

**CITY OF BEVERLY
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES**

COMMISSION: Historic Districts Commission

DATE: May 27, 2021

LOCATION: Google Meet (Virtual)

MEMBERS PRESENT: William Finch, Chair; Suzanne LaMont, Vice Chair;
Caroline Mason, Wendy Pearl

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

OTHERS PRESENT: Emily Hutchings (Planning Department, City of Beverly);
Greg Ward; Miranda Siemasko (Glovsky & Glovsky)

RECORDER: Stacia Chamberlain

Call to Order

Chair Finch calls the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. Hutchings reads a statement introducing the meeting, takes a roll call, and describes the meeting as a virtual public meeting as required to honor Governor Baker’s State of Emergency declared due to the national crisis of COVID-19.

1. 7:06 p.m.: Public Hearing – Demolition Delay Review #259 – Demolition of a building located at 47 Cabot Street – 47 Cabot LLC

Chair Finch provides a brief review of the project, noting that the building in question is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing building in the Fish Flake Hill National Register Historic District. Finch refers to Atty. Miranda Siemasko, representing the property owner, to make her presentation.

Atty. Siemasko of Glovsky & Glovsky, legal representative for the owners of 47 Cabot Street, presents the position of the property owners. She states that the house is between two adjacent parcels used for Ward’s Florist and Greenhouse, and that the purpose of the demolition is to consolidate the lots and create additional parking for the business. As the building is listed on the National Register, Atty. Siemasko states the owners fully expect the outcome of the public hearing will be that the building is considered “preferably preserved” and that a delay of the demolition permit will be established.

Atty. Siemasko states that the Wards (the property owners) appreciate and are sensitive to the community and Commission with respect to this property, and describes how the Wards acquired the multi-family property in 2018. She commends the Commission for its passion and notes that the Wards appreciate the gravity of the hearing.

Finch asks if Mr. Greg Ward would like to make a statement. Mr. Ward states that Ward’s Florist made a social media post for the public as to their position. He refers back to Atty. Siemasko to answer questions.

Finch asks if Commission members have any questions prior to hearing from the public. Pearl asks if there is something wrong with the existing parking lot. Mr. Ward responds that parking has been a problem more and more over the years, as parking restrictions for residential parking has become more stringent. He states that the future of their parking situation is unclear.

Mr. Finch asks if any members of the public are present who would like to speak.

Speakers from the public:

1. Hutchings reads a letter submitted by Historic Beverly, signed by president Lincoln Williams, regarding the property, stating its support for the preservation of the building by a delay on the demolition permit. The letter states Historic Beverly's support of expanding the Fish Flake Hill Local Historic District to protect this property and others.
2. Hutchings reads a letter submitted by James M. Younger of 32 Butman Street, in favor of a demolition delay period and the preservation of the building.

3. Fay Salt (66 Haskell Street)

Ms. Salt shares a prepared statement. She states she opposes the demolition of the historic building. She discusses the history of the building and her association with the home, being the last of generations of family members who lived in the building. Ms. Salt states her concerns about the perception that the building should be demolished for parking. She thinks the house and streetscape should be preserved, and other parking on the property should be used. She recalls how many other historic buildings on Cabot Street have been demolished in the 20th century and urges the Commission to not allow further demolition of historic buildings, but rather expand the historic district.

4. Pam Keller (17 Sherwood Drive, Morristown, New Jersey; Beverly native)

Ms. Keller describes how she grew up on Beverly and returns frequently, and is a member of Historic Beverly. She expresses surprise and sadness at how much reconstruction and new development is happening in downtown Beverly. She opines that the historic district be maintained as an asset for the enjoyment of people now and in the future.

5. Carrie Pshedesky (5 Stone Street)

Ms. Pshedesky states she is a neighbor of the Wards' property, and asks for elucidation about the parking needs for the property. She notes that the current parking lot appears empty often and she is unaware of the restrictions as noted by Mr. Ward previously.

Mr. Ward responds that the lot holds 16-17 vehicles, 8-10 of which are used by employees on a daily basis. Mr. Ward states they also have about half a dozen delivery vehicles that require parking. He notes that residential-only parking streets have become more prominent, therefore spaces for retail customers are limited.

6. Dan Finn (16 Front Street)

Mr. Finn states he also feels that the building is historically significant and should be preserved. He states his concern about how the building will be kept or maintained if it's not demolished. He gives his thanks to the Commission.

Fay Salt requests to comment again, that she is getting texts and social media messages that the meeting link isn't working and that some members of the public aren't able to attend the meeting

due to technical problems related to the format of the posting for the virtual meeting. She asks that the Commission make getting into the meetings more accessible for the public. Hutchings confirms that although the link is not currently live (clickable), the meeting and link address are appropriately posted and that members of the public are able to use the link address to get into the meeting. She states she is working on making the link live.

7. Emma Basso (99 Lovett Street)

Ms. Basso brings up the point that four families live in the building currently. She points out the fact that affordable housing in Beverly is important and demolishing the building works against the efforts of the city to create more housing.

8. Domenico Eramo (19 ½ Atlantic Avenue)

Mr. Eramo asks Mr. Ward what his expected parking needs are and how many new parking spaces the demolished building would provide.

9. Matthew Swindell (3 Lee Street)

Mr. Swindell states he is the research manager for Historic Beverly and a lifelong resident. He offers that his concern is for the future of Beverly and the downtown landscape. He asks what value is of making the property as a parking lot, versus a historic building that houses residents.

Public comment has stopped and the Commission discusses whether to continue public hearing, as Hutchings has been working to make the meeting link live. The Commission agrees to wait momentarily in order to give more public comments to be included in the meeting. Ms. Salt comments that her contacts are no longer in immediate touch. Hutchings and Finch discuss how members of the public can provide public comments on this agenda item for consideration by the Commission. Hutchings confirms that members of the public are free to provide written comments to the Commission in the coming days. LaMont asks what bearing such letters might have if they are submitted after the Commission votes. Rules of procedure are discussed; considering some members of the public are having issues accessing the meeting, and whether it may be necessary to continue the hearing. Pearl states she supports continuing the hearing if public participation is so limited. Finch seeks input from Atty. Siemasko, who states that the applicant has no opposition for a delay imposed by the Commission. She states she suspects that additional public comments will yield the same inclination of public comments thus far, in support of the delay with the hope of preserving the building.

Mason states she feels that the Commission could make a decision tonight, and if the following letters are so compelling to change a vote, they can revisit the vote (as the Rules of Procedure permit if the Commission votes to instate a delay. Finch concurs. LaMont asks for clarification on the process of making a decision: what is the statute for changing their vote after hearing additional comments? Finch clarifies that the Commission would have the right to review their decision based on the addition of new information. Hutchings reads the specific clause regarding this process from the Rules of Procedure, and states that if the Commission votes that the building is preferably preserved and places a delay on the demolition permit, they can revisit their decision at future meetings and reduce the delay period. Hutchings restates that the meeting

and access information were properly posted. Options include closing the public hearing and making a decision, having a special meeting properly to facilitate additional access while not delaying the Commission's decision until the next regular meeting, or continuing the public hearing to the next regular meeting, and making a decision after the public hearing is closed at that meeting.

Ms. Salt is recognized by the Commission, and asks what happens to a home at the end of a demolition delay period, should a demolition delay be approved. Finch replies that once the delay period expires, the Building Commissioner may issue a demolition permit and the home may be demolished. If permits are required to carry out a proposed demolition/development project, then the building commissioner is not to issue the demolition permit until all other permits have been granted. He isn't sure what the procedure would be in the context of a project that doesn't require permits, as in this instance, where the demolition/development project is a parking lot (where no permits are required).

Atty. Siemasko addresses the Commission, and asks what the purpose would be to continue the topic to an additional meeting, since the applicant not debating the delay of demolition, and also given that all public comments heard thus far are also in favor of a delay. Finch expresses that the Commission may be concerned by how accessible the meeting has been to the public. However, he states he does not know what could be gained by prolonging the decision either. Hutchings notes that additional members of the public have joined the meeting.

Ms. Salt is recognized by the Commission, and states she is concerned that the need to protect the historic character versus parking for the business are at odds, and asks for a clarification about the length of the delay. Atty. Siemasko reiterates that they are not contesting that the building is historically significant, and are willing to hear all public comments.

Mr. Eramo asks about alternative parking arrangements. Mr. Ward replies that he is sympathetic to the historic value of the building and Beverly's broader history, and understands why there is a 1-year delay to demolition permits for important buildings. He states that Ward's Florist is the second-oldest business in Beverly, having opened in 1885. Mr. Eramo asks if Mr. Ward is open to the idea of demolishing the non-historic addition on the rear of the building but retaining the historic building. Mr. Ward replies that he is open-minded.

Pearl suggests that Finch provides a final call for public comments. With no additional public comment, Finch closes the public hearing. Finch notes that the public is welcome to submit comments addressed to the Commission and directed to Hutchings.

Finch opens discussion to the Commission about whether the building is historically significant. Commission members agree that as a contributing building in a National Register historic district, the building is clearly historically significant.

Motion: Pearl moves to find the building is historically significant due to its architectural and social connections to the history of Beverly. LaMont seconds. There is a

formal roll call vote with all members voting yes: Finch, LaMont, Mason, and Pearl. The motion passes (4-0).

The Commission considers whether the property should be determined preferably preserved. LaMont asks for clarification about residential parking requirements in the area. Mason comments that this question is not relevant to the vote. LaMont concedes.

Motion: Mason moves to find the building preferably preserved. Pearl seconds. Finch calls roll with all members voting yes: Finch, LaMont, Mason, and Pearl. The motion passes (4-0).

The Commission discusses options for addressing the needs of the parcel but preserving the historic building. Finch notes the opportunity to protect and restore the building, given the historic context and historic features that have been retained and the fact that there is a matching “twin” house across the street. Finch states that together, those two houses would be a strong historic entry to the city. Pearl asks if the City could help review traffic flow and circulation in Ward’s parking lot to organize and potentially gain spaces, and review the needs for residential versus commercial parking in the neighborhood. Mason notes the previously stated suggestion of removing the rear addition but retaining the historic building. The Commission agrees these are items for future discussion. Hutchings states the discussion could be continued or set for the next scheduled meeting. Finch states that it is the property owner’s responsibility to consider options, and invites Mr. Ward to bring any additional questions or concerns to the Commission in the future and states that it is up to the owner and not the commission. Atty. Siemasko agrees with Finch, and states that the property owners will bring any questions or alternative proposals to the Commission. Finch agrees that alternative proposals would be considered by the Commission, and that the Commission clearly would like to see the historic building preserved.

Finch moves the meeting to the next agenda item.

2. Draft Annual Report

Hutchings provides a draft annual report, and states that the Planning Board typically submits annual reports to City Council at the end of each fiscal year. LaMont recommends the Commission’s annual report also be submitted by the fiscal year. Mason and Finch state that they agree the report’s timing should align with other reports. Hutchings asserts that the Commission could receive the Planning Department’s Annual Report to City Council, and that the Commission could submit a more detailed report or use what was submitted by the Planning Department.

Finch states that using a calendar year rather than fiscal year could be more beneficial, and that public attendance numbers should be included to demonstrate how virtual meetings have positively impacted attendance. Hutchings offers that if the Commission chooses a calendar year format, she can provide statistics. Pearl and Finch state that they would be comfortable with the report submitted by the Planning Department, with the addition of itemized statistics for virtual meeting attendance and funding for training for Commission members.

3. Discussion and Update: Certified Local Government Designation

Hutchings provided two documents provided by the Massachusetts Historical District, one having more detail of the requirements for the designation. Finch notes that the Commission meets the requirements as outlined in the document, with the exception of needing a full commission of at least five members. Hutchings says that she can provide the draft application for designation at the next meeting, and that the City is working actively to fill the Commission's vacant seats.

4. Approval of minutes

a. April 22, 2021

The minutes for April 22, 2021 are discussed and amended as needed.

Motion: Pearl moves to accept the amended minutes for April 22, 2021. LaMont seconds. There is a formal roll call vote with all members voting yes: Finch, LaMont, Mason, and Pearl. The motion passes (4-0).

5. New/Other Business

b. Discussion: Follow up on CPC priorities

Since Mayor Cahill is not present for this meeting due to a scheduling conflict, LaMont recommends the topic be continued to the next regular meeting on June 24, 2021.

Finch notes that a resident on Front Street has had their historic home designation plaque replaced; Commission members ask about who is responsible for replacing the plaques. Hutchings states that Historic Beverly has a historic plaque program, and that this plaque was replaced through that program.

c. Discussion on Beverly Depot/Odell Park Historic District, following the demolition of two contributing buildings

Finch states that two historic buildings in the Beverly Depot/Odell Park Historic District have been demolished to make way for the new Depot II building. He notes that these buildings went through the Demolition Delay process, and asks if buildings that go through the process are tracked. Hutchings states that yes, they are. Finch states that when buildings that go through delays are demolished, it should be noted on annual reports. Hutchings says that she can add this information to the annual report.

d. Other discussion or action items related to Commission business, if any

There being no other business, the commission moves to adjourn.

6. Adjournment

Motion: LaMont moves to adjourn the meeting at 9:08 pm. Mason seconds. There is a formal roll call vote with all members voting yes: Finch, LaMont, Mason, and Pearl. The motion passes (4-0).