex.com/meet/historicalcommissionwebex> and
call-in number 415-655-0001 (Access Code: 1608081191).

Commissioners Present: Diane Long, Chair
Janet Theerman, Vice-Chair
Erika Helnarski (participated remotely)
Devon Kurtz
Donald Northway
Steven Taylor
Vanessa Andre, Alternate (participated remotely)

Commissioners Absent: Tomi Stefani

Staff Present: Michelle Johnstone, Division of Planning & Regulatory Services (DPRS)
Michelle Smith, Division of Planning and Regulatory Services (DPRS)

Call Commission to Order – 5:30 PM

Approval of Minutes

On a motion by Vice-Chair Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Northway, the Commission voted seven (7) in favor and zero (0) opposed to approve the minutes of January 26, 2023 & February 9, 2023.

Old Business

Certificate of Appropriateness & Building Demolition Delay Waiver

1. 114 Austin Street (03-024-00002) – HC-2022-090

Petition purpose: Demolish building and construct a replacement building

Don O’Neil, Attorney, and Jesse Heldengarth, o/b/o Daniel Yarnie, owner, presented in person to the commission with Carmine Guaracino, the engineer of the project, available remotely.

Chair Long stated the reason the commission wanted the engineer present was because the report submitted in 2023 and the report on the property submitted in 2020 were different and the commission was looking to know why.

Mr. Guaracino said that it is unclear why the report in 2020 made the building sound like it was in such good shape and repairable. Mr. Guaracino has been doing this work of restoration and preservation of homes for over 30 years all over New England. The opinion in the report is that the building should not be allowed to remain standing. There is concern over a partial collapse due to conditions of the foundation and walls.

Chair Long stated that many of the support beams had been reinforced from the report in 2020.

Mr. Guaracino stated that everything had been done improperly and does not meet code.

Mr. Heldengarth added that perhaps what is being overlooked is that this building is going from a two family code to a five family code which is a completely different code. He asked that Mr. Guaracino to explain what it means to seismically brace that building at the foundation.

Mr. Guaracino said once you get into the commercial code, outside of one- and two-family houses, there has to be planning for earthquakes. That means that the stone and brick foundation does not meet today's code and cannot really be updated. The building would need to be lifted, a new concrete foundation poured, and the house put on the new foundation. In Mr. Guaracino's opinion, this building could not withstand the process needed to complete the foundation work.

Commissioner Northway asked if the building was shored up, would it be safe to do work to keep the building alive.

Mr. Guaracino stated that he believes in order to do the level of work needed, the building would have to be dismantled and rebuilt.

Commissioner Northway asked if that was true for the carriage house as well.

Mr. Guaracino said the carriage house does have some issues and was afraid doing the inspection. The brick foundations and interior are in poor condition.

Commissioner Long asked if it would be possible to save the front façade of the carriage house as that has the historic integrity and put a building on the back of it.

Mr. Guaracino answered absolutely.

Chair Long stated that the commission had talked about that a little bit, but hadn't gone into any great detail the first time it was discussed.

Mr. Heldengarth showed a sketch that was worked on of a future option for opinion. The idea as a "napkin sketch" is to keep the carriage house as a unit and add additional new construction.

Chair Long said any part of the house that can be kept would be preferred. If the petitioner is looking to do more work on the carriage house, maybe the commission leaves that off of the vote and vote just on the main house.

Ms. Johnstone stated that there was conversation with the applicants before the meeting and what they are looking for tonight is some confidence that they are going in the right direction so that the commission can take a vote on demolition and reconstruction at the same time.

Mr. O'Neil stated that he agreed with Ms. Johnstone. The applicant would like to bring back an official design so that the commission would know what the replacement would be for confirmation they are headed in the right direction. They are not married to a vote tonight and would be happy to come back.

Chair Long said that listening to Mr. Guaracino is convinced the building is not structurally sound and would like to commission to also weigh in on the demolition and saving whatever parts of the historic building that are possible for the new build.

Commissioner Northway has a vested interest as this is his district. What was brought up tonight about the carriage house and façade is very encouraging and moving forward is very encouraging and a likely solution as well.

Commissioner Theerman noted the petitioner is held to a higher standard because it is a multifamily dwelling and there are probably many old homes in Worcester that would not meet that standard. I don't understand the concern for an earthquake.

Mr. Heldengarth responded that they also design for wind loads that have never been seen in Worcester. The code is the code, and the design has to be in line.

Commission Theerman said that if the house remained a one- or two- family home, it would not be held to that high a standard.

Mr. Guaracino stated that it still would. Whether it is a few people or many living in this house, it is still a hazard.

Commissioner Kurtz had nothing to add and is comfortable moving forward as discussed.

Commissioner Taylor had no comment.

Commissioner Helnarski appreciated efforts to save historic elements and stated it is a shame to lose the main building.

Commissioner Andre agreed with saving the façade of the carriage house.

Public comment:

Jonathan Ostrow, 200 Lovell Street, SNDA Group, has not seen either the 2020 or 2023 report and speaking from ignorance, but since this most recent report was so different and paid for by the owner, shouldn't the city's building or health department inspect as well for an objective opinion. If the building is in such condition, it should have been condemned when it was inspected when work was done in 2020.

Ms. Johnstone said this building has been inspected by Lee Hall in Inspectional Services and was slated for an emergency demolition order on more than one occasion. More than likely, if asked, Inspectional Services would issue the emergency demolition order and then there would be no input given from the Historical Commission. The regulatory process is probably the best thing to do.

Chair Long added there were two and a half years between the reports and the assertion of bias now doesn't speak to the first report being done for a rehab of the building. That report probably spoke to the project happening at that time.

On a motion made by Vice-Chair Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted six (6) in favor and zero (0) opposed to close public comment with Commissioner Taylor not voting as he wasn't present at the initial presentation of the project.

Mr. O'Neil stated that what makes the most sense at this point is for the petitioner to withdraw and then refile when the plan for the project is in place. The request is to Leave to Withdraw without Prejudice.

Upon a motion made by Vice-Chair Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted six (6) in favor and zero (0) opposed to issue a Leave to Withdraw without Prejudice to the application with Commissioner Taylor not voting as he wasn't present at the initial presentation of the project.

Exhibits

Exhibit A:

Exhibit B: Slides/photos shown at meeting of current conditions/future proposals

New Business

Certificate of Non-Applicability

2. **64–68 Austin Street, 61–65 & 67–69 Chatham Street, 29–33 & 38–42 Oxford Street (Multiple MBLs) – CNA-23-9 – 13**

Petition purpose: Replace decks & select windows in-kind

Donal Magrane o/b/o Whittier Crown Hill participated remotely for the commission. Casement windows on the back of the building will be replaced in kind. Also replacing all existing decks to the same exact dimensions as well with the same materials and color.

Chair Long indicated that the townhouses were built in 1983 and are not historic even though they are in a historic district. The commission had voted on replacing the roofs at the last meeting.

The Commission had no questions for the applicant.

Public comment: None.

On a motion made by Vice-Chair Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted seven (7) in favor and zero (0) opposed to close public comment.

Upon a motion made by Vice-Chair Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted seven (7) in favor and zero (0) opposed that the proposed changes at 64–68 Austin Street, 61–65 & 67–69 Chatham Street, 29–33 & 38–42 Oxford Street, consisting of the replacement of the decks and select windows with in-kind materials, are not under the jurisdiction of the Commission. Having gained a unanimous affirmative vote, the request for a Certificate of Non-Applicability was approved.

Exhibits

Exhibit A:

Exhibit B: Slides/photos shown at meeting of current conditions

3. **64–68 & 86 Austin Street, 61–65 & 67–69 Chatham Street, 29–33 & 38–42 Oxford Street (Multiple MBLs) – CNA-23-14 & 15**

Petition purpose: Repair/replace asphalt walkways & parking lots, repair/replace concrete walkways, walls, and stairs, replace railings

Kevin Jordan, Assistant Regional Maintenance Director for Beacon Communities, representative/petitioner, presented that they are looking to repave the walkways, take down concrete staircases and redo them in concrete. The only change that will be made is that the handrail system is not up to current code so those will be brought up to code.

Chair Long clarified that the handrail system would be taller.

Mr. Jordan answered that they won't be taller, they will be longer. The current handrails are not looped where they are supposed to be and there is not a continuous railing from the top landing that needs to extend out a foot. Same materials and colors will be used.

Chair Long said most of these townhouses were built in the 1983 however, also included is 86 Austin Street which was built in 1890.

Mr. Jordan said yes, built in 1890 and modified in 1986 to its current use. The historic look to the building is very important so the same handrail is going to be reused to keep the same look.

The Commission had no questions for the applicant.

Public comment: None.

On a motion made by Vice-Chair Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted seven (7) in favor and zero (0) opposed to close public comment.

Upon a motion made by Vice-Chair Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted seven (7) in favor and zero (0) opposed that the proposed changes at 64–68 & 86 Austin Street, 61–65 & 67–69 Chatham Street, 29–33 & 38–42 Oxford, consisting of the repair/replacement of asphalt walkways & parking lots, repair/replacement of concrete walkways, walls, and stairs, and replacement of railings, are not under the jurisdiction of the Commission. Having gained a unanimous affirmative vote, the request for a Certificate of Non-Applicability was approved.

Exhibits

Exhibit A:

Exhibit B: Slides/photos shown at meeting of current conditions

Certificate of Appropriateness

4. 18–24 Oxford Street (03-022-00015, -00021) – COA-23-2

Petition purpose: Replace sign face, repave existing parking area/driveway, re-install fence

Victor Wahome o/b/o Wilson Kiriungi, Austism Alilies Inc. /Early Steps Daycare is requesting to replace the existing sign face for the day care and they would like to repave the driveway, and replace a fence that separated the property from 26 Oxford street that was removed during that demolition.

Chair Long asked for photos of the previous sign and the current sign. Photos of existing sign were shown as part of Exhibit B.

Ms. Johnstone explained that the petitioner used the same signpost and hooks, just changed the name plate of the sign.

Commissioner Northway asked for clarification on which fence they would like to replace and with the repaving, making sure that no dimensions will be changed.

Mr. Wahome stated they would like to replace the cedar fence with like materials. The repaving will be the exact same area.

Public comment: None.

On a motion made by Vice-Chair Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted seven (7) in favor and zero (0) opposed to close public comment.

On a motion made by Vice-Chair Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted seven (7) in favor and zero (0) opposed that the proposed changes at 18-24 Oxford Street, consisting of replacing the sign face, repaving existing parking area/driveway, and re-installing the fence are appropriate for the Crown Hill Local Historic District. Having gained a unanimous affirmative vote, the partial Certificate of Appropriateness for 16 Congress Street was thus approved.

Exhibits

Exhibit A:

Exhibit B: Slides/photos shown at meeting of current conditions/proposed changes

Building Demolition Delay Waiver

5. 49 West Street (03-034-00015) – BDDW-23-7

Petition purpose: Install fiber cement siding

Cedric Richardson, in person, and Fritzie Purverge, remotely, o/b/o Black Equity Group, LLC, Owner, presented that they would like to keep the historic aesthetic of the building. The outside is covered in peeling lead paint at the moment. Were going to abate the lead paint and repaint the house, however, a larger boundary than the footprint of the property would be needed to comply with lead paint guidelines. This made it financially unsustainable. What they are looking to do now is cover the house in fiber cement board. Plan on retaining shakers and custom molds. They are unsure of the color as of yet but they will keep with the Elm Park neighborhood.

Chair Long thanked them for saving the custom shakes. The commission has approved fiber cement in the past.

Commissioner Taylor clarified that they are not taking the siding off, they are just putting the cement over what is currently there and what does that do to the trim.

Mr. Richardson stated they are covering the house with Tyvec with an adhesive backing and then putting the cement board over that. They were told the buffer created will not be such that requires a whole new trim.

Ms. Johnstone shared photos of 65 Cedar Street of the same fiber cement. The photos showed that the to the eye it looks exactly as it did when it was wood. The fiber board is a very thin layer.

Commissioner Kurtz asked that they keep the trim details.

Mr. Richardson answered absolutely. The biggest issue is really the lead paint – making sure it is encapsulated and be financially feasible.

Commissioner Theerman asked if there was lead paint around the windows as well.

Mr. Richardson stated they have been before the commission for the window replacements as well.

Mr. Purverge added for the windows they will scrape and epoxy where needed around the window frames.

Commissioner Theerman clarified that the trim around the windows will look exactly like they do now. If you can't scrape the building due to the lead paint, there must be lead paint in the trim paint as well.

Mr. Purverge said correct, but they will be replacement windows.

Mr. Richardson stated that the 10ft boundary was related to the size of the project. To scrape a smaller section will be easier to contain.

Commissioner Northway clarified that no windows are being replaced.

Mr. Richardson stated that windows will be replaced but keeping the window frame.

Ms. Johnstone stated that the windows have already been approved by the commission.

Public comment: None.

On a motion made by Vice-Chair Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted seven (7) in favor and zero (0) opposed to close public comment.

On a motion made by Vice-Chair Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted seven (7) in favor and zero (0) opposed that the proposed demolition at 49 West Street, consisting of installing fiber board cement siding would not be detrimental to the historical or architectural resources of the City of Worcester. Having gained a unanimous affirmative vote, the motion passed and a Building Demolition Delay Waiver for 49 West Street was thus approved.

Exhibits

Exhibit A:

Exhibit B: Slides/photos shown at meeting of current conditions

Communications

None

Other Business

- A. Discussion and vote on final study report and assessed condition of additional properties proposed for inclusion in the proposed Elm Park Local Historic District.

Chair Long asked if the commission would like to take a vote to send to the city council.

Commissioner Taylor asked if there was still more work to be done and pictures added.

Ms. Johnstone replied yes, waiting on graphics. The commission would be voting on sending to city council with the noted additions. This conversation is to see if the commission would like to see substantial changes.

Commissioner Taylor stated that the most difficult part of the report is the justification as to why the boundaries are where they are. On google street view when you look at the boundary it makes perfect sense. Perhaps some visual support can be added to the report. Also, if why the church isn't part of the proposed district can be addressed. Hoping the discussion of boundaries can be enhanced by a few pictures to support what is in the text..

Ms. Johnstone said because the church is on the periphery, and it was built in the 1950's it didn't make sense to include. The text is sufficient but add a few photos of streetscapes at the boundaries.

Chair Long added that the commission still has the item of 230 Park Ave not wanting to be a part of the historic district. That discussion should be furthered as to whether to include that building in the district or not. That building was built around the same time as the houses in the district and is on the other side of the park. A check was done with the legal department as to the memo of agreement with the bank for maintaining the building and was told that the time period of the agreement has ended and is no longer in effect. Keeping the building in the district would give it more protections. Currently, it has the twelve-month demolition delay waiver because it is listed on the national register and would have to come before the commission. One of the things that had come up was losing the slate roof. It does sound like they are looking to maintain the slate roof in kind. Looking for feedback from Commissioners.

Ms. Smith added additional information about historic districts, the role of the Historical Commission, and the role of the City Council in establishing a district.

Commissioner Theerman inquired as to why exactly the bank does not want the building to be a part of the district Attorney Douglas Raddigan (participating remotely) spoke on the bank's behalf. The public/private partnership already included a significant investment by the bank in the historic preservation of the building. The bank will be before the commission in the near future for the slate roof replacement and have already sourced slate. The bank is committed to the preservation of the building. The bank does not want to be included in the district as they don't believe it sends the right message and will continue to oppose its inclusion. The historic district designation is separate from the commitment to the preservation of the building.

Commissioner Northway would like the bank to be included in the district and believe the property is significantly historic and to insure that for the future, if the bank ever leaves, the building is protected.

Chair Long commented on celebrating City/Business partnerships and the job of the Historic Commission.

Commissioner Taylor thinks this is one of the most significant buildings in Worcester and it should be protected as much as possible.

Commissioner Kurtz believes it is an amazing structure however, believes that the building does feel cut off from the rest of the district and doesn't feel a part of the neighborhood story.

Commissioner Theerman feels it should be a part of the district. The commission has to look forward and no one knows what the future will be, so the more protections for the buildings, the better off in the long run.

Commissioner Helnarski agrees with Commissioner Theerman. It is to preserve these buildings and neighborhoods for decades to come. The building should be in the district.

Commissioner Andre also agrees that the building should be in the district. This is to preserve the history and the structures.

Ms. Johnstone asked if anyone had any additional feedback regarding the actual report.

The commissioners had no additional feedback.

Public comment:

Mr. Raddigan o/b/o the bank, expressed that he does not believe the law department's summation is a fair characterization of the agreement. If the bank were ever to leave, ownership reverts to the city.

Ms. Smith clarified that this meeting was not to rehash conversations or contradict the bank's position, but rather to clarify for the commission the bank's position that the historic district was in conflict with the MOA agreement.

Jonathan Ostrow, Worcester, SNDA, voiced his opinion of concern for if the bank were to leave and the city couldn't find a new tenant, that the building could be demolished. The building should be included in the district.

Susan Chicacci, architectural historian who worked on the original survey of Worcester's buildings in 1977. Although not having seen the report, this building deserves all the support available for Worcester's built environment and the bank is an important part of the neighborhood. Many important buildings have been lost in recent years due to lack of oversight to help counteract business decisions. The one question is why the park is not included in the district.

Ms. Johnstone responded that the process was started to preserve what were the Becker College buildings and then the project expanded to the neighborhood. It was about protecting the buildings in the built environment rather than landscapes. The neighborhood developed separately from the park itself.

On a motion made by Vice-Chair Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted seven (7) in favor and zero (0) opposed to close public comment.

On a motion made by Vice-Chair Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted seven (7) in favor and zero (0) opposed to approve the final study report of the Elm Park Neighborhood Local Historic District, and request that the Department of Planning and Regulatory Services transmit the report to City Council for consideration on condition that streetscapes at the periphery be included in the final report and that rationale of the exclusion of the Greek orthodox church be included.

Ms. Smith stated that the report will be available on the city's website.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon a motion by Commissioner Long, the Commission voted seven (7) to zero (0) to adjourn the meeting at approximately 7:10 p.m.