

WHDC joint meeting with Wayland Historical Commission
and the Wayland Historical Society
March 5, 2014

Present:

Historical Commission (HC) members: Elisa Scola (chair),
Gretchen Ryder-Sharry, Sheila Carel, Tonya Largy, John Dyer

Historic District Commission members: Gretchen Schuler (chair),
Margery Baston, Alice Boelter, Chris Hagger, Kathie Steinberg.

Historical Society Board of managers: Bob Mainer

Public Comment: There was none.

Demolition Delay Bylaw. Gretchen Schuler gave some background on such bylaws and noted that -- a 6 month delay is not long enough. She recommended a one year delay. She also commented that there is no State enabling legislation so -- it is all Home Rule. As the three groups consider proposing a demolition delay bylaw again, some of the issues to be considered are the length of the delay and the trigger for review (our existing Historical resource list, or date of 1945, a finite date, 50 years, 75 years, etc). If the trigger for being subject to demolition delay is that a property has been surveyed, homeowners may be concerned should we try to document their houses. Yet the Historic Houses and Building Inventory is simply a list with address, photo, architectural description and a history of the property. Gretchen advised that the HC, not the Zoning Board of Appeal should handle demolition applications.

Gretchen said that the HDC is required to have a member sponsored by the Historical Society. Bob Mainer asked if the age

of the building is that relevant. Gretchen said that the building inspector has to have something finite. Elisa asked if the survey could be separated from the demolition delay so people aren't afraid of having their house surveyed. Gretchen said you can ask for time to document a property. It is even possible that a building could be moved to a different location within a property. Alice asked about the results of the Sudbury and Weston demolition delay bylaws. Gretchen pointed out that Sudbury's bylaw related to houses constructed prior to 1940.

Kathie suggested a 2-step process for Wayland's implementation of demolition delay starting with restricting it to 100 year old buildings and then as we educate people of the importance of protection, properties could be identified for the Survey List. Gretchen was in favor of 100 years plus the Survey List. Alice asked if there might be an incentive for people to have their property on the Survey List such as free guidance on repair techniques, etc. Gretchen spoke of a house in Lincoln that was going to be demolished, but a buyer appeared who wanted to restore the building. We might want to encourage such occurrences where appropriate.

Gretchen noted that we need to craft our language carefully for this demolition delay bylaw. There currently are about 250 homes on the Survey List. John suggested that it should be called something other than "demolition delay." The suggestion was made that for educational purposes there could be articles in the local paper describing different types and periods of houses to educate people on the variety of styles which do exist and how they each contribute to community character.

John said that if a building is decrepit or on an over-sized piece of land -- people will question why it should be saved. We need to educate people about what these buildings tell us about our community and its history not just 1700's but also 1900's. Alice said that kids helping on the Five Century House Tour this past

September were really enthusiastic about it. This shows that people of all ages can become interested in “period” houses of any era if they are informed. Bob Mainer reiterated the idea of incentives since he’d found with a property he owns in another state, volunteer designers or architects were willing to help him.

Gretchen suggested that there could be a clause about considering alternative uses instead of demolition. (Who does this? The owner? The HC?) John wondered if the Design Review Advisory Board in Wayland might advise property owners. It was pointed out that the Design Review Advisory Board currently focuses just on the commercial properties.

Kathie pointed out that a demolition delay bylaw is a way of preserving a streetscape. Gretchen said that word of the demolition plan has to get out quickly when demolition is being considered. Gretchen mentioned the importance of notifying abutters when a building is being considered for demolition since otherwise they might not even know until too late. She said that most of the people aggrieved by a demolition delay bylaw are developers. She noted that the developer, who was required to restore the old house on the property which is now “Highland Meadows” on Route 20 in Weston, has yet to remodel the house for two units even though much of the remaining new development is complete and occupied.

If Wayland were to enact a demolition delay bylaw, each application would require prompt attention from those deciding whether a building is historic. Gretchen advised that this could be implemented by assigning two HC members this task, and rotating this responsibility among the entire HC. Gretchen said that sometimes an old house is in the middle of the property and in the way of subdivision plans, but it **could** be moved in order to be saved. Someone asked about little outbuildings and whether these too must be saved. The answer was: If it is too new it wouldn’t even come up for consideration.

Gretchen stressed the need of streamlining the demolition delay process to minimize applicants' anger over what they consider unnecessary delay. She advised notifying abutters as well as other boards in town, although newspaper notification is not needed.

Kathie asked if a demolition delay went into effect in other communities following the sale of that property. Gretchen pointed out that it could be a condition of the sale.

Gretchen also recommended that if a demolition permit has been issued, it should be valid for only one year. Otherwise, the property could be left in limbo and be an eyesore/hazard. Gretchen stated that Cambridge does not allow the demolition to occur unless the applicant has all your other permits in place. There, when space for parking cars is so valuable, property owners see demolition as creating a revenue source while they await other necessary approvals for new construction. Bob asked what might be done about a building in Wayland that was in very bad condition if demolition could not occur until all permits were in place.

Gretchen said that the HC would have to make that call.

Gretchen had made available a chart which listed some of our neighboring towns (Lincoln, Sudbury, Weston) and the particulars of their demolition delay bylaws (qualifications, procedure, length of delay, and remedies). Also listed was the bylaw proposed for Wayland a number of years ago that was not approved at Town Meeting, and there was a "general" demolition delay bylaw description.

The "general" characteristics were as follows: (1) Qualifications: 75+ years; National/State register; HC finding of historically significant because associated with historic persons or events or has architectural value; (2) Notice of intent to HC with a public hearing within 65 days; Written finding within 14 days of hearing (3)

Length of delay 365 days; and (4) No building permit for 2 years following violation.

Each person at this joint meeting was asked to state his/her tentative preference for bylaw language.

- Margery began and voiced preference for the “general” demolition delay bylaw with a shorter period before a public hearing - perhaps within 30 to 40 days.
- Sheila’s preference was also for the “general”, however, with the public hearing within 45 days rather than 65 days.
- John was insensitive to 75 or 100 years. He also suggested that no permit be issued until there is an OK from HC for any demolition. (Gretchen said that this would require a majority HC vote.)
- Sheila suggested 100 years and/or on the Survey List.
- Gretchen Ryder Sharry likes the 100 years qualification, with public notification. Some towns had 6 months as the “length of delay”, but she wondered about 9 months? However, most important to her was the 100 years.
- Tonya as an archaeologist noted “the houses are all too recent for me.” I honestly don’t feel I know enough to comment -- however, there should be heavy penalties for demolition. No building permit for 5 years following a violation!”
- Elisa wanted 100 years; public hearing within 60 days; a delay 12 months at least.
- Chris liked the “general”, 75 years; with barns included; public hearing within 45 days.
- Alice wanted to know more about the effectiveness of the experience which surrounding communities have had with their demolition delay bylaws.
- Bob asked how many buildings might be affected since this would likely be asked at Town Meeting. Gretchen responded that it would be more than 250.

Discussion of Railroad Bike Trail and Railroad Interpretive site.

Gretchen said that the \$250,000 from Twenty Wayland must be used within 2 years of the issuance of the building permit for Phase II. If not used within those 2 years it could be lost. Sarki Sarkisian, Town Planner is still working with Iron Horse, a commercial entity, for a stone dust trail between Russell's and the Depot. Iron Horse has offered to build a stone dust trail if they can keep the old rails.

Gretchen explained that the HDC wants to be on same page with the HC. However, the HDC was thinking of preserving the rails in part of the Historic District (to north of Depot and along side the Freight House). The inclination of the HC would be to keep the entire track from Russell's to the Depot. It was pointed out that a bike path may not "fit" if the rails are kept in place. Also, the Town might lose the \$250,000. Rick Conard had pictures that showed rails and bike paths working together. There was a consensus that this discussion should be tabled until we could include Rick who has so much information to bring to this discussion.

Kathie reminded us that there are other possible uses for the \$250,000.

HC working on a sensitivity map. Gretchen has provided the HC a list of houses that have been surveyed. There are railroad and Indian artifacts The HC wants to get as much as we can onto the sensitivity map it is creating. The "gatehouse" and the water works, old Mill Pond area, etc..

In order to protect them, Indian artifacts, burial sites are not to be publicly advertised. Alpine Field had Indian history dating back 6000 to 7000 years. Tonya pointed out that what we can talk about are sites that aren't there any more. Elisa pointed out that the sensitivity map is to help protect and preserve rather than letting the world know where things are.

The joint meeting between the HDC, the HDC and the Historical Society ended around 9 pm.

The HDC met briefly after the joint meeting, and approved the draft minutes for February 20 with amendments. (5-0-0)

The HDC meeting adjourned around 9:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Margery Baston