

Minutes
Watertown Historical Commission
Thursday,
July 14, 2016
Philip Pane Lower Hearing Room
7:00 p.m.

Historical Commission Members Present: David J. Russo, Marilynne K. Roach, Thomas Melone, Susan Steele, J.B. Jones, Donald S. Berg, Elise Loukas

Member(s) Absent: N/A

Staff Present: Christopher, Hayward, Susan C. Jenness

Russo chaired. The meeting opened at 7:00 p.m. with a description of the public hearing process for the Historical Commission (HC) by Russo.

- 1) **Public Hearing – 32 Church St.** a charity hall with a lodge style building built around 1959, with a brick exterior and asphalt roof. Proposed under this application are 5 town house units in two structures. Stephen Winnick, applicant/PNG, LLC, owner

Attorney Stephen Winnick, Esq. represented the petitioner and owner, PNG for the presentation.

He described the current structure as the Masonic Center at 32 Church St. which has been in existence since 1959 making it part of the jurisdiction of the HC. Chris Mulhern, the architect was in attendance to discuss details of the conditions of both the current building, as well as the project being proposed.

Winnick reviewed the package that was submitted for review by the HC which included the historical background of the building, and the history of the Masons to the extent that was available in the Watertown Library.

His research concluded that while the Mason's housed their organization in this building from 1959 onward, many of their activities occurred before the building was erected and were held at locations other than 32 Church St. He explained that this building was not the site of any historical activities that he felt would rise to the level of the HC feeling compelled to save the building.

Mr. Winnick called Mr. Chris Mulhern, the Architect to speak with the HC in more detail.

Mulhern, principal architect of Harrison & Mulhern Architects of Winchester, Massachusetts, described the building as a 1 story late 1950's semi institutional brick building with a flat asphalt roof that peaks in the center; with tall casement windows that he assessed were in reasonable condition. He saw no architectural merit to the building within the context of Watertown or New England. He concluded that the site would benefit by this redevelopment.

The proposed plans are to build 5 town house units in two buildings; three will face Church St. with 2 on the rear of the property around a courtyard in the center. Porches will be on the units facing Church St.

Large trees will be planted out front between the façade and sidewalk with the balance to be landscaped and fenced in to reinforce the residential character of this part of Watertown.

Across the street from the site are a bank and Unitarian Church with quite a lot of green space; there are some row houses to the northeast and an apartment building to the west. Mulhern's position was that the placement of a residential townhouse building in full compliance with zoning by laws would be an appropriate replacement and fit well into the texture of the neighborhood.

Mulhern said that Planning has made considerable input into this project and that they have also worked with the DPW. The project team will still be required to meet for site review plans before all four boards in the future.

Jones asked about materials and Mulhern explained that the materials for the exterior will be a wood structure made of a clapboard siding product with 2 different exposures on the side for vertical interest.

Russo commented that what was being proposed was box shaped and had a flat roof with a cornice. He was concerned with the significant height increase from the Masonic Temple, and its close setting into the street. Mulhern explained that the Planning Department was interested in a traditional row house look to the building which was how they ended up here. He said they were encouraged to locate the façade closer to the street to reflect the Design Guidelines in order to enliven this part of Church St.

Jones said that the porch should break up the massing of the box look.

Melone asked why the Masons were selling this building and Mulhern said that he thought there had been a decline in membership. Winnick added that the Masons decided to put this building up for sale and that the number of units that are built will set the sale price of the building. Winnick called on Kenneth Leitner, Esq. who stated that the Masons are selling this building in order to join forces with another lodge.

Winnick spoke about the current structure which he said is not an enduring style rising to the level of the HC wanting to preserve it.

Russo explained the broader role of the HC and said that is why proposed plans are required to be submitted for demolition delay review.

Winnick explained that the town has had a lot of input into this plan, and that the Design Guidelines are reflected in this plan and that this is one of the 1st new projects being proposed under the new design guidelines. He explained that there will be more site plan review coming in the near future; there will be community meetings with abutters and more process to follow.

Commission Discussion

Roach said it would be helpful to save the logo on the chimney on the front of the lodge. Mulhern said that he was sure there was a way to combine it into the new structure.

Steele commented that she was happy with the wood and Hardy Board materials.

Melone expressed that he thought it was a good idea to develop a residential property that was so close to Watertown Square.

Jones said he saw no sufficient value in the building rising to the occasion of fighting to preserve it. He commented that it was right to make this a more urban setting by allowing this proposed project which does no violence to the area.

Russo said he felt it would overwhelm the streetscape.

Berg mentioned that while they are being encouraged to build this project, this would be imposing.

Roach said that if the building were set further back it would not lean over the side walk so much, and then it would look more like the buildings on Pleasant St.

Loukas said that whereas there are a number of other hurdles here perhaps a vote should be continued until after some others have been jumped over.

Hayward commented that there will be a town management meeting held around August 2, 2016 to discuss safety, fire, A/C units, ADA access and street trees.

Motion- Jones made a motion that the building at 32 Church St. is Not Preferably Preserved. Melone seconded the motion.

Vote: A six to one vote was reached that the building at 32 Church St., is not Preferably Preserved.

1) Minutes – June 9, 2016

Minutes were adopted with minor updates.

2) Old Business

a. HC March 7, 2016 Site Visit with Mark Comeiro, Veteran Services Officer – Follow up discussion.

Agent Hayward has spoken to Magoon who said that this is something he will continue to bring up with other Department Heads.

Loukas said that the Town Clerk should be interested in knowing what is going with the records as they are a direct concern to him. She stressed that the documents should be looked after appropriately.

Russo mentioned that the Police Station basement might be suitable as a new location for them.

Loukas mentioned an idea to invite a group of students who would be supervised by the HC to come and sort out the boxes into categories in exchange for Community Service credit and lunch.

Hayward said he would report the ideas back to Magoon and that maybe Loukas and Russo could meet with him later this summer to explore options.

b. 917 Belmont Street – Upkeep and Maintenance discussion based on language of Landmark Ordinance-

Russo reported that the Landmark Designation was recorded at the registry of deeds.

Hayward said that there are two potential donors who would like to help with the cost of repairs needed at the school.

Russo suggested it would be good to have a list of what needs to be repaired already in the works.

Steele agreed that would be a prudent idea to talk with Bill Barry a well reputed architect who specializes in historical preservation. She suggested that he could

help to assess what needs to be fixed and plan for the materials that would be needed.

The Agent agreed that he would look into the details of the cost that may be associated in working with Bill Barry on this aspect of the repair of 917 Belmont St.

The Chair mentioned that there may be money in the fund from the Historical Commission Plaque Program.

- c. **Neighborhood Photography project – David Russo-** Melone reported that he now has photographs of every house in Whiting Park.

Meeting Adjourned