

**CITY OF BEVERLY
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES**

COMMISSION Historic District Commission

DATE: July 22, 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 (Beverly Planning Department); Elizabeth
Keary Soule; Jared Bowers; Paul Whalen; Fay Salt; Jeffrey
Dauzat; Jonathan Salt; Sue Richardson; Susan Goganian;
W2CA Beverly; Ward 4 City Councilor Scott Houseman

RECORDER: Sharlyne Woodbury

Call to Order

Vice-Chair LaMont chairs and opens the meeting at 7:12 pm. Chair Finch experiences technical difficulties and joins the meeting shortly thereafter.

This is a virtual meeting with special meeting format as required to honor Governor Baker's State of Emergency declared due to the national crisis of COVID-19.

1. 7:00 PM: Public Hearing – Demolition Delay Review #261 – Partial demolition of a building located at 572R Essex Street – Elizabeth Keary Soule

Finch reviews the demolition delay ordinance, discusses the intent of the ordinance, and the expectations of the Commission to make a determination following the public hearing. The Commission may make two determinations: (1) whether the building is historically significant to the city, and if so (b) whether the building is preferably preserved. If the building is determined to be both historically significant and preferably preserved, a one-year delay may be placed on the demolition permit. The Building Inspector will be notified and no demolition permit for the building may be issued for one year.

Finch asks Elizabeth Keary Soule, the Structures and Landscape Project Manager for The Trustees of Reservation, for her presentation. She is joined by Jared Bowers, Director of Long Hill estate. They review the scope of the proposed demolition, including two elements of the farm house: the two-bay garage and attached rooms on the second floor, and a screened in porch on the opposite (southwest) side of the building. The southeast elevation of the building faces Essex Street. The northeast elevation faces the rear, which is the most impacted by the proposed demolition. Ms. Soule states they knows this farmhouse was constructed before the Sedgwick acquisition, but they do not know the exact construction date of the farmhouse, they believe it's an 18th century structure. Ms. Soule states the Sedgewicks renovated the property to change it from a working farm to a country farm house retreat. Renovations were made in the 1920s by the Sedgewicks. Since the Trustees' acquisition of Long Hill in the 1970s the farmhouse has been used for offices and a residence. The second floor is primarily offices and some bathrooms. For the purpose of the proposal, Ms. Soule states the Trustees is investing in the property has a

horticultural center. They are trying to promote and establish Long Hill as a public garden and as an educational horticultural destination, noting a rich and diverse plant environment. Ms. Soule states the Trustees had a consultant review the structural integrity of the farmhouse. Based off recommendations it was suggested to remove the sections proposed for demolition, as they were beyond renovation capacity or required financially and/or technically infeasible improvements to ensure ADA accessibility. They would like to add a classroom and restore the front (northeast) façade where the new classroom is going. The west façade will have matching windows and patches to maintain exterior consistency. Ms. Soule states they intend to preserve the historical integrity of the front façade. Ms. Soule provides photos with the presentation for context.

Finch notes there is one other 19th century house on the property and states he is unsure what its current use is. Pearl asks to see the demolition plan of the first floor again, and reviews the second-floor demolition plans with Ms. Soule. Pearl asks Ms. Soule about the history behind the first-floor addition. Ms. Soule gives a brief history of the permits received for the building, noting not all permits for the additions are present. They do know the addition was done before the Sedgewicks purchased the property.

Finch goes into recess for the public hearing, and reviews the rules and protocols of addressing the committee. Finch notes the proposal is not to demolish the whole house, only two ancillary additions to the house. He states it is not their purview to provide input on what the owner will do with the house, and requests the public to keep comments to the preservation of the building.

Paul Whalen, 583 Essex Street: Mr. Whalen asks if the garage on the back side of the house was structurally unsound. Ms. Soule clarifies that the space was used as storage. Although it isn't structurally unsound, they need to demolish the existing structure to ensure the classroom is ADA accessible and up to code.

Sue Richardson, Cogswell Avenue: Ms. Richardson states she thinks Long Hill has done a great job with the property, and believes the work they have done so far as appropriate.

There being no other members of the public who would like to speak, Finch closes the public hearing. He states the commissioners will go into deliberation. Finch notes that members of the public will need to be asked to be recognized if they want to speak.

Finch states the first determination the Commission needs to make is whether the property is historically significant. LaMont and Pearl state they believe the property is historically significant. Both speak to the renovations made by the Sedgwick and the history of the property. Mason and Finch state their agreement to its historical significance. Pearl states the property could be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Finch states the property contributes to the story of Beverly.

Motion: LaMont moves to find the property historically significant. Mason seconds. The motion carries 4-0.

Finch states the second determination that needs to be made is whether the elements are considered preferably preserved. Finch states the elements bring a colonial element to the property, and asks if there is a need to preserve what the Sedgewicks have done to the building.

Finch asks the Commission if there is a need to preserve the elements or is there a greater public benefit to allow their demolition in order to contribute to greater historic significance of the property.

Mason states the demolition allows for the broader appreciation of the property's history and story. Pearl states she would like to save the screened-in porch and preserve that story; although the garage demolition doesn't appear as important, the porch seems very important to the story of the house. Members review the question of preserving the screened-in porch. Finch states the photographs appear to demonstrate the porch is not structurally sound and would need to be fully reconstructed. He states the detailing is not on a scale of true colonial work, and is very rudimentary. Ms. Soule states the condition of the porch is poor, and it is not usable because it is not an accessible space for staff and visitors. To keep it would mean they couldn't use the egress to the great room, and they do not have the financial means to restore the porch at this time. Finch states reconstruction could resolve some of the structural issues, but it would likely be a total reconstruction. LaMont asks if the egress would be usable if they were to reconstruct it. Ms. Soule states it would still be a non-accessible egress because it would not be compliant with ADA accessibility codes.

Pearl states she believes the porch is an important element and asks if the Trustees would be willing to document the porch for future possibility of restoration. Finch suggests a set of measured drawings to preserve the history and story of the porch. Ms. Soule confirms they will complete drawings and documentation of the porch.

Motion: Pearl moves that the Commission determine the screened-in front porch, the garage, and the addition adjacent to the garage on the building are preferable determined. LaMont seconds. The Commission discusses conditioning the documentation of the screened-in porch. Hutchings explains that is not typically part of a motion such a motion, as it is not approval or denial, but a determination. The motion fails 0-4.

As the respective building elements were determined historically significant but not preferably preserved, no delay will be placed on the demolition permit.

2. Discussion: Expansion of Fish Flake Hill Local Historic District, establishment of Local Historic District Study Committee

Finch reviews the process of establishing a local chapter 40C (Local Historic) District, and states that a Local Historic District Study Committee (LHDSC) must be established to consider the option of expanding the Fish Flake Hill Local Historic District. The HDC may declare themselves to be the LHDSC, or they may turn the matter over to the Mayor and the City Council to appoint an LHDSC. Finch reviews all the requirements of creating a new Local Historic District or expanding the existing district. Finch notes his concern that the most recent information provided on how to establish local historic districts was completed in 2003 and last updated in 2007, and states that the literature doesn't discuss conservation districts. Hutchings clarifies the differences between conservation districts and local historic districts, noting the different process and different enabling legislation.

Finch observes that a vast number of the properties of the Fish Flake Hill local and National Register historic districts appear to be owned by absentee landlords, and states that this may make expanding the local historic district a difficult process, whereas a conservation district could be easier to gain support. Finch states that as an LHDSC, the HDC would have to establish the boundaries of the expanded local historic district and address areas of concern. LaMont states the consultant who completed the Historic Preservation Plan recommended expanding the Fish Flake Hill Local Historic District to align with the National Register Historic District, and that feedback from residents is needed. After receiving feedback, the proposed boundaries can be reduced if necessary.

Pearl questions whether a conservation district, rather than expanding the local historic district, would provide the teeth they are looking for to protect the properties in the district. Finch notes a lot of the buildings in the National Register district have vinyl siding and replaced windows, and that a conservation district would provide the ability to prevent demolition and major alterations, but wouldn't require review for more minor changes. Hutchings reviews what local historic districts manage versus conservation districts.

Finch recognizes Susan Goganian, Executive Director of Historic Beverly. Ms. Goganian discusses conservation districts, and how they can be as restrictive or unrestrictive as communities want them to be. The main goal is preventing major demolition to significant structures. Ms. Goganian provides examples and notes in an existing conservation district in Boston, the neighborhood doesn't care about paint color, siding, windows, etc., but just covers major changes. Ms. Goganian advises that if the HDC believes Fish Flake Hill is a significant neighborhood that needs to be protected, they proceed with the process of establishing an LHDSC to further review the area. Ms. Goganian states that if the HDC doesn't act, the neighborhood will see significant losses. Mason echoes Ms. Goganian's sentiments and states they need to start the process in order to preserve these areas.

Pearl asks if the HDC can ask people to join the LHDSC, as the HDC currently only has 4 members. Pearl states she does not believe the existing HDC has enough members to complete the work. Hutchings clarifies the HDC may receive information from members of the public, but others cannot be part of the LHDSC or the final decision-making process. Mason suggests interested members of the public could share information and complete research that would otherwise be incredibly time consuming. Pearl states her concern is a work load issue and this would be a good opportunity for the public to get involved. Finch notes they could hire a consultant to complete the report and manage the public hearing process, which provides an opportunity for public input, but hiring a consultant would cost money. Hutchings agrees that public feedback and education is built into the process, and cites the process as described in state resources. Finch discusses the importance of public education on historical properties for both the owners and the public.

Mason speaks to the subject in the context of the demolition delay on the Israel Stone House, and notes that there is a time constraint associated with this process. Pearl states that other downtown areas are competing for preservation efforts, noting the City's limited time and resources. Pearl discusses the possibility of establishing an LHD for the downtown Cabot Street National Register District and expansion area, and which area, downtown Cabot Street of the Fish Flake Hill neighborhood, should be the HDC's priority. HDC members discuss the importance of both

district and priorities for preservation efforts, noting they are gravely concerned with the preserving downtown history and character, including remaining historic storefronts, signage, etc. LaMont states they should return to the subject of the Fish Flake Hill Local Historic District expansion, and whether the HDC will establish themselves as the LDCSC. Members review the boundaries of the district and how Beverly's downtown areas have expanded since the town's inception.

Hutchings reviews the pros and cons of the HDC becoming the study committee. Pearl asks if they can try to fill their vacancies on the Commission to assist with workload and have greater representation. Hutchings and HDC members discuss procedures, protocols, public hearing forums/options and collaborations with other city boards/councils.

Motion: Mason moves to establish the Historic Districts Commission as the Study Committee. LaMont seconds. Discussion on the motion. Pearl asks to include the expansion of the Fish Flake Hill historic district in the motion. Mason amends her motion to establishing the Historic Districts Commission as Study Committee for the Expansion of the Fish Flake Hill Local Historic District. LaMont amends her second. The motion carries 4-0.

Hutchings informs the members now that they are established as the Study Committee they can continue the discussion of Fish Flake Hill or move on to the next subject on the agenda. LaMont states she would like to continue the agenda. Hutchings asks if the members would like schedule a separate Study Committee meeting before the scheduled HDC August meeting. Finch suggests next meeting be a site walk of Fish Flake Hill. Hutchings states she will send out a poll to establish an acceptable time for the site walk.

3. Discussion: 47 Cabot Street, alternatives to demolition of the historic structure

Hutchings notes an invitation was extended to the owner to meet with the Commission to discuss potential alternatives. Pearl asks that the Commission defer the discussion until the owner is present and available for a meeting. Hutchings informs members the owner's preference is to attend an in-person meeting. Members agree to have an in-person meeting with the owner at a later date.

When asked about virtual versus in-person meetings, Hutchings informs the Commission they have the authority to set the in-person or virtual meetings until April 2022, due to the act signed into law by Governor Baker extending the option for remote meetings until that time.

4. Review high priority action in Historic Preservation Plan

Members review the action items. Hutchings provides the updates to the draft design guidelines for Fish Flake Hill. She states the guidelines were placed on hold while the Historic Preservation Plan was being developed. Hutchings informs members they can complete the guidelines in house, or consider requesting the City hire a consultant to complete the guidelines. Hutchings notes that hiring a consultant would require budget considerations. Members ask if design guidelines are required for local historic districts, and Hutchings informs members guidelines are not required per the Beverly Ordinance. Pearl and Hutchings review the procedural requirements

surrounding design guidelines, and how design guidelines, while not required, significantly benefit a district. Hutchings will send out the existing draft guidelines for members to review. Members agree that the actions currently under consideration are sufficient in terms of workload, and they will review other priorities when they have available capacity.

5. Approval of minutes (as available)

- a. May 10, 2021
- b. May 27, 2021
- c. June 24, 2021

Minutes are deferred to the August 26, 2021 meeting.

6. New/Other Business

LaMont asked if the letter was sent to Massachusetts Historical Commission updating them of the Odell Park demolitions. Hutchings confirms that a letter is being completed at this time, and will be submitted in the coming weeks.

Finch recognizes the following members of the public:

- Councilor Scott Houseman states his support of the Commission and thanks them for their work.
- Susan Goganian offers her help and encourages the Commission to reach out for assistance regarding the potential expansion of the Fish Flake Hill Local Historic District.

7. Adjournment

Pearl moves to adjourn. LaMont seconds. The motion carries 4-0.

Meeting adjourned 9:01 pm. Next meeting scheduled for 8.26.21.