



Holyoke Historical Commission (HHC)

Meeting Minutes

Monday October 19, 2020

Due to the declared public health emergency, the meeting was held virtually via zoom.us

Zoom Meeting ID: 850 8704 8116

Attendance: Richard Ahlstrom, Elana Aubrey, Marco Crescentini, Paola Ferrario, Christopher Gauthier, Luis Salazar, Frances Welson

Not in Attendance: N/A

Municipal Staff: Ben Murphy (OPED)

Others in Attendance: Harry Montalvo, Mimi Panitch, Efrain Vazquez

- 1. Call to Order** – Richard Ahlstrom called the meeting to order at 6:37 p.m. and announced that the meeting was being recorded. Mr. Ahlstrom introduced new commissioner, Luis Salazar. Mr. Ahlstrom also introduced Harry Montalvo, who has been appointed to the Commission by the Mayor but still must be accepted by the City Council. Mr. Salazar and Mr. Montalvo shared some of their background with the Commission. Mr. Montalvo was asked by the Director of Planning and Economic Development to join the Commission.
- 2. Review of September 14, 2020 Minutes**
Frances Welson requested a small change to correct a grammatical mistake and Paola Ferrario requested small changes to clarify some points of the 140 Middle Water Street demolition delay hearing.

A motion was made by Christopher Gauthier and seconded by Elana Aubrey to accept the minutes from September 14, 2020, as amended.

The motion carried unanimously.

- 3. Certified Local Government Report**

Ben Murphy explained that the state requires an annual report be submitted by all Certified Local Governments and that it should be reviewed by the Commission before it is submitted to the state. The report includes the activities of both the Historical Commission and the Historic District Commission over the last fiscal year. As chair of the Historic District Commission, Marco Crescentini provided information about the activities of that Commission. Paola Ferrario indicated that in the future she would track any professional development related to historic preservation that she participates so that it may be included in the report. Ms. Ferrario also shared that she is a licensed real estate agent and Mr. Murphy indicated that he would add that information to the report before submitting.

- 4. Demolition Delay Ordinance**

Richard Ahlstrom explained that the Commission has been working on updates to the ordinance for a couple of years, which includes changing the name to the Preservation Ordinance so that it is more positive sounding. Changes include reducing the age of eligible properties from 100 years to 75 years and to increase the delay period from six months to eighteen months. There was some discussion on the merits of reducing the age of eligibility to 50 years so that Mid-Century modern buildings, like the Lynch School, would be included. The goal is to have the Commission finalize the proposed changes and bring the amended ordinance to the City Council for approval.

Ben Murphy review the most recent changes to the document and explained that he incorporated the changes to the already amended working document. The changes were based on the discussion the Commission had at its last meeting and include:

- creating a two-step process that would first determine if a building is historically significant to determine whether a public hearing is necessary;
- removing the requirement for a legal notice and instead requiring a large placard be placed at the building site within view of the public way; and
- requiring that only direct abutters receive the public hearing notice by certified mail and that other abutters within 300 feet receive notice through regular mail.

Creating a two-step process is meant to eliminate the need for a public hearing in some cases, which would reduce the burden on City staff and for applicants. The current ordinance requires that the Commission hold a public hearing for all properties that fall within the parameters of the demolition delay ordinance.

Mr. Murphy suggested that the Commission could create guidelines once the new ordinance is in place to provides specific guidance on how other abutters within 300 feet receive notice and the exact language on the placard that is placed on the site. He felt that those details do not need to be placed within the ordinance.

Mr. Murphy explained that there where some additional small changes including changing the word “will” to “shall” in section C.9.i. to be consistent with the language throughout the document and to remove the requirement in section D.4. that notice from the Building Commissioner be sent to the Commission via certified mail. Mr. Murphy explained that the Building Commission had made this request and that there are easier more efficient ways for notice to be sent, including email and interoffice mail.

The Commission reviewed the changes within the document and discussed the merits of the changes. There was discussion about the requirements that an applicant submit materials to the Commission and concern about not receiving those materials ahead of a public hearing. There was consensus that sections C.4. and C.5. should be reworked to allow the Commission to compel an applicant to provide materials to the Commission by delaying the hearing. Mr. Murphy will rework those sections and then resubmit the updated document to the Commission for review. Frances Welton indicated that there was a need to make grammatical corrections and that she would work with Mr. Murphy to make those changes.

Mr. Ahlstrom opened the discussion to public comment and Mimi Panitch, of the Holyoke Planning Board, commented that the Commission, when dealing with scheduling a demolition delay hearing, could open a public hearing and then immediately continue the hearing to a future date if the applicant has not submitted all the required materials. Ms. Panitch also suggested that if materials are not received from the applicant within a certain timeframe, those missing documents could be interpreted as supporting the argument for a demolition delay.

Efrain Vazquez asked about future plans for the Holyoke Armory and Mr. Murphy explained that the topic would be discussed later in the meeting but that a study has been produced to help identify potential reuses of the building. Mr. Murphy indicated that he would email the report to Mr. Vazquez.

Mr. Ahlstrom asked the Commission to review next steps to move forward with the City Council. Ms. Welton suggested that Commissioners contact Councilors to speak to them one on one about the ordinance before it is presented to the full Council. Ms. Ferrario suggested that the Commission produce a presentation to build support from the public and Councilors on why the ordinance needs to be updated. Luis Salazar indicated he would help put together video messaging.

Mr. Murphy explained that once the ordinance is finalized by the Commission it can be submitted to the City Council, the City Council will refer it to the Ordinance Committee, the Committee may take it up and decide to recommend or not recommend the ordinance. The ordinance will then go back to the City Council for their approval. Mr. Murphy is not certain on the voting requirements for passage of the ordinance, but believes that it must be voted on three times, which is usually done in two different

meetings, and that two thirds of the Council must approve the ordinance for passage. It will take at least three City Council meetings to go through the process.

5. Holyoke Armory Study

Ben Murphy shared that the Office of Planning and Economic Development is planning to publicly share the MassDevelopment study on the Holyoke Armory and would like to make sure the HHC has had a chance to review and comment on the document.

Commissioners had concerns about the study, which included:

- The Commission was not consulted about the parameters of the study that guided the work of the architects.
- The conceptual designs left the space behind the historic Armory walls empty and made the building look like a ruin.
- The additions in the conceptual designs overwhelmed the Armory building and did not compliment or integrate the historic aspects of the Armory building.
- The conceptual designs and the pictures of the building where not appealing for marketing the building.

Commissioners suggested the following to improve the study:

- Conceptual designs should show the interior of the Armory building built out.
- Include better pictures to help market the building.
- Rethink the concepts to preserve the building and involve community input and possibly University students to help.

Mr. Murphy explained that the study had a limited budget and scope of work, which focused on saving the exterior walls and the cost to do that. The conceptual designs where broad and simplistic, meant to give a developer a sense of what may be possible and at what cost. Mr. Murphy indicated that he would share Commissioners comments and concerns with OPED Director, Marcos Marrero.

6. Survey & Planning Grants

a. Main Street Corridor Historic Survey Project

Ben Murphy shared that the historic surveys are being finalized and the consultant has completed the additional properties. The City will be receiving digital and hard copies of the surveys, which will be shared with the Commission.

b. Canal System Industrial Area Survey Grant

Ben Murphy shared that the City Council is expected to accept the grant at their next meeting and he asked Commissioners to contact City Councilors to ask them to support accepting the grant. He also indicated that the documents required to solicit quotes from preservation consultants have been put together and are ready to go out as soon as the grant is accepted.

7. Old Business –

- Ben Murphy sent out a document for the Commission to review regarding 106 Pine Street and indicated that it can be discussed at the next meeting.
- Christopher Gauthier shared concerns about the public speak out at the last City Council where some Commissioners spoke out about the MHC grant and at the same time spoke out about another City Council action. The Commission had a discussion on how this may be handled differently in the future.

8. New Business– Ben Murphy shared that Holyoke Medical Center has applied for demolition permits for four houses adjacent to their campus and that the public hearing will be held at the next meeting. The houses are located at 12 Corser St., 14 Corser St., 605-607 Beech St., and 1840 Northampton St.

9. Next Meeting – November 9, 2020

10. Adjourn

At 8:44 p.m., there being no further business to come before the Commission, a motion was made by Frances Welton and seconded by Elana Aubrey to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried.

Sincerely,

Holyoke Historical Commission