



Holyoke Historical Commission (HHC)  
Meeting Minutes  
Monday January 13, 2020

**Attendance:** Richard Ahlstrom, Christopher Gauthier, Frances Welton, Marco Crescentini

**Not in Attendance:** Paola Ferrario

**Municipal Staff:** Ben Murphy (OPED)

**Others in Attendance:** Don Sanders, Kathy McKean

1. **Call to Order** – Richard Ahlstrom called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.
2. **Review of November 13 & December 9, 2019 Minutes** – The minutes of the December 9 meeting were not available for the Commission to review and approve.

*Frances Welton made a motion and Christopher Gauthier second the motion to accept the minutes of the November 13, 2019 meeting of the Holyoke Historical Commission. The motion carried unanimously.*

3. **Public Participation** – No public participation

4. **Public Hearings**

- a. **Demo Delay – 134 Chestnut Street**

Richard Ahlstrom summarized that the demolition application for 134 Chestnut Street was from the Massachusetts International Festival of the Arts (MIFA) and that the building is listed on the Holyoke Historic Inventory and is over 100 years old. The demolition is related to the rehabilitation of the Victory Theater for reuse as a theater.

The proponents from MIFA, Don Sanders, Executive Artistic Director and Kathy McKean, Managing Director of MIFA explained the history of the theater and the rehabilitation plans for the building. 134 Chestnut Street and its property sit in the location of an addition that is necessary to reuse the theater for Broadway shows. Mr. Sanders made the case why the Victory Theater is important to reopen and how the adjacent property is important for the project. The Commission received plans that show the addition which will house back of house spaces, a loading dock, and the HVAC system. The addition will take up most of the property at 134 Chestnut Street. Alternatives for the loading dock were looked at but were found to be unfeasible. The design of the addition is in keeping with the historic theater building. The proponents indicated that they have their other permits for the project and that parking will be accommodated through the adjacent HG&E parking lot and the municipal parking facility at the end of Suffolk Street. The existing back of house spaces and areas that had been retail and office space will be utilized for restrooms and concessions/hospitality. Construction is planned to move forward in 2020. After concerns were raised by Commissioner Crescentini that equipment screens on the roof may be removed for budget savings, the proponents assured the Commission that the screening is part of the historic tax credits process, so they must stay in the project.

*Frances Welton made a motion and Marco Crescentini seconded the motion to open the public comment portion of the hearing on 134 Chestnut Street. The motion carried unanimously.*

No public was in attendance and therefore no public comments were collected, and no letters were received about the application.

***Frances Welton made a motion and Marco Crescentini seconded the motion to close the public comment portion of the hearing on 134 Chestnut Street. The motion carried unanimously.***

Mr. Ahlstrom shared that in a letter from Brona Simon, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Historical Commission, it is noted that the 134 Chestnut Street is not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and that removing it will not effect listing the Victory Theater on the National Register.

***Frances Welton made a motion and Christopher Gauthier seconded the motion to impose a six-month delay on the demolition of 134 Chestnut Street. The motion unanimously failed to carry.***

Mr. Murphy shared with the proponent that a notice will be sent to the Holyoke Building Commissioner that a six-month delay was not imposed by the Commission.

## **5. Community Preservation Act (CPA)**

### **a. Eligibility Determination**

Ben Murphy explained that numbers 5 and 6 of the policy were combined so now the language reads that a determination notice will be sent to the Community Preservation Committee informing the Committee that the project property is historic or is not historic. Language that made it sound as if HHC determined which projects get funded has been removed.

***Marco Crescentini made a motion and Christopher Gauthier seconded the motion to accept the Eligibility Determination Policy as presented. The motion carried unanimously.***

### **b. CPA Role and Responsibilities of the HHC**

Ben Murphy stated that the initially document has been edited based discussion with the Commission. He removed some language, most significantly the section on determining adverse or no adverse effect of the project on the historic property.

***Marco Crescentini made a motion and Frances Welton seconded the motion to accept the CPA Role and Responsibilities Policy as presented. The motion passed unanimously.***

### **c. Preservation Restriction Policy**

Ben Murphy reviewed the document with the Commission and explained that the language was taken from the preservation restriction agreement and reworked for the policy. Preservation restrictions would be held by the HHC and best practices would have properties with restrictions inspected on an annual basis to make sure the restriction is being followed. The HHC will hold preservation restrictions for non-City owed properties because the Commission has expertise on historic preservation that the CPC does not.

The Commission generally had concerns about the HHC ability to monitor preservation restrictions. There was discussion on how to make sure property owners get approval from the HHC before changes are made and how it could be done through the Building Departments database to flag those properties when permits are pulled. Mr. Murphy will work with the Building Department to make sure these properties are flagged through their system.

***Frances Welton made a motion and Christopher Gauthier seconded the motion to accept the Preservation Restriction Policy as presented. The motion passed unanimously.***

## **6. Demolition Delay Ordinance**

Frances Welton shared that she and Ben Murphy met with Building Commissioner Damian Cote and he showed support for the changes to the ordinance. The next meeting will be Sean Gonsalves, the Director of the Board of Health in the next couple of weeks. Suggested changes will be brought to the Commission for their consideration with the goal of creating a final draft to present to the Problem Properties Group before moving on to the City Council. Ms. Welton indicated that Commissioners should speak to some City Councilors before officially going to the full Council. The strategy is to make the case that the landscape of the city has changed since the last time the ordinance has been updated.

## **7. MHC Survey and Planning Grant**

### **a. Main St. Corridor Survey**

Ben Murphy shared that the consultant has produced several sample forms, which were chosen because they may be helpful for the Heart of Holyoke placemaking initiative and properties that are in the area of the South Holyoke Homes project. He will send those forms to the Commission to review. The next step is to proceed with creating the rest of the survey forms which is expected to be complete by early May.

### **b. 2020 Grant Application – HHC Letter of Support**

Ben Murphy shared that MHC has invited Holyoke to submit a full application, which is due on February 10. Mr. Murphy is also submitting a grant application for CDBG funds to be a match for the MHC funds. The MHC application requires a letter of support from the local historical commission.

*Frances Welton made a motion and Chris Gauthier seconded the motion to submit a letter of support for the Massachusetts Historical Commission Planning and Survey Grant application for the Canal System Industrial Area. The motion carried unanimously.*

## **8. Old Business**

- Frances Welton plans on meeting with the Mayor to ask him to appoint Commissioners for the Commission and she has actively been searching for possible candidates.
- Richard Ahlstrom shared that James Sheehan and Joe Paul have both resigned the Commission.

## **9. New Business**

- Richard Ahlstrom shared that he called David White, the new owner of the historic Richardson Train Station, and asked that he attend a future Commission meeting to share his plans for the property. Mr. White appreciated the phone call and he indicated that he would be willing to attend a meeting. Ben Murphy mentioned that he reached out to the owners of the Steaming Tender Restaurant in Palmer (another Richardson Train Station) to see if they had any interest in the Holyoke Station and they indicated that they do not.
- Ben Murphy shared an MHC notice soliciting nominations for their historic preservation awards and also indicated that he will be attending a workshop at Wysteriahurst about MHC preservation grants, although he does not have any potential projects to apply.

## **10. Next Meeting – February 2020**

## **11. Adjourn**

*At 8:07 p.m., there being no further business to come before the Commission, a motion was made by Frances Welton and seconded by Marco Crescentini to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried.*

**Sincerely,**

**Holyoke Historical Commission**