

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

**JANUARY 11, 2007
44 FRONT STREET, ROOM 300**

Commission Members Present: Peter Schneider
Michael Theerman
Thomas Constantine
Thomas Conroy
Nicholas Plante

Staff Present: Lara Bold, Division of Planning & Regulatory Services

REGULAR MEETING (5:30 PM)

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Schneider called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Upon a motion by Commissioner Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Conroy, it was voted 5-0 to approve the December 28, 2006 minutes.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Ms. Bold informed the Commission that there were no updates on the Historic Commission procedures or the local option property tax assessment.

NEW BUSINESS

292 Lincoln Street (HC-06-35) – Patricia Gates, representative for James Chacharone, petitioner and owner of the structure at 292 Lincoln Street, presented the petition. Chair Schneider acknowledged the interested abutters in attendance and explained the Building Demolition Delay Waiver hearing process. He stated that in order to approve the 12-month demolition delay waiver for historic buildings, the Commission must find that the proposed demolition would not be detrimental to the architectural and/or historical resources of the City of Worcester, or, find that the lack of a waiver would impose an undue economic hardship on the applicant.

Ms. Gates submitted a letter requesting a continuation of the hearing for 292 Lincoln Street (to...) because the applicant was unable to attend the meeting, and to provide her additional time to meet with the neighbors to address their concerns. In addition, Ms. Gates indicated that renovating the building would be costly, and added that neither she

nor the petitioner argued the architectural and historic significance of the structure. Afterward, she referred the Commission to the Mr. Chacharone's letter, which described in detail the applicant's financial concerns with the property.

Deborah Packard, executive director of Preservation Worcester, stated that her organization had received an outpouring of concerns regarding the proposed demolition of the Frederick Kimball house, and indicated that Preservation Worcester had considered placing the building on the organization's list of "most endangered buildings". In addition, she stated that the importance of the building was not only its historic architecture but also its role as a neighborhood gateway. Ms. Packard informed the Commission that the building underwent significant renovations in 1995 with funds provided by several local foundations. Ms. Packard added that prior to purchasing the parcel Mr. Chacharone had been informed that the building on site was historic; therefore, any proposed demolition of it would require a Building Demolition Waiver granted by the Worcester Historical Commission. She further indicated that Mr. Chacharone owns several properties in the city and is not new to the development process. Ms. Packard informed the Commission that Preservation Worcester was willing to work with Mr. Chacharone to address his reasons for demolition, which she understood were triggered by his need to provide additional parking for an office building located at 299 Lincoln Street, which he also owns. Edith Morgan, an abutter and president of the Brittan Square neighborhood Association, spoke on behalf of the neighborhood, stating that the neighborhood had already lost several other historic buildings such as the building known as the Shattuck mansion. She indicated that Mr. Chacharone had met with neighborhood groups to discuss the construction of a parking garage elsewhere, but had then purchased the property at 292 Lincoln Street with the intent of creating parking on that location, instead.

Ann Nelson informed the Commission that she had served on the Board of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (MSPCC) in 1994 and 1995, and indicated that the MSPCC had owned the building until recently. Ms. Nelson stated that the Board felt strongly about locating at 292 Lincoln Street and began raising money locally to substantially renovate the building. Ms. Nelson indicated that she was the project manager for the renovations of the building. She stated that the substantial renovations had occurred only 11 years ago and that the local funders who contributed to the renovation campaign had done so with the intent of seeing the building maintained, not demolished within a decade.

Tom Reardon, architect with Benoit and Reardon, informed the Commission that he was the main architect involved with the 1995 renovations. He indicated that \$425,000 of renovations had taken place in 1995, including the installation of a new electrical system, central air, fire suppression, the replacement of the first floor windows, handicapped accessibility upgrades including bathrooms, as well as extensive interior work including the installation of period-appropriate tiles from a salvage yard. Mr. Reardon also informed the Commission that a new roof was installed and \$10,000 worth of trim work was completed during the 1995 renovations. He argued that Mr. Chacharone's statement that the structure at 292 Lincoln Street would require \$800,000 to comply with current

building code was not itemized and appeared inflated. He also indicated that in his opinion, at most, \$80,000-\$100,000 worth of renovations would be needed. Mr. Reardon also questioned Mr. Chacharone's estimate that 292 Lincoln Street should be earning \$25.00 per square foot. He stated that, in his experience, prime office space is usually leased for \$14-\$16 per square foot. Mr. Reardon stated that the original architect of the building located at 292 Lincoln Street, William Ralph Emerson, was the originator of an architectural style known as the "shingle style" which represents a continuous shingle of siding and roof. He stated that Emerson's style spread throughout the United States, but that many buildings of similar architectural style have been destroyed by fire and demolition over the years.

Ms. Gates requested that the Commission allow her to withdraw the original request for a continuance.

Phil Palmeri, District 2 Councilor, stated that he appreciated Preservation Worcester's efforts. He stated that the Frederick Kimball house at 292 Lincoln Street was a significant historical and cultural building for the neighborhood. Mr. Palmeri stated that he appreciated the demolition delay ordinance and stated that razing such an important building would be a travesty for the neighborhood. He also stated that he wished the demolition delay order was stricter. Mr. Palmeri indicated that, if necessary, he would meet with the City Manager, the new Mayor, and the owner to help save the building.

Larry Haley, an abutter at 117 Paine Street, informed the Commission that he is a professional carpenter as well as a trained architect and had attended the same school as the architect who prepared the report for Mr. Chacharone. Mr. Haley indicated that he did not agree with the report's recommendations of the work that needed to be done nor with the proposed cost estimates. In addition, Mr. Haley expressed concern that site preparation had already begun on the site and that there were erosion control problems. Chair Schneider suggested that the applicant report the issues to the building inspector and that there may be civil recourse for certain water damage problems caused by nearby construction.

David Rushford, resident of 2 Regent Street, informed the Commission that he came to the meeting as a private citizen representing Preservation Worcester and its mission to preserve neighborhoods for people. Mr. Rushford stated that the Lincoln Street neighborhood is a people-friendly neighborhood with a nice pedestrian scale and was not meant to be a street such as Gold Star Boulevard, filled with parking lots and high speed traffic. He also indicated that he looks forward to working with the owner and Preservation Worcester to work on a solution.

James Postale, an abutter, also expressed concerns with water issues he felt were caused by site work. Chair Schneider referred Mr. Postale to the Code Department and to seek civil recourse. John Coolis, 18 Norton Street, stated that the structure at 292 Lincoln Street was one of the reasons he moved to the neighborhood and was a treasure for the area. He stated that the area has seen an increase in owner-occupied homes. Commissioner Theerman stated that he appreciated all the neighborhood input.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Conroy and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission found that the proposed demolition would be detrimental to the architectural and historical resources of the City of Worcester and voted 0-5 to approve the waiver of demolition delay; therefore the waiver for demolition delay was not granted and the Commission considered the possibility of undue economic hardship for the owner.

Chair Schneider and Commissioner Conroy inquired as to whether Ms. Gates had any further information regarding the applicant's economic hardship. Ms. Gates stated that the only information she had was represented in the applicant's petition, in his letter to the Commission as well as the architect's report.

Chair Schneider stated that it was apparent that Mr. Chacharone knew the building was historic when it was purchased. Ms. Gates informed the Commission that Mr. Chacharone purchased the property in September 2006 but stated that she did not have a copy of the agreement. Commissioner Conroy informed the audience that the demolition delay is only for 12 months and allows the applicant and concerned parties to explore options to prevent the demolition.

Commissioner Theerman explained that in Worcester's two local historic districts, the Commission has considerably more authority to protect historic structures from change and demolition. He also stated that he had toured the building at 292 Lincoln Street and thought that it was an important anchor for the neighborhood. Commissioner Theerman expressed hope that one day Worcester might adopt an ordinance similar to a City of Cambridge ordinance which states that historic buildings cannot be demolished for parking.

Ms. Gates questioned when the 12-month period would end and stated that the applicant had filed the application on November 30, 2006. Chair Schneider asked that staff verify the date which the 12-month delay would end.

Commissioner Plante stated that the neighborhood should focus on putting anger and rhetoric aside and should work with the owner to come up with a solution that makes sense for the neighborhood. He also suggested concerned neighbors contact Ms. Gates and thanked Ms. Gates for her willingness to discuss possibilities.

Commissioner Theerman also suggested that the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children should also take some responsibility for the property.

Ms. Gates informed the Commission that Mr. Chacharone had obtained an amended site plan approval for a two-story parking garage at 299 Lincoln Street but that a recent change in the mix of tenants which included the addition of a "clinic" use had increased the parking requirement. In addition, Ms. Gates informed the Commission that Mr. Chacharone had indicated that the parking garage had become too expensive with the necessary engineering and had therefore looked for nearby surface parking solutions.

Ms. Nelson informed the Commission that Mr. Chacharone had already received a demolition permit for a non-historically listed structure abutting the Frederick Kimball House.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Constantine and seconded by Commissioner Theerman, the Commission found that the applicant did not have an undue economic hardship and voted 0-5 to approve the demolition delay waiver; therefore the waiver was not granted and the request for a waiver of the 12-month building demolition delay for 292 Lincoln Street was denied.

OTHER BUSINESS

Upon a motion by Commissioner Theerman and seconded by Commissioner Constantine, the Commission voted 5-0 to re-elect Commissioner Schneider as Chair and Commissioner Johnson as Vice-Chair.

Chair Schneider requested an update on the possibility of receiving a matching grant for further historical survey work. The Commission stated that they would like to survey the Quinsigamond Village area. Chair Schneider also requested staff inform the Chair and/or Commission if their presence was needed at any Community Development Block Grant meetings.

Commissioner Theerman stated that it will be extremely important that the Worcester Historical Commission and Preservation Worcester maintain their strong ties.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Schneider adjourned the meeting at 7:00 p.m.