

**Minutes**  
**of the**  
**Watertown Historical Commission**  
**Thursday, July 12, 2007**  
**Council Chambers**

**Historical Commission Members Present:**

**Russo, Roach, Jones, Berg, O'Looney, Light**

**Staff Present:** Hayward, Collins

**Public Present:** See attached Sign-In Form

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The meeting opened at 7:30p.m.

- 1. Public Hearing Continued – Demolition Permit Browne School, 552 Main Street, Kaestle Boos Associates, applicant; Town of Watertown, owner**

David Russo inquired what the cost for restoration and why had it been expensed over 15 years. Michael McKeon, architect with Kaestle Boos Associates, responded that he did not produce the numbers. It was done by another consultant eight years ago.

Jones requested information on the impact of the renovation on the playground. McKeon responded that the improvements to the playground

would be incorporated into the project. Presently, they were working with the neighbors and that the playground would be improved overall.

John Lawn, 20 Pilgrim Road, Chairman of the Police Building Committee, said that he was concerned about the impact of the project on the playground. He reported that the playground was installed by the Atrium School and that any improvements would be made for neighborhood usage. Presently, the playground is not usable for young children. He wants it redone and improved. He hopes there will be a buffer between the Police Station and the playground. He'd mentioned that he would like to see a sprinkler park. Additional money will be necessary from Town Council for an improved park. Jones inquired if the new configuration of the building would have an impact. Lawn responded that it would be an improvement.

Berg inquired how far forward the new building will be from the present one. McKeon responded that it was 30'.

Russo inquired how much would it cost to restore the building and where were the numbers requested. McKeon stated that he actually needed to design the restored building to derive restoration costs. That was the reason why he did not provide the figures and why he used the "academic" examples presented at the previous meeting.

McKeon informed that the Browne School was not robust enough to be restored as a Police Station.

Mark Sideris, 30 Union Street and member of the Town Council, informed that a feasibility studies conducted in 2003 and 2004 estimated that a Police Station at the Coolidge School would cost \$12 million, the Main Library would cost \$10 million and at the Brown School \$11. The new building at the Browne School is estimated at \$13 million. McKeon noted that the estimates for the Brown School would be more expensive than the examples given because the restored building has to meet the

functionality of the new building. Russo wants the cost to restore the building to compare it to new construction costs.

Stephen Corbett, 14 Irving Park and Town Council Member, inquired why were the restoration numbers needed since they wouldn't change the historic value of the building.

Candi Alenbach, 33 Puritan and representative of the Westside Neighborhood Committee, reported that it was more expensive to renovate and that it would be less safe for the police. She felt that a new building would be aesthetically better for the neighborhood.

Russo inquired if there had been any contact with Historic New England (HNE). Wendy Price, representative of HNE, reported that she has attended meetings and that all concerns have been addressed. She had no objections to a new building. However, as a representative of HNE, she informed that the Browne School is a building that should be preserved.

O'Looney stated that the Browne School was historically significant and it's proximity to the Browne house also made it historically significant. She understood that the building would not meet the needs of a Police Station.

Jones agreed with O'Looney. He wished that there were more choices and he felt that the decision for a new Police Station came too quickly. He did not hear or know the cost of restoration. He was unsure if it would be less or more to restore. He wanted the police to have a good facility. However, he felt that the Browne School was a valuable resource to the Town. He felt it would have been good for housing. He felt that the building was Preferably Preserved.

Russo felt that the cost factor was important in the determination. He felt that if the cost was close restoration and preservation would be a good

option. He felt the costing was germane to the discussion. He stated that the building was historic. He informed that the Coolidge School received \$2 million in grant funding from MHC because it was an historic building. He felt that the Browne School was equally historically significant. He also noted that the building was historically significant as a school. He noted that a delay could be imposed because of the proximity to the Browne House.

Roach appreciates that architectural details of the building are proposed for restoration. She wished that the historical significance of the building were considered before the decision for a new police station was made.

**Vote:** Jones moved that 552 Main Street (the Browne House) be determined as preferably preserved. Berg seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Jones said he was reluctant to impose a demolition delay.

Russo informed that a demolition delay provides a cooling off period to explore preservation options and that it is not to be punitive. Jones indicated that it was obvious that the police had a need and want for a new police station and questioned the use of the delay.

Light noted that a delay be imposed.

**Vote:** Jones moved that no demolition delay be imposed on 552 Main Street. Berg seconded the motion. The motion was **approved**. 5 Ayes, 1 No (Light)

Russo informed that Watertown has lost its history through school demolition. He provided examples – Lowell School, Francis School and the original Watertown High School.

2. **June Minutes.** Approved.
3. **Brigham House – Russo** informed that he would be meeting with the manager of the Brigham House to discuss the possibility of a local land marking.
4. **TAB Past/Present Photo Program** – Roach informed that the editor appears interested in going forward. Possible September timeline.
5. **Rooster** – Metallurgy testing indicated that the Watertown rooster is not an 18C one but a 19C one.
6. **Demolition Permits** – Staff to email address of permit of demolition permits as soon as they are received.
7. **Zoning Ordinance** – Russo suggested meeting with Watson and Scott to discuss preserving single family neighborhoods in SF/Multi-Family Zone areas. Russo suggested identifying and prioritizing the areas. Jones, Berg and O’Looney are interested in participating.
8. **59 Lowell Street** – Russo requested that staff contact the applicant in writing to come before the HC’s September meeting to present an update on his project.

Meeting adjourned at 9:15pm