

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

December 4, 2008

**CHASE BUILDING, 44 FRONT STREET, WORCESTER
SUITE 300 – CONFERENCE ROOM**

Commission Members Present: Peter Schneider, Chair
Michael Theerman
James Crowley
Janet Merrill
Timothy McCann

Staff Present: Judy Stolberg, Planning and Regulatory Services
Joel Fontane, Planning and Regulatory Services
Ruth Gentile, Planning and Regulatory Services
Edgar Luna, Planning and Regulatory Services

REGULAR MEETING (5:30 PM)

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Schneider called the meeting to order at 5:30 P.M.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. **85 Chatham Street (HC-2008-091) – Building Demolition Delay Waiver:** The item was tabled until later in the meeting. When all other business had been concluded, the item was taken off the table. Mr. Fontane informed the Commission that John Kelly, Acting Building Commissioner, had issued an order that the deteriorated condition of the exterior brick masonry walls and roof parapet require immediate emergency repair to abate a threat to the health and safety of the public. The Order further states that a Building Permit for the areas that require immediate restoration will be issued. Mr. Fontane said the Order supersedes any action by the Commission. Chair Schneider expressed concern that the Demolition Delay Waiver requested by the applicant could be constructively approved if not acted upon by the Commission. He felt the Commission needed to take action so that did not happen, even though he understood the Emergency Order would render any such action moot. His primary concern was that it was unclear if the work outlined in the application and the work authorized by the Building Permit would be the same scope of work. Mr. Fontane responded that the Building Permit would be for any work necessary to handle the repairs and abate the threat to public safety. He advised the Commission that the matter was in litigation and that he supported the Acting Building Commissioner's action. Chair Schneider reiterated his position that he wanted a vote to prevent constructive approval. Upon reviewing the petition submitted to install a metal apron on the roof line of the building and repoint or replace loose and missing bricks where needed and all evidence provided, and upon a motion by Commissioner Crowley and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 0-4 (Janet Merrill was not present for the hearing) that the proposed demolition would not be detrimental to the historical or architectural resources of the City of Worcester. The motion failed and the Building Demolition Delay Waiver was denied.

NEW BUSINESS

2. **2 Woodford Street (HC-2008-094) – Building Demolition Delay Waiver:** Paul Hernandez, petitioner, is seeking to remove architectural shingles and deteriorated slate on the roof and repair the roof with architectural shingles. Mr. Hernandez said he would replace architectural shingles with architectural shingles. Thomas Gregory, representing the Neighborhood and Housing Development Division, advised there was slate under the architectural shingles but it had deteriorated to such an extent that it was unsalvageable. Upon reviewing the petition submitted to remove architectural shingles and deteriorated slate and repair the roof with architectural shingles and all evidence provided, and upon a motion by Commissioner Crowley and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission voted 5-0 that the proposed demolition would not be detrimental to the historical or architectural resources of the City of Worcester and the Building Demolition Delay Waiver was approved.

OTHER BUSINESS

Washburn Moen Wire Rope Building (a.k.a. Rome Building) – Presentation of Proposed Adaptive Re-use of the Building: Stephen Crane, Special Projects Coordinator, Economic Development Division, said the project is unique in that it is a City project constructed by the State. He apologized to the Commission for not providing a more thorough presentation at the November 6, 2008 meeting. Mr. Crane said that, after a series of community meetings, the Washburn Moen Building was designated as the preferred site for a visitor and/or multi-use center to anchor the northern gateway to the Blackstone River Valley. He said the Worcester Historical Museum has chosen to become an integral part of the project and will move to the new facility. Mr. Crane introduced Bob Miklos who provided the Commission with an historical perspective of the site. He indicated that the site is believed to be the site of a paper mill constructed on the banks of the Blackstone River by Isaiah Thomas in the 1700's. He said the Washburn Moen Building was chosen because of its historical significance as the last remaining building of the Washburn Moen steel and wire complex, which became one of the world's largest suppliers of cable and wire. The company was eventually taken over by American Steel and U.S. Steel with operations ending in the 1960's. A model of the proposed exterior renovations was shown so the Commission could visualize the merging of the new and the old. Mr. Miklos said it is believed that the fabric of new additions should be distinct while incorporating the fabric of the original buildings. He said elevators and stairways would be enclosed in wire netting to provide character in keeping with a period manufacturing building. He said the intent is to celebrate and immerse visitors in the fabric of the structure. Chair Schneider said the Commission had a much clearer picture of the proposal. Commissioner Theerman said that touring the building and seeing the model had convinced him that it would be great project. Deb Packard said Preservation Worcester reviewed the plan and its only comment was that the windows should be preserved if possible. Mr. Miklos said new windows must be installed because the space needs to be climate controlled with a vapor barrier in order to ensure the proper handling of artifacts and the preservation of historic collections. Sam Batchelor said that some of the windows will be incorporated into interior spaces as part of the design to provide a view from one space into another. Mr. Crane reminded the Commission that this was not a restoration project but rather an adaptive re-use of the site. Chair Schneider urged that, when repointing, the masons make certain the mortar color matches what exists and that the spacing not be increased. Mr. Miklos said they would specify a custom mix to ensure the color match and the masonry bid specifications would include spacing criteria. Upon a motion by Commissioner Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Crowley, it was voted 5-0 to

authorize the Chair to send a letter of support for the project to the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

Local Historic Districts - Creation of Crown Hill Local Historic District and Expansion of Massachusetts Avenue Local Historic District: Mr. Fontane advised the Chair that Janet Merrill should recuse herself and leave the room during the discussion relating to the creation of the Crown Hill Local Historic District until a final legal opinion is rendered on the matter. Chair Schneider disagreed that she had to leave the room. Ms. Merrill indicated that she was advised to recuse herself from deliberation on this item. The question was whether she had to leave the room. Ms. Merrill did recuse herself and left the room shortly thereafter.

Massachusetts Historical Planning and Survey Grant – Request to Authorize Letter of Intent to Apply: Mr. Fontane told the Commission that the City Council had adopted a resolution authorizing the City Manager to apply for and accept a Massachusetts Historical Planning and Survey Grant in the amount of \$10,200.00. He said \$6,800.00 more allocated would be available from Community Development Block Grant funds for the local match. He said once the choice between the creation of the Crown Hill Local Historic District and the expansion of the Massachusetts Avenue Local Historic District is made, a letter of intent must be sent from the City Manager to convey the City's intention to apply. Should the grant be awarded to the City, it will be used to hire a consultant to survey the properties in the proposed LHD. Chair Schneider recapped the options open to the Commission. He said two petitions had been referred to the Commission by the City Council – one to create the Crown Hill Local Historic District and one to expand the Massachusetts Avenue Local Historic District. Mr. Fontane said the Crown Hill group was further advanced in the process and had done multiple mailings to solicit neighborhood responses. Tom Johnson said the purpose of the creation of the Local Historic District is to stabilize and build a better neighborhood. He said the area is comprised of early 19th and 20th century architecture as well as some new construction. He further indicated that there are a number of properties that are owned by absentee landlords who are not stakeholders in the fabric and character of the neighborhood but merely look upon their properties as income opportunities. Mr. Luna informed the Commission that representatives from the Massachusetts Avenue Local Historic District were unable to attend the meeting but were still interested in pursuing expansion of this LHD. Commissioner Crowley said it is unfortunate that we have to compare the two proposals, but clearly, the Crown Hill group was much better prepared at this juncture and should be supported. Commissioner Theerman agreed that the Crown Hill group had already expended a great deal of time and effort to move forward. Mr. Fontane said the expansion of the Massachusetts Avenue Local Historic District could be tabled to be revisited at a later date should another round of funding become available. Upon a motion by Commissioner Crowley and seconded by Commissioner McCann, it was voted 4-0 to create a preliminary study committee to consist of the Commission members to consider creation of the Crown Hill Local Historic District. Upon a motion by Commissioner McCann and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, it was voted 4-0 to table the expansion of the Massachusetts Local Historic District for an indefinite period. Upon a motion by Commissioner Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Crowley, it was voted 4-0 to authorize the Chair, or his designee, to sign a letter to the City Manager recommending that a Letter of Intent to apply for Survey and Planning Funds to conduct a survey to identify and document architecturally and/or historically significant properties in the Crown Hill area for the purpose of creating a new Local Historic District be submitted to the Massachusetts Historical Commission. Ms. Gentile said that in mid-December a mailing from the City would be sent to all property owners within the Preliminary Study Area regarding the LHD project and inviting them to an informational meeting on January 29, 2009. She indicated that on January 19, 2009 the

Massachusetts Historical Commission will designate those communities that are invited to apply for the MHC Survey and Planning Grant. She said if the City is chosen to apply, the deadline for full application submittal is March 9, 2009.

There being no further business, Chair Schneider adjourned the meeting at 7:20 P.M.