

**DRAFT
CITY OF BEVERLY
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES**

COMMISSION: Historic District Commission

DATE: March 30, 2022

LOCATION: Google Meet (Virtual)

MEMBERS PRESENT: William Finch (Chair), Suzanne LaMont (Vice Chair),
Wendy Pearl, Caroline Baird Mason, John Leahy, Gregory
Howard

MEMBERS ABSENT:

STAFF PRESENT: Emily Hutchings

OTHERS PRESENT: Estelle Rand, Ward 2 councilor; Danielle Spang; Fay Salt;
Steven Frederickson

RECORDER: Sharlyne Woodbury

Call to Order

Chair Finch calls the meeting to order at 7:06 pm. Gregory Howard joined the meeting at 7:23 pm. Howard leaves the meeting 8:55 pm.

1. Approval of minutes

a. January 26, 2022

Motion: Pearl moves to hold the minutes pending the member's discussion for window preservation preference under agenda item "Beverly Golf & Tennis Rehabilitation" project. Hutchings will further review the recording. Finch seconds. The motion carries 5-0.

b. February 24, 2022

Motion: LaMont moves to approve the minutes as presented. Mason seconds. The motion carries 5-0.

2. Discussion: Bass River Area Overlay District

Members review topics of interest: parking, setbacks along the riverfront, increased open spaces, design guidelines, National Registry designation, creating new districts balancing historical and contemporary coexisting neighborhoods, and preservation of historic buildings. Mason was able to attend the Bass River Overlay District meeting and summarizes public concerns, opinions, and those present at the meeting. She recalled that speakers favored preserving open spaces with large setbacks and increased access to the riverfront and did not favor large or tall buildings.

Mason's main concern is having a small set back from the river front. Mason was pleased that during the meeting attendees appeared to favor increased open space.

Members discuss the private parking lot of the plumbing supply company and Beverly Depot Restaurant. Pearl advocates for special criteria for lots adjacent to the Beverly Depot. Pearl does not recall if the Depot is part of the National Registry.

Members discuss design standards for the district. Leahy points out a few notable buildings such as the VanNess building where lack of standards will impact the desired affect and outcome for this area. Finch is extremely disappointed with the lack of design standards. There are little to no discussion of height/density. The areas in question are deep and large parcels. From an urban design perspective, this overlay district presents an opportunity to take into consideration the area. Members prefer to avoid large buildings like the Rantoul Street redevelopment. Finch also laments the lack of interest and priority for transit-oriented development. The area presents real design opportunities, to make a different place than in recent city redevelopments. Finch would like to see larger family housing units incorporated into the area as opposed to the 1-2-bedroom units currently reported. Finch advocates for creative legislation able to address multiple needs for residents and the city.

Pearl asks a clarification question. The City is running parallel projects for citywide design standards and the Bass River Area rezoning. Hutchings confirms there is a project the city is currently reviewing design standards. Pearl asks if the commission should also partake in that process for their input. Hutchings notes the overlay would allow for different type of mixed uses, but not remove the IG zoning. Pearl asks is there an opportunity to remove the IG zoning in order to preserve the area adjacent to the district on the national registry. Hutchings confirms the IG zoning has a height allowance of 65 feet. Mason inquires after the tall building guidelines. With an overlay, all the height allowances remain in effect for the IG zoning district. Pearl asks do they want to see the IG zoning uses in place. Pearl believes the IG zoning would be a detriment to the adjacent historic districts. Hutchings reviews the protocol for continued zoning uses and the effects. Using Moynihan Lumber as an example, members discuss property sale, use, value, etc., as it currently pertains to the IG zoning and what it would be if sold. Members continue to discuss the issues with ordinances permitting size by right.

Pearl does not believe it is appropriate the commission comments on the housing since the housing is already incorporated in the Master Plan. Pearl believes the key focus should remain on the design guidelines and recommends suggesting a buffer between the adjacent zoning areas. Advocates for design guidelines that are enforceable and for projects that are compatible with the historic area. She highlights important concepts such as the design materials, preserving the river view from the street, etc. LaMont and Pearl point out the overlap and adjacent components. Members continue to point out the issues with the design guidelines and tall building guidelines referring to the Depot Square projects that did not preserve the character of the historic districts. Finch does see the correlation of the issues as comparable between Depot Square project and the Bass River overlay district. Pearl notes the design of the Depot buildings is not consistent with the character of the neighborhood.

Finch believes this is an opportunity to build a new neighborhood with buildings that are a variety of scale, however; it is not the same as being historically compatible. LaMont supports the commission being involved in the discussion. Councilor Rand is present and offers brief comments to the commission. She is a member of design guidelines project. Preservation has been discussed at the meetings. The final area of the Bass River District has not been set yet. LaMont agrees it is important to hear about it, but these meeting discussions remain undisclosed to the commission and to the public. Pearl asks if there is a draft product available for the public and members to view. Hutchings confirms the draft is under review with the consultant and will be reviewed through April and May. Hutchings suggests a commission representative could attend the meetings and members agree.

Hutchings offers to guide the member's concerns to the proper channels. Pearl volunteers to write and express the concerns how the overlay may affect the Depot. Hutchings encourages members to review the link below for the IG zoning district. Members review and discuss the map geo area, buildings, and parcels as presented by the link. Members discuss important parcels that include the river house, the VanNess building, the boatyard, the car wash, the Bowl O'Mat, etc., to name a few.

IG Zoning:

<https://ecode360.com/29284165>

Bass River district:

<https://beverlyma.mapgeo.io/datasets/properties?abuttersDistance=100&latlng=42.565158%2C-70.857627>

Hutchings recommends the subcommittee consist of 2 members since they are a committee of 6. Pearl and Leahy will take the initiative for drafting a letter with remaining members creating their own lists. Members will further discuss their collective concerns at the next meeting. Hutchings informs members no decisions on the overlay will be made until fall 2022 at the earliest. Pearl inquires with Hutchings about other communities with similar districts, citing Gloucester as an example. Hutchings replies and refers to Assembly Square in Somerville as a comparable example instead of Gloucester. Hutchings asks members if they would like a formal letter drafted requesting inclusion to the steering committee or if a verbal confirmation via the Mayor and City Planner is sufficient. Members opt to keep the initial request for inclusion informal.

3. Review: Draft Neighborhood Conservation District Ordinance

Members review the document and are pleased with the updates. Finch suggests changing the wording for one sentence regarding city council; can "appoint" or "approve". Finch expresses concerns with the make-up of the study committee; specifically, 1 person with experience and 4 people with no experience. LaMont and Finch interpret the language differently with LaMont's interpretation as read: 2 people with experience. Finch rebuts and says only 1 person of the 5 shall have "reasonable" experience. Finch understands the desire to have representation from the area or district, however; his main concern centers on experience. Finch would like 2 committee members present. Leahy rebuts. The concern is the perception that if there is too much HDC on a

particular group, it would have a different level of optics for the public. Leahy agrees with Finch that there should be professional experience on the study committee. Finch understands the concern for a regulatory group, and believes the study group should be more informed. Pearl advocates to keep the language as is. She encourages the study committee be able to access the HDC for technical support. Mason concurs with Finch and notes the hefty list of requirements. The NDC committee must be able to determine the historical significance, the technical aspects of reviewing the buildings, character, and area.

Leahy rebuts; notes the first committee sets the template for future committees and encourages the group to have faith in the process. Members will review the language again to confirm the two professionals, their experience, and where they originate. LaMont points out there will be staff support to the committee. Hutchings clarifies there is not staff support, but the committee could use the planning staff for conversation and advice. LaMont inquires if the study committee would have to go through legal. Members discuss the fail-safe measures built into the study group recommendations. Leahy emphasizes the study group proposals have to be sold to the public, the city council, etc.

Councilor Rand inquired how this process compares to other committees. Hutchings reviews the comparable towns where this committee style works, provides further detail and explanation of the work required, the time reviewed. Hutchings confirms there is other city staff present to review the ordinance. Hutchings notes this is not a final draft as the document requires additional review and discussion.

Section D, XXIII – Finch questions the language. Are they approving the members? Hutchings suggests the change, “shall approve the establishment of a study committee.” Pearl requests the notice language to the abutters should be provided in the language spoken in that neighborhood. Reduce/lighten the scale for the outfit; clear up the language for the tech savvy members in the group composition.

Finch questions the language regarding fair housing practices. What is allowed by right via zoning since the change would not come under review of the committee. The point of the NDC is to have some review where appearances impact the quality, view, and character of the neighborhood. Using Washington Street as an example, an original 3 unit was turned into a 6-unit building. Would that change not be reviewed by the NDC? Finch would like to preserve the review process by the NDC even though the zoning in the neighborhood is allowed by right. Finch prefers a balanced approach. The purpose is to discourage the property owner from subverting a review process on their proposed projects and to balance an overly invasive process of review. Members further discuss and debate the legal ramifications of that language. Hutchings and Pearl agree the intent of the language is not to take away rights; however, the language should be tightened to avoid a savvy attorney from subverting the review process because the project conforms to zoning standards by right. Finch seeks to avoid legal loopholes.

Pearl looks at the review process and notes the decision for the review process where the language should be consistent. Issue a certificate of compatibility, then a statement of disapproval, certificate of non-approval, non-compliance. Hutchings discusses the difference in

terms. Pearl would like consistency of terms throughout the document. Finch provides a point of reference by utilizing the “universal access and ADA compliance” terms.

4. Discussion: CPA Plan Update

Pearl provides the updates. Discusses the strict red-line process for the existing content. The content is built on the momentum of work in recent years. Pearl suggests hiring a consultant to review CPA for 10 years and to run the public process. There have been dwindling applications and participation. In 10 years the first applications have declined from 30 to 8. Members put forward ideas for bigger updates to the plan which result in greater public awareness. Pearl looking for feedback, recommendations and direction the commission prefers to construct the redline. Members specifically desire more input for the CPA plan, those items to carry over and those items to retire. Pearl reviews some of the plan highlights noting the broad bullet points. Suggests updating and revisiting those points with feedback for next steps.

Hutchings presents to the committee the Historic Preservation Resources and Needs. Pearl reviews the language and suggests updating the work that is complete plus updating the register. Members discuss the infrastructure around historic preservation with ideas to modernize and update everything present. Pearl suggests coordinating with Hutchings to update the priorities where members can view the redline version and further discuss.

5. New/Other Business

a. Response to questions posed at previous meeting

Members agree to move the next meeting to April 14, 2022.

Lamont inquires about the Certified Local Government initiative and where the process is at. Hutchings notes it is still ongoing. Lamont also inquires if the HDC was invited to tour the YMCA renovation. Hutchings extends an invite to interested members and will provide further tour details for those who have yet to tour the renovation.

6. Adjournment

Motion: Leahy moves to adjourn. Pearl seconds. The motion carries 5-0.

Meeting adjourned 9:17 pm. Next meeting scheduled 4/14/22.