

APPROVED Minutes
Westport Historic District Commission
Public Hearing
August 9, 2016

The Westport Historic District Commission held a work session at 6:30 p.m. and a public hearing at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, August 9, 2016 at Town Hall, Room 201.

PRESENT:

MEMBERS Chair Randy Henkels, Vice Chair Ed Gerber, Bob Weingarten, Marc Lotti and Janet Rubel
ALTERNATES Marilyn Harding

ABSENT:

MEMBERS
ALTERNATES Judi Freedman and Cheryl Bliss

QUORUM: Five full members sitting.

WORK SESSION

ITEM #1 TO DISCUSS WAYS OF RAISING AWARENESS OF THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE HDC, PARTICULARLY AS IT PERTAINS TO ITS INTERACTION WITH THE RTM AND OTHER TOWN AGENCIES.

Janet Rubel and Marilyn Harding volunteered to work as a committee to investigate possible future actions.

PUBLIC HEARING

ITEM #2 TO HEAR THE CHAIR'S REPORT AND UPDATE ON CURRENT HDC ACTIVITIES.

Chair Henkels reported:

- We have been advised by the State Historic Preservation Office that the Westport Center National Register Study has been approved by the National Park Service.
- The application for CLG Enhancement Grant Funding for the preparation of a Bridge Street National Register Nomination is complete. It will be sent to SHPO following Board of Selectmen approval for grant reimbursement in the amount of \$15,000, the total cost of the project. It is a fully reimbursable grant.

ITEM #3 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MAY 10, 2016 PUBLIC HEARING, THE MAY 25, 2016 SPECIAL MEETING, THE JUNE 2, 2016 SPECIAL MEETING, THE JUNE 6, 2016 SPECIAL MEETING, THE JUNE 14, 2016 AND JULY 12, 2016 PUBLIC HEARINGS.

The minutes of the May 10, 2016, the May 25, 2016 special meeting, the June 6, 2016 special meeting, the June 14, 2016 and July 12, 2016 public hearings were unanimously approved.

ITEM #4 TO DISCUSS AND MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS TO CHIEF FOTIOS KOSKINAS ABOUT THE POSSIBLE REUSE OF BROWNSTONE BLOCKS FOUND IN AN ORIGINAL DRAINAGE SYSTEM (C. 1800S) DURING AN EXCAVATION OF LOT #1 AT THE SAUGATUCK TRAIN STATION.

Deputy Chief Sam Arciola requested the HDC members advise the Police Department and Public Works Department on how brownstone blocks discovered during an excavation of the parking lot adjacent to Luciano Park might be reused on site. The blocks were found in an original drainage system which was replaced by a cast iron system during the upgrade. The five or six blocks are uniform in size and were probably used in the construction of the railroad overpasses throughout the area. He suggested that the blocks might be incorporated into the concrete block retaining wall. He welcomed a variety of ideas from the members and the public. Chair Henkels suggested a site visit to discuss options.

Morley Boyd commented that the stones might have been recycled from work on the railroad bridge abutments and might be recycled again as park benches at Riverside Park.

John Suggs commented that brownstone is expensive and suggested it might be worthwhile finding out how much they are worth. If there is value, he thought the town should consider selling the blocks. He also mentioned the possibility of conducting further excavation for possible additional underground historic resources. Chair Henkels responded that the area was already backfilled and therefore not practical to consider re-excavating.

Chair Henkels thanked Deputy Chief Arciola for sharing the findings with the HDC and for seeking its advice on possible reuses. Staff will set up a site visit early next week.

ITEM #5 TO DISCUSS WITH THE OWNER THE PROPOSED DEMOLITION AND POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES AT 63 TURKEY HILL ROAD SOUTH, C. 1920, IDENTIFIED ON THE HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY.

The property owners, Deane and Maryanne Martire, stated they moved to Westport 10 years ago from New York and currently reside on Treadwell Avenue. They grew up in Bridgeport and aspired to someday live in Westport. They have spent the last three years looking for a lot on which to build a new house. They found their builder, Coastal Construction, whose new constructions they admired, and a Greenwich realtor who found the property. In their opinion, the house was in poor condition. Therefore the previous owner's family was anxious for their elderly father to sell. It was sold quickly with the understanding that the seller could remove whatever they wanted from the house since it was slated for demolition.

Mr. Martire emphasized that his purpose in coming before the HDC was to be transparent and disclose that he and his wife did not like the style of the house, it had many deficiencies, and it was in serious disrepair. They stated many times during the meeting that they bought the lot, not the house.

Chair Henkels commented that although the Martires did not appreciate the historic value of the house, it was listed on the Westport Historic Resources Inventory.

Mr. Martire repeated that there was "no scenario" where they would consider keeping the house. He referred to the six sump pumps that were supporting the foundation. As a buyer, he was informed that there could be a 180-day demolition delay due to the age of the structure. However, at the end of the delay period, the house could be demolished because it was not protected by an historic designation.

Mr. Martire said if someone wants to buy the house and compensate him for his costs, conveyance tax, and legal fees, he would sell the property.

Chair Henkels commented that it was unfortunate that steps were not taken to market the property because he was confident there would have been a buyer who would have preserved the structure. Mr. Martire said he was willing to close in four days and agreed to let the seller take out as much as possible with the understanding that a spec house was not going to be built on the property. Chair Henkels asked Mr. Martire about his plans for the walled gardens and the rear accessory building.

Mr. Martire commented that the English and Japanese walled gardens have been torn down and the pool removed. The accessory structure is "like a horror building with spray painted words that harken to the 70s and 80s." Chair Henkels

asked if it was contemporary to the house. Mr. Martire responded that there were no walls and the floors had fallen through.

Chair Henkels asked if the owner would consider incentives provided by the Special Permit for Historic Residential Structures, a zoning regulation, which would allow for the subdivision of the property where the historic structure would remain and a new construction could be built on a second lot.

Mr. Martire stated he had no interest in a subdivision. He restated that he bought three private acres on which he intended to build a new house. He said they want to live in this town. If the HDC can find a buyer, the sale would be contingent on the preservation of the structure and no subdivision. If it “came down” he would seek reparations. Chair Henkels questioned why Mr. Martire would not grant a new buyer the same development opportunities as he had when he purchased the property. He said you are binding a prospective buyer in ways that you were not bound. Mr. Martire stated he wanted half a million dollars to be held in escrow for his protection from a loss resulting from a potential buyer who would pursue a subdivision.

Chair Henkels stated that he considered the house one of the most identifiable and significant historic structures in town.

Mr. Martire said that it may have been in the past, but it had not been maintained in two decades.

Chair Henkels said many would take exception with his assessment of the condition of the structure.

Mr. Martire refused to market the house. He said if someone comes forward with interest, “give him a call.”

Member Marc Lotti commented that he respected Mr. Martire’s offer to sell the property within the next 30 days without the subdivision option. Mr. Martire stated again that the buyer would have to purchase the entire three acre parcel and not subdivide it.

Marilyn Harding stated that many of the historic elements are gone. A new buyer would be considering a diminished property.

Vice Chair Ed Gerber commented that he found it hard to understand why the new owner bought the house if he didn’t like it.

Mr. Martire replied that he bought the land.

Mrs. Roxie Henemuth, 2Turkey Hill Circle, read a letter to the commission members expressing her profound sadness at the proposed demolition of the structure and the changes in her neighborhood over time. She presented the HDC with a petition with signatures from 150 residents who objected to the demolition.

Mr. Steve Penwell, 47 Turkey Hill Road South welcomed the new owners to the neighborhood. He described his labor of love for his historic house and the many similar challenges he faced. He remembers the neighborhood as it was 20 years ago. He recognized the rights of the property owners and at the same time, the rights of the other property owners to express their opinions. He commented that it was unreasonable to expect the house to sell in its current condition in 30 days.

Chair Henkels stated it was the HDC’s goal to continue to explore ways of preserving the structure for the remainder of the delay period.

ITEM #6 TO TAKE SUCH ACTION AS THE MEETING MAY DETERMINE TO RECOMMEND TO THE BUILDING OFFICIAL THAT THE BALANCE OF THE DELAY PERIOD FOR A DEMOLITION PERMIT AT 4 SHARP TURN ROAD BE WAIVED.

There were no questions or comments from the commission members.

There were no questions or comments from the public.

Upon motion Bob Weingarten and seconded by Marc Lotti and approved unanimously, it was:

RESOLVED: That a request to waive the balance of the delay period for a demolition permit application at 4 Sharp Turn Road is hereby APPROVED.

ITEM #7 TO TAKE SUCH ACTION AS THE MEETING MAY DETERMINE TO RECOMMEND TO THE BUILDING OFFICIAL THAT THE BALANCE OF THE DELAY PERIOD FOR A DEMOLITION PERMIT AT 76 LONG LOTS ROAD BE WAIVED.

There were no questions or comments from the commission members.

There were no questions or comments from the public.

Upon motion Bob Weingarten and seconded by Ed Gerber and approved unanimously, it was:

RESOLVED: That a request to waive the balance of the delay period for a demolition permit application at 76 Long Lots Road is hereby APPROVED.

ITEM #8 TO TAKE SUCH ACTION AS THE MEETING MAY DETERMINE TO RECOMMEND TO THE BUILDING OFFICIAL THAT THE BALANCE OF THE DELAY PERIOD FOR A DEMOLITION PERMIT AT 28 HILLSPPOINT ROAD BE WAIVED.

Vice Chair Ed Gerber questioned the demolition.

There were no questions or comments from the public.

Upon motion

Bob Weingarten and seconded by Ed Gerber and approved and approved by a vote 4 (yes) Henkels, Weingarten, Rubel, Lotti and 1 (no) Gerber, it was:

RESOLVED: That a request to waive the balance of the delay period for a demolition permit application at 28 Hillspoint Road is hereby APPROVED.

ITEM #9 TO TAKE SUCH ACTION AS THE MEETING MAY DETERMINE TO RECOMMEND TO THE BUILDING OFFICIAL THAT THE BALANCE OF THE DELAY PERIOD FOR A DEMOLITION PERMIT AT 10 WESTPORT AVENUE, A NON-CONTRIBUTING RESOURCE IN THE COMPO OWENOKE NATIONAL REGISTER DISTRICT, BE WAIVED.

Clerk Bob Weingarten questioned the demolition of a property located in the NR district. Ms. Slobodin, who represented Milton Development, commented that the property was not considered a contributing resource.

There were no questions or comments from the public.

Upon motion Bob Weingarten and seconded by Ed Gerber and approved by a vote 4 (yes) Henkels, Gerber, Rubel, Lotti, and 1 (no)Weingarten, it was:

RESOLVED: That a request to waive the balance of the delay period for a demolition permit application at 10 Westport Avenue.is hereby APPROVED.

ITEM #10 TO TAKE SUCH ACTION AS THE MEETING MAY DETERMINE TO RECOMMEND TO THE BUILDING OFFICIAL THAT THE BALANCE OF THE DELAY PERIOD FOR A DEMOLITION PERMIT AT 17 BLUEWATER HILL BE WAIVED.

There were no questions or comments from the commission members.

There were no questions or comments from the public.

Upon motion Bob Weingarten and seconded by Ed Gerber and approved unanimously, it was:

RESOLVED: That a request to waive the balance of the delay period for a demolition permit application at 17 Bluewater Hill is hereby APPROVED.

The public hearing was closed. The members met in a work session to discuss award nominations.

ITEM #11TO DISCUSS NOMINATIONS FOR UPCOMING 2016 ANNUAL PRESERVATION AWARDS. REVIEWED NOMINATIONS.

The members created a preliminary list of 7 award recipients

Carol Leahy
HDC Staff Administrator
C:G Coordinator