

TOWN OF ASHLAND
HISTORICAL COMMISSION

MEETING DATE: February 8, 2022

MEETING NOTES:

Members in attendance:
(Voting Members only)

Elizabeth Childress
James Neilsen
Kelly Flannery
Karen Coleman
Tom DeAlmeida
Jennifer Paratore
Joanna Sorensen

Meeting called to order at 7:02pm
Meeting held via Zoom

Chairman DeAlmeida called the meeting to order. Paratore motioned to accept the meeting minutes from January 31, 2022. The motion was seconded by Neilsen and Flannery. The members voted unanimously to accept the minutes.

Paratore invited members of the public in attendance to raise their hands if they were interested in speaking about various topics with the Historical Commission. Helen Nickole spoke in favor of updating the language of the demolition delay by-laws 125-2 and 125-9 to ensure that it self-updated every year. She proposed revising the language to read "50 or more years" rather than the fixed date of 1940. She requested that the Commission add this to an upcoming agenda for discussion and a vote, in the interim requesting a place-holder warrant article to let the Select Board know this may be brought to a vote a Town Meeting. Several members of the Commission voiced their support for this idea and the group decided to add this item to March's agenda. Mark Dassoni inquired what updates have been made to the Commission since it was formed in 1993. Neilsen said he wasn't aware of the changes to the Commission over the years. Kate Jurczyk spoke in support of the by-law language change proposed earlier. She also discouraged the Commission from rescinding the demolition delay currently in place for 56 Fountain St. Steve Morgan discussed the MBTA overlay districting and housing density. He believes this is an issue for the Historical Commission. He maintains that the buildings at 10-50 Main Street do not fall into that district but believes the Town is incorrectly trying to include them. He asked for the Commission to familiarize themselves with this issue. Mr. Morgan also wanted to go on record to say that he does not believe there is language in the Town's by-laws that grants the Commission permission to rescind a demolition delay once it is voted on.

With no other comments from residents, Paratore called the next agenda item: homeowner's request to lift the demolition delay at 56 Fountain Street. Chairman DeAlmeida said that he contacted the homeowner and toured the property in question. It is his opinion that the house

and barn are falling apart. DeAlmeida said that he spoke to two abutting neighbors who support tearing down the house. He claims the home is rotting in place, vacant and a liability. DeAlmeida said that holding the homeowner to the full term of the demolition delay at this point would be out of spite and he supports granting the demolition permit. Paratore respectfully disagreed with the Chairman, citing the fact that not once in the past 7 months has the homeowner met with the Commission or provided proof that he was trying to salvage the home or sell it. Neilsen said he believes the homeowner is in attendance at this meeting and agreed that he has not shown any effort to try to save the house. George Connors, attorney for the homeowner, said he did not think the Commission followed proper procedure when they issued the demolition delay. He claims that he and the homeowner were not notified about the hearing when the demolition delay was voted on. He is asking the Commission to reconsider their decision because the house is falling apart, referencing DeAlmeida's prior statements. He said that the home was occupied by tenants who trashed the place and made the home uninhabitable. Mr. Connors said the homeowner emailed pictures of the damage and architectural renderings to the Commission today for the proposed new buildings that the homeowner is willing to build if the demolition delay is lifted. He said there are two months left of the delay and his client is eager to start construction. Mr. Connors referenced Paragraph 8 of the Town by-laws, believing that language allowed the Commission to lift the delay. Mr. Morgan debated the language of the by-law with Mr. Connors, disagreeing with his interpretation. Ashland resident Corrine Breed spoke against lifting the delay. She said it was hard to believe the homeowner didn't know about the original demo-delay hearing because all of the abutting neighbors were aware of it and many of them attended the meeting in person. She said that the homeowner actively contributed to the decay of the property. She claims that when the tenants moved out, the homeowner cut the electric and the water to the house and just left it. Breed asked the Commission about what happens after the 9 month demolition delay expires. DeAlmeida said that there is nothing the Commission can do after that. He said the homeowner has the legal right to demo the property and there is nothing the Commission can do about it. Mr. Connors said that prior to applying for the demolition delay, the homeowner intended to save the house and build another home on the property with a variance. Connors said that there was a no support for that plan and the homeowner was forced to abandon that idea and pursue the current plan of demolishing the existing home/barn and just build a single home at the back of the lot. Neilsen asked Connors why the existing home was salvageable in the original plans but is now suddenly beyond repair. Neilsen said it seemed liked the homeowner was willing to save the house if he got the variance for a second home. Morgan asked to speak on the issue and reiterated that the property is clearly listed as a historically significant home in the Town of Ashland. He referenced Town Code 125-3 that discussed the responsibilities of the homeowners. Morgan said that he thinks the Commission should have engaged more with the homeowner after the demolition delay was issued but, regardless, he believes the demolition delay should stay. Coleman called for a vote on the issue. The Commission voted 5 to 1 to uphold the demolition delay at 56 Fountain Street.

Paratore asked the Commission to vote on Helen's earlier proposal for the by-law language change. The Commission voted unanimously to pursue it.

The next item on the agenda was the ongoing discussion of the Historic District. Neilsen had a longer discussion with Stacy Spies, historic preservation consultant, about the best contiguous area of downtown to form a district. He said that she priced the completion of the 2010 Historic Properties Survey at \$7,000 but that was only one quote. Commission discussed different landmarks and streets as possible starting and end points for the district. DeAlmeida wanted to know the funding would be coming from. Paratore suggested a CPC funding application. Neilsen said the Commission needed to find out if the CPC funding would require a bidding process for the survey. Paratore asked if the Commission should put this before Town Meeting in May because the deadline for warrant articles is March 4, before the next Historical Commission's meeting. The group decided it was too early in the process to go to Town Meeting. Morgan wanted to remind the Commission that there are already districts A-E existing in MACRIS. Those existing districts could be a good starting point for identifying the parameters for the local district downtown. Morgan said that there is CPC funding available for the Commission with a dedicated bucket for historical uses, including the rehab of properties. He also wanted to say that the Massachusetts Historical Commission requires the review of projects that use State and Federal funding. Mark Dassoni asked the Commission what the term "circa" means. Neilsen said that the term is used for old buildings when they don't know exactly what date they were constructed. They use various historical records to come up with an approximate date. Coleman added that they look at the surrounding areas and the style of the property. Flannery asked the Commission if they thought the next steps would be to obtain funding, bid out and complete the survey before going to Town Meeting. The Commission agreed.

Next on the agenda is grant opportunities. Paratore let the group know that she wrote the application dates down incorrectly and inadvertently missed a deadline for the Veteran's Heritage grant. She apologized to the Commission for the oversight and said that she would continue to explore other grant opportunities for the town.

Next agenda item was a summary of the Commission's appearance before the Select Board. Childress thought the discussion went very well and summarized her talking points to the Board. Paratore agreed that it went well and thought it was a good step to take. She feels that there should be better communication between the Commission and other Boards in Town. DeAlmeida had to leave the meeting because his phone was about to run out of battery.

Next agenda item is the Mill Buildings ongoing general discussion. Paratore said that she has been watching the Planning Board schedule to see when the developer planned to submit their revised plans for the buildings that conformed to the current zoning. She said that at the Select Board appearance, the Board suggested that Historical Commission members engage with the developer at the Planning Board meeting rather than have a separate meeting about the project. Coleman and Childress asked if Paratore would let the group know when the meeting would take place. Resident Sean Cavanaugh asked to speak on the topic. He is a new member of the Historic Society and has done extensive research on the Mill Buildings. He said that all of the granite buildings are significant but he wanted to highlight that the brick building was also historically significant during World War II. Cavanaugh asked what would happen if the Commission voted for a demolition delay on the property, what would happen at the end of the nine months. Neilsen said that he believes the developer can just wait out the delay. Neilsen said that the Commission has discussed these properties at length and believes we all agree that we would prefer to save all off the Mill Buildings but that if we could work with the

developer to save all of the granite buildings, the Commission might be less concerned about the brick one. Paratore said that the Commission plans to issue an official recommendation to the developer and the Planning Board but it was her opinion that it would be more productive to do so after the Commission saw the revised plans to ensure the recommendation was a complete and thoughtful as possible. Morgan asked to speak regarding the Mill Buildings. He encouraged the Commission to put our recommendations in writing to the Planning Board and urged the Commission to hold their own meeting with the developer rather than try to engage at the Planning Board. He said the Town is actively negotiating this project and that the Commission should be playing a more active role. Helen echoed the sentiment and said she believes the Commission's role is vital in the project. She highlighted how significant it is to have multiple buildings made out of granite and that they should be preserved. Flannery agreed with Helen and wondered if it would be possible for us to extend past a 9 month demolition delay. Coleman said that although the Commission may not have as much teeth in this fight, we all have the personal power to file historic designation on any building as a private citizen, citing a personal experience she had with her church in Somerville. Neilsen asked where the paperwork was filed and Coleman said it was through the city. Neilsen didn't think that Ashland allowed for individual historic designation but that it was worth looking into. Elisabete, business owner inside one of the Mill Buildings was in attendance and asked what happens to the businesses inside. She said the buildings were very old inside and needed updating. Flannery asked if business owners can apply for CPC funding to renovate inside historic buildings. Morgan offered the opinion that you can't use the historic money in the CPC budget or private purposes without a value return to the community. Sorensen gave an update on the CPC and said that she would bring up funding for the Commission at the next meeting.

Additional agenda items: Paratore mentioned that resident Julie Nardone emailed the Commission about the proposed subdivision at 100 Fountain Street. Paratore planned to attend the Planning Board hearing to learn more about the project and would update the Commission at our next meeting. Neilsen asked for this topic to be added to the agenda for next month's meeting.

Paratore motioned to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Childress

Concluded at 8:45pm

Next meeting March 8, 2022 AT 7pm via either Zoom or Google Meets

Documents referenced in this meeting: Demolition Permit Dated June 16, 2021 for 56 Fountain St, Written notice of Demolition Delay from the HC to the Building Department dated July 20, 2021, Letter from George Connors, attorney representing 56 Fountain St, to the Building Department dated January 17, 2022 sent to the HC via email on 2/8/22