



**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE
HISTORICAL COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF WORCESTER**

Thursday, November 17, 2022

Worcester City Hall - Levi Lincoln Chamber,
with remote participation options available via Webex online at
<https://cow.webex.com/meet/historicalncommissionwebex> and
call-in number 415-655-0001 (Access Code: 1608081191).

Commissioners Present: Diane Long, Chair
Janet Theerman, Vice-Chair
Steven Taylor, Clerk
Erika Helnarski (participated remotely)
Devon Kurtz
Donald Northway
Tomi Stefani (participated remotely)
Vanessa Andre, Alternate

Commissioners Absent: None

Staff Present: Michelle Johnstone, Division of Planning & Regulatory Services (DPRS)
Michelle Smith, Division of Planning & Regulatory Services (DPRS)

Call Commission to Order – 5:30 PM

Approval of Minutes – September 8 & 22, October 6 & 27, November 3, 2022

Review of the October 27, 2022 and November 3, 2022 meeting minutes were held until a later date.

Upon a motion made by Commissioner Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted 7-0 to approve the September 8, 2022 meeting minutes as written. Commissioner Northway did not vote because he was not a member of the Commission at the time of the September 8, 2022 meeting.

Upon a motion made by Commissioner Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted 6-0 to approve the September 22, 2022 meeting minutes as written. Commissioner Northway did not vote because he was not a member of the Commission at the time of the September 22, 2022 meeting, and Commissioner Kurtz did not vote due to his absence at the September 22, 2022 meeting.

Upon a motion made by Commissioner Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted 6-0 to approve the October 6, 2022 meeting minutes as written. Commissioner Northway did not vote because he was not a member of the Commission at the time of the October 6, 2022 meeting, and Commissioner Taylor did not vote due to his absence at the October 6, 2022 meeting.

Old Business

1. 600 Lincoln Street (MBL 46-019-32-36) – HC-2022-042 – Building Demolition Delay Waiver (financial hardship consideration only)

Item opened on June 30, 2022

Petition purpose: Demolish building

Attorney Patricia Gates of Mountain, Dearborn & Whiting LLP appeared in front of the Commission, accompanied by one of the applicants, LuAnn Russell.

Attorney Gates stated that at the meeting in the summer, a member of the public approached her and the applicants in the hallway after the hearing, and the member of the public stated that she was going to try to work with her neighborhood cohort to try to come up with a solution. Attorney Gates stated that the member of the public has never since contacted her or the applicants.

Attorney Gates noted that the applicants are asking the Commission to consider their petition based on financial hardship. She reviewed documentation that she and the applicants had procured that she felt proved an economic hardship, including comparable properties identified by Kelleher & Sadowsky showing that if the property were restored, it would be worth approximately \$635,600 – \$681,000. She stated that the cost to restore the building would be \$735,000 [the figure submitted by the applicant in the Building Demolition Delay Waiver application was \$738,000]. She went on to state that restoring the building would result in a loss of \$76,000.

Attorney Gates also reviewed an appraisal prepared by appraiser Howard Dono in September 2020. Mr. Dono valued the property at \$800,000. She supplied the Commission with copies of the summary of the appraisal.

Attorney Gates stated that Ms. Russell obtained a quote for the cost of demolition, which was \$42,700. She supplied the Commission with copies of the quote.

Attorney Gates stated that it is her position that the discrepancy between the cost to demolish the building and sell it as compared with the cost to restore and sell it is a hardship. She stated that no one wants the building, even if restored.

She asked the Commission to approve the demolition based on financial hardship.

Commissioner Taylor asked if it is the position of the attorney that anything other than maximum profit is a financial hardship. Attorney Gates rejected that that was her position.

Commissioner Taylor asked why losing money represented a financial hardship to the applicant. Ms. Russell, the widow of the former owner of the property spoke. She stated that her husband died unexpectedly and that this property is all she has. She stated that she is alone, that she is the person who has been left responsible for the property, and that she can not financially afford to maintain the property.

Attorney Gates stated that she did not want to get into disclosing the personal finances of the applicants, other than to say they can't afford to restore the property.

No public comment.

Commissioners Helnarski and Northway did not participate in voting on the item because Commissioner Helnarski was absent, and Commissioner Northway was not yet a member of the Commission at the meeting at which the item was opened.

Upon a motion made by Commissioner Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted 6-0 to close the public hearing.

Upon a motion made by Commissioner Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted four (4) in favor and two (2) opposed, with Commissioners Kurtz, Stefani, Theerman, and Long being the yeas and Commissioners Taylor and Andre being the nays, that the issuance of demolition approval for 600 Lincoln Street is necessary to avoid an undue economic hardship to the property owner. Having gained a majority affirmative vote, the motion passed and the Building Demolition Delay Waiver on the basis of financial hardship for 600 Lincoln Street was approved.

New Business

Certificate of Appropriateness

2. 98 Chatham Street (03-026-00001) – HC-2022-083

Petition purpose: Install solar panel system

Greta Masiello from Sunrun, and Roland Brandt, the construction supervisor for the project and the license holder for Sunrun, joined the meeting remotely.

Commissioner Long stated that the application is to place solar panels at 98 Chatham Street. She asked the applicants to describe where the panels would be going.

Ms. Masiello stated that there would be ten panels in total, with five out of public view and an additional five on the side that would be visible.

Commissioner Taylor asked what the roof is clad in. The applicants stated that the roof is clad in asphalt shingle. Ms. Johnstone stated that the roof is an asphalt shingle-clad mansard roof and that the proposed placement is likely the best place for the panels because they would be as minimally visible as possible yet retain solar access.

Commissioner Long stated that as a Commission, they cannot deny access to solar energy, but are charged with making sure that the solar panels are as minimally visible and disruptive as possible.

The Commission stated that they had no further questions on the petition.

No public comment.

Commissioner Andre did not participate in voting on the item given the presence of a full commission.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted seven (7) in favor and zero (0) opposed to close the public hearing.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted seven (7) in favor and zero (0) opposed, that the proposed changes consisting of adding solar panels to 98 Chatham Street is appropriate for the Crown Hill Local Historic District. Having gained a unanimous affirmative vote, the motion passed and the Certificate of Appropriateness for 98 Chatham Street was approved.

3. 18 (AKA 18–24) Oxford Street (MBL 03-022-00015) – HC-2022-084

Petition purpose: Install directional signage

Commissioner Long stated that the petition was for installing directional signage at 18 Oxford Street.

Wilson Kiriungi, owner of Autism Allies, and Victor Wahome, the director of operations for Autism Allies, appeared in person to present the petition.

Ms. Johnstone stated that the plan approved by the ZBA (Zoning Board of Appeals) called for two directional signs, while the Certificate of Appropriateness application only called for one. She asked the applicant if there would be one or two signs.

The applicant stated that at this time they were only planning on installing one sign that says “do not enter” to minimize the number of changes they needed to make to the property.

There was discussion about whether installing only one sign would be in substantial accordance with the ZBA decision. Michelle Smith stated that that determination would need to be made by Inspectional Services. Ms. Johnstone suggested that the applicant request approval for two signs in accordance with the ZBA decision, understanding that they could then install either one or two based on the requirements of Inspectional Services. Ms. Smith agreed that that would be the most expeditious way to handle the petition.

Mr. Wahome stated that Autism Allies received a special permit for 18 Oxford Street to operate at a professional office, and that as a condition of approval, they were required to install directional signage. He stated that he was before the Commission to seek design approval for the required sign.

There was a brief discussion on what discretion the Commission can exercise in approving the design of traffic signs.

No Public Comment

Commissioner Andre did not participate in voting on the item given the presence of a full commission.

On a motion made by Commissioner Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted 7-0 to close the public hearing.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted seven (7) in favor and zero (0) opposed, that the proposed changes consisting of the installation of directional signage for safety at 18 Oxford Street is appropriate for the Crown Hill Local Historic District. Having gained a unanimous affirmative vote, the motion passed and the Certificate of Appropriateness for 18 Oxford Street was approved.

4. 36 Whitman Road (MBL 20-003-00001) – HC-2022-085

Petition purpose: replace fence

Commissioner Kurtz recused himself, as he was the applicant.

Devon Kurtz of 36 Whitman Road described his proposed project, which consisted of replacing an existing wooden fence with a wooden fence of a similar appearance.

Commissioner Kurtz stated that they were planning on letting the fence naturally gray.

No Public Comment

On a motion made by Commissioner Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted 7-0 to close the public hearing.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted seven (7) in favor and zero (0) opposed, that the proposed changes consisting of the replacement of an existing fence with a new cedar fence at 36 Whitman Road is appropriate for the Montvale Local Historic District. Having gained a unanimous affirmative vote, the motion passed and the Certificate of Appropriateness for 36 Whitman Road was approved.

Building Demolition Delay Waiver

5. 3 Irene Street (MBL 08-017-00024) – HC-2022-086

Petition purpose: Rebuild front porches

Shiran Aguila, the property owner, appeared in person to describe his petition to remove and replace the tri-level porches.

Ms. Johnstone described the existing condition of the porches.

The Commission discussed with the applicant the proposed materials and proposed design for the replacement porches. Mr. Aguila described that the new porch systems will generally look the same as the existing porches.

No Public Comment

On a motion made by Commissioner Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted 7-0 to close the public hearing.

Upon a motion made by Commissioner Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission voted seven (7) in favor and zero (0) opposed that the proposed demolition at 3 Irene Street, consisting of the replacement of the tri-level porch to match the existing first-floor porch and replicating existing historic details throughout would not be detrimental to the historical or architectural resources of the City of Worcester. Having gained a unanimous affirmative vote, the motion passed and the Building Demolition Delay Waiver for 3 Irene Street was approved.

Other Business

A. Discussion on voting procedures

Item taken out of order, after Other Business item B.

Chair Diane Long and City staff facilitated a discussion amongst Commission members pertaining to the protocol on voting on petitions with expired decisions that had previously been approved by the Commission. The importance of providing reasoning for denying petitions, especially when petitions had been previously approved, was discussed.

B. Greendale Revitalization Initiative presentation

Item taken out of order prior to Other Business item A.

Representatives from Worcester Business Development Corporation (WBDC) and their consulting firm, Epsilon Associates, presented the Commission with a proposal to redevelop the site of Saint-Gobain Abrasives. City staff facilitated a discussion between the proponents and Commission, and advised the Commission of their role under Section 106.

Adjournment

On a motion made and duly seconded, the Commission voted 7-0 to adjourn the meeting at approximately 7:52 p.m.