

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

December 3, 2020

CITY HALL*

Commission Members Participating:

Mark Wamback, Chair
Devon Kurtz, Vice-Chair
Randolph Bloom
Diane Long
Janet Theerman

Commission Members Not Participating:

Tomi Stefani
Erika Helnarski, Alternate

Staff Members Participating:

Michelle Smith, 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 5:40 PM.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

October 29, 2020: On a motion by Commissioner Long and seconded by Commissioner Kurtz, the Commission voted 5-0 to approve the October 29, 2020 meeting minutes.

November 12, 2020: On a motion by Commissioner Long and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 4-0 to approve the November 12, 2020 meeting minutes, with Commissioner Kurtz not voting due to his absence at the November 12 meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

Certificate of Non-Applicability

1. 6 Congress Street – HC-2020-090 (MBL 03-026-00027)

Petitioner: Lorraine Quinn

Year Built: 1852

Historic Status: MACRIS listed; State Register of Historic Places (SR); National Register District (NRDIS); National Register Multiple Resource Area (NRMRA); Crown Hill Local Historic District

Petition Purpose:

- Replace existing asphalt shingle roof with new asphalt shingle roof
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Lorraine Quinn, a contract purchaser, spoke on behalf of the application.

She stated that the existing roof is leaking, and that the proposal is to replace the existing three-tab asphalt shingle roof with a new three-tab asphalt shingle roof in the color nickel gray, and to install vents on the roof to properly vent the insulation.

The Commission had no comment on the application.

No public comment.

On a motion by Commissioner Kurtz and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 5-0 to close the public hearing.

On a motion by Commissioner Long and seconded by Commissioner Kurtz, the Commission voted 5-0 that the proposed changes consisting of the replacement of an asphalt roof and the installation of a ridge vent in a like color are not under the jurisdiction of the Commission and is therefore not applicable, due to the fact it is a replacement using in-kind materials, and approved a Certificate of Non-Applicability.

List of Exhibits

Exhibit A: Certificate of Non-Applicability application, dated November 5, 2020, and received November 18, 2020.

2. 2 Regent Street – HC-2020-091 (MBL 02-014-00001)

Petitioner: Brian Lawler o/b/o Anne Higgins

Year Built: 1909

Historic Status: MACRIS listed; State Register of Historic Places (SR); Massachusetts Avenue Local Historic District

Petition Purpose:

- Replace sections of damaged roof on the house and garage in-kind

Anne Higgins and Kim Merrick, the homeowners, spoke on behalf of the application. The contractor, Brian Lawler was also present on the line.

Ms. Higgins stated the purpose of the petition, which is to repair the roof of the house and garage, which were damaged by a fallen tree, with in kind materials.

The Commission had no comment on the application.

Mr. Lawler also noted that all work will be in-kind.

No public comment.

On a motion by Commissioner Long and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 5-0 to close the public hearing.

Ms. Johnstone noted that a permit has already been issued for this work [given that it was an emergency].

On a motion by Commissioner Long and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 5-0 that the changes consisting of repair of the roof at 2 Regent Street is not under the jurisdiction of the Commission, due to the fact that it is in-kind materials to repair damage, and is therefore not applicable, and approved a retroactive Certificate of Non-Applicability.

List of Exhibits

Exhibit A. Certificate of Non-Applicability application, dated November 18, 2020, and received November 19, 2020.

Building Demolition Delay Waiver

3. 12 Marconi Road – HC-2020-085 (MBL 37-017-00092)

Petitioners: Andrew & Veronica Fish

Year Built: ca. 1915

Historic Status: MACRIS listed; State Register of Historic Places (SR); National Register District (NRDIS); National Register Multiple Resource Area (NRMRA)

Petition Purpose:

- Replace existing slate roof with new asphalt shingle roof
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Andy Fish, the homeowner, spoke on behalf of the application. He stated that the slate roof is leaking. He stated that they had done repairs to the roof a number of times and that recently, they received a quote to repair the slate roof that was astronomical. Ultimately, they have decided to propose colonial slate style asphalt shingles to replace the slate roof.

Commissioner Wamback stated that the prevailing thought is that if it is possible to keep the slate it should be kept, but there are a number of products that look like slate.

Commissioner Theerman asked if this was being decided on economic hardship. Ms. Johnstone stated that the Commission would first need to take a vote on whether the removal of the slate shingles would be detrimental to the historical or architectural resources of the city, and if such a motion failed, a second vote could be taken on the basis of financial hardship. She also stated that the applicant's estimates are in the application materials.

No public comment.

On a motion by Commissioner Long and seconded by Commissioner Kurtz, the Commission voted 5-0 to close the public hearing.

On a motion by Commissioner Long and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 3-2, with Commissioners Wamback, Kurtz, and Bloom being the yeas, and Commissioners Long and Theerman being the nays, that the proposed demolition at 12 Marconi Road of the removal of the slate roof 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 October 22, 2020, and received October 27, 2020.

Building Demolition Delay Waiver

4. 1103 Millbury Street – HC-2020-086 (MBL 31-007-00004)

- Petitioner: Crescent Builders, Inc.
Year Built: ca. 1890
Historic Status: Located within a MACRIS area
Petition Purpose:
- Demolish building
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Attorney Jonathan Finkelstein spoke on behalf of Crescent Builders in regards to the application. He gave some background on the property, stating that there is a single-family dwelling located on a 2.5 acre lot. The applicant wished to demolish the dwelling and develop the lot. He asked that given its lack of historical integrity that the Commission grant leave to withdraw.

Commissioner Bloom asked about the condition of the property, as well as what will happen to the land once the house is removed. Mr. Finkelstein stated that the owner plans to develop the lot, although the plans are not formalized or finalized. He stated that the inside of the property is in worse condition than the outside of the property.

Commissioner Bloom asked Ms. Johnstone what a MACRIS area is. She explained that a MACRIS area is a boundary around a large area of historic buildings, sometimes with individual survey properties, and sometimes not. Commissioner Bloom asked if, because this property was not individually surveyed, the people who prepared the form didn't believe that the property was significant. Ms. Johnstone explained the reasons that the property may have not been individually surveyed.

Commissioner Theerman asked if the Commission has any say in what gets built in the property's place. Ms. Johnstone stated that the Commission does not have purview over that, and that what the Commission is considering is whether or not the loss of the building would be detrimental to the historical or architectural resources of the City.

No public comment.

On a motion by Commissioner Long and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 5-0 to close the public hearing.

On a motion by Commissioner Long and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 5-0 that the proposed demolition at 1103 Millbury Street is not subject to the Historic Building Demolition Delay Ordinance because the structure has been heavily altered and is no longer potentially eligible for listing on the National Register and thereby granted leave to withdraw without prejudice for the application.

List of Exhibits

Exhibit A: Building Demolition Delay Waiver application dated October 5, 2020 and received October 27, 2020.

5. 50 Front Street – HC-2020-088 (MBL 02-025-00013)

Petitioner: Felicio Lana, 250 Commercial Street, LLC

Year Built: 1897

Historic Status: MACRIS listed; positive opinion of eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places within a district, FKA the Ransom C. Taylor Block

Petition Purpose:

- Install stone veneer around side (Commercial Street) entrance (retroactive)
- Remove existing awning and install a new awning above side (Commercial Street) entrance (retroactive)

Felicio Lana, building owner, spoke on behalf of the application. He stated what had been done at the property, which included defining the side entrance by installing granite panels on either side.

Commissioner Wamback asked if the work was reversible. Mr. Lana stated that the structure is intact beneath the granite panels. Ms. Johnstone noted that the granite is a veneer installed on a metal frame, and agreed that she believed it to be reversible.

Commissioner Long stated that she thought that the work was an aesthetic improvement, considering everything remained intact.

Commissioner Wamback asked Ms. Johnstone if the awning that was replaced was non-historic. Ms. Johnstone stated that the awning was not historic and that if it had been replaced in kind, it could have been approved administratively. Since the new awning was attached directly to the masonry, the installation of the new awning constituted a demolition.

No public comment.

On a motion by Commissioner Long and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 5-0 to close the public hearing.

On a motion by Commissioner Long and seconded by Commissioner Kurtz, the Commission voted 5-0 that the retroactive demolition at 50 Front 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 4, 2020, and received November 12, 2020.

6. 86A Elm Street – HC-2020-089 (MBL 06-005-00012)

Petitioner: D+N Properties, LLC

Year Built: ca. 1906

Historic Status: MACRIS listed, FKA the M.J. and S.G. Friedman House

Petition Purpose:

- Remove portions of existing asbestos siding (retroactive)

- Remove underlying original wood shingles on the flat surface of the façade and install new, wider wood shingles in their place and to cover the remaining asbestos
- Restoration of first-floor porch to match its original design, except where code prohibits it in the height of the railings
- Restoration of second- and third-floor porches to match the original design of the second-floor porch, except where code prohibits it in the height of the railings

Rebecca Thrush, manager of D+N Properties, spoke on behalf of the application. She stated the intent of the application, which is to receive approval for the replacement of the existing wood shingles on the front elevation; to restore the first- and second-story porches and bring the railings up to code; and to restore the third-story porch in the same style as the second-story porch.

Ms. Johnstone asked for some clarification on the application, specifically how the applicant planned to keep the columns intact if the railing system was being raised to meet code. Ms. Thrush clarified that the base of the column would be removed.

Commissioner Wamback asked why the third-floor porch isn't proposed to stay the same as it is. Ms. Thrush stated that they are open to keeping the same design, but they feel that the second-floor porch design is more desirable aesthetically.

Commissioner Theerman asked if the design of the third-floor porch is original. Ms. Johnstone stated that it probably is original given the in-kind siding materials beneath the porch opening and the style of it, but in the absence of photographic evidence, that she cannot be sure.

Commissioner Long stated that she thinks that the third-floor porch would look better in the style of the second-floor porch. Commissioner Theerman agreed.

Commissioner Theerman noted that the capital and the base on columns are typically separate pieces, so the applicant could shorten the length of the columns rather than losing the base. Ms. Thrush stated that she would be open to that.

No public comment.

On a motion by Commissioner Long and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 5-0 to close the public hearing.

On a motion by Commissioner Long and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 5-0 that the proposed demolition of removing the asbestos siding and removing it with wood shingles, and matching the third-floor porch to the second-floor porch at 86A Elm 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 5, 2020, and received November 10, 2020.

COMMUNICATIONS

- A. Notice from the FCC of MHC finding of no adverse effects to historic resources for project at 55 Union Street (Section 106)

No comment.

- B. Invitation from EBI Consulting to comment on potential effects to historic resources regarding cellular equipment installation and alterations at Goddard Library, Clark University, 160 Woodland Street (Section 106); and associated notification from FCC regarding the project

Ms. Johnstone described the proposal, which is to install new cellular equipment on the Goddard Library at Clark University. She stated that there is already cellular equipment on the building, and that in her opinion, the installation of new cellular equipment would not affect nearby historic resources.

On a motion by Commissioner Wamback and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 5-0 to withhold comment on the communication.

C. Request from the Public Archaeology Laboratory (PAL) for CLG Opinion – St. Mary’s School, 50 Richland Street

James Cunningham, a project proponent, and Elizabeth Totten, Preservation Planner at PAL, were present on the meeting line. Mr. Cunningham stated that he is a contract purchaser of the school, and that his firm is in the process of determining the highest and best use of the building. He stated that they like working with historic buildings and within historic preservation guidelines. He asked for the Commission’s support.

Ms. Johnstone stated that she has prepared a draft opinion of eligibility for the Commission to vote on.

The Commission voiced their support of the proposal.

On a motion by Commissioner Wamback and seconded by Commissioner Kurtz, the Commission voted 5-0 to approve the draft opinion of eligibility, which was a positive opinion of National Register eligibility, as written.

D. Flyer from Preservation Worcester regarding the Door to Door Tour

No comment.

E. Request from Epsilon Associates for updated Letters of Support for State Historic Tax Credits for the Commerce Building, 340 Main Street; and Walker Shoe Factory, 28 Water Street

On a motion by Commissioner Wamback and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 5-0 to provide updated letters of support.

F. Request from Epsilon Associates for a new Letter of Support for Historic Tax Credits for the Worcester County Institution for Savings, 365 Main Street

Ms. Johnstone stated that this proposal calls for the preservation and rehabilitation of the building to allow for mixed commercial office space.

On a motion by Commissioner Wamback and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 5-0 to provide a letter of support.

OTHER BUSINESS

A. Discussion on Demolition Delay Ordinance Revisions.

Ms. Johnstone described the proposed revisions to the Demolition Delay Ordinance with a short presentation. She stated that with the use of the MACRIS database, only a very small number of historic buildings in Worcester are captured. She also stated that the Massachusetts Historical Commission does not recommend the use of a categorical system, which is what Worcester currently uses by relying on MACRIS. She stated that the revised ordinance will likely employ an age-based system so that all buildings 75 or more years old will be captured.

Also, she stated that the current ordinance is overreaching in many ways and functions as design review, which is not an acceptable use of demolition delay.

She stated that a revised ordinance would increase the Commission’s ability to protect more properties by using an age-based system. In order to do that, the threshold for what is considered “demolition” would need to be modified to remove projects such as window or roof replacements or siding projects to allow more time to review full demolitions. More time and resources could also be allocated to establishing new Local Historic Districts.

Commissioner Wamback stated that he liked the idea of an age-based system.

Commissioner Bloom stated that in the past, people on the Commission had been concerned about losing details on buildings, because the revised ordinance proposal does not include protections for specific details.

In the meantime, entire buildings have been lost, so his feelings on how to approach demolition delay have changed. With an age-based system, he stated, the Commission will have the ability to save an entire building, which is more important than particular details.

Ms. Johnstone gave some background on how the workflow process would work with a revised ordinance.

Commissioner Wamback asked if the revised demolition thresholds would be strictly for properties outside of Local Historic Districts. She stated that that would be the case, and there would be no change to purview in Local Historic Districts.

Commissioner Long stated that she thinks the proposal sounds good.

Commissioner Bloom stated that the Commission needs to make sure they are moving on this issue, and that it appears that an age-based threshold is probably the best.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by Commissioner Wamback and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the meeting was adjourned at 6:43 PM.