



Holyoke Historical Commission (HHC)

Meeting Minutes

Monday September 14, 2020

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

Zoom Meeting ID: 819 2092 5128

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

Not in Attendance: N/A

Municipal Staff: Ben Murphy (OPED)

Others in Attendance: Jeff Dannenberg, Mark Ellis, Eddie Fernandez, Michael Dixon, John Furman, Matthew Barley

1. **Call to Order** – Richard Ahlstrom called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. and announced that the meeting was being recorded.

2. **Review of August 10, 2020 Minutes**

A motion was made by Christopher Gauthier and seconded by Paola Ferrario to accept the minutes from August 10, 2020.

The motion carried unanimously.

3. **Public Hearing – Demo Delay 140 Middle Water Street**

A motion was made by Frances Welson and seconded by Christopher Gauthier to open the demolition delay public hearing for the 140 Middle Water Street application.

The motion carried unanimously.

Jeff Dannenberg introduced himself as the attorney for the applicant, Alaska Assets, LLC and EMB Natural Ventures, LLC. Mr. Dannenberg then introduced Eddie Fernandez and Mark Ellis who are the owners and managers of both companies. Michael Dixon, director of training and human resources for EMB Natural Ventures, was also on the call. Mr. Dannenberg explained that Alaska Assets is a real estate entity which owns 140 Middle Water Street and EMB Natural Ventures is the operating entity that holds the special permit from the City and the state provisional license to operate a cannabis cultivation facility on the site. The business will grow marijuana within grow rooms in a new building at 140 Middle Water Street. EMB Natural Ventures will lease the site from Alaska Assets. Alaska Assets is the entity that has applied for the demolition permit and will apply for a building permit. The applicant purchased the property in October of 2019. Mr. Dannenberg shared that the building was built as a paper mill around 1880 and the two buildings that abut it to the north where additions, 134 Middle Water Street was built around 1890 and 130 Middle Water Street was built around 1900. From 1964 to 1997, 140 Middle Water Street was used by a business that provided junking and waste management services and that it appears that the building has not been used since 1997.

John Furman, director of land development with VHB in Springfield and civil engineer for the project made a brief presentation to identify the site on maps, its relationship with the other properties in the area, the access easements to the site, and the site plan of the property.

Project architect, Matthew Barley, shared the current conditions of the property. The building is a three-story building with a full basement and a fourth floor that is under the gabled roof. The original intention

of the current owners was to renovate the building for the new use but after further examination it has been found to be infeasible to bring the building up to modern building codes required for the new use.

Mr. Barley explained that there are multiple problems with the current structure including:

- There are unsafe load bearing masonry conditions due to two or three courses of brick pulling away from the walls in some places, which makes it dangerous for a mason to make repairs.
- Mortar is missing from many exterior walls.
- Brick piers for structural columns in the basement are significantly degraded.
- Floor beams that sit in the brick walls have rotted.
- There is significant sagging on the first and second floors due to years of overloaded floors.
- Roof trusses have failed and cracked in many places because the trusses that support the floor of the fourth floor were most likely overloaded in the past.
- There are many inappropriate repairs such as concrete being used instead of mortar, which has caused additional damage and deterioration over time.
- When an addition was removed, bricks meant to be on the interior are now on the exterior and have been exposed to the element, which has led to deterioration.

Mr. Barley shared that the new building is meant to be a similar size on the same footprint and of the same height but that the building materials have not been selected yet. Several Commissioners shared concerns about not seeing plans for the new building and that it was important for the new building to compliment the remaining historic buildings and the neighborhood. Attorney Dannenberg indicated that once permission is granted for the demolition, the applicants will then proceed with new building plans. The applicant was under the impression that they did not need to supply a plan to the Historical Commission. The applicants assured the Commission that they plan on working with the Planning Board to ensure the building is appropriate for the site and that it is a quality building.

Richard Ahlstrom asked when the architect and engineer examined the building, as it seemed like it was obvious the building was in bad shape from the beginning. The applicants explained that the architect and engineer examined the building after it was purchased and that it had been an opportunistic purchase. It was not until testing took place that it was better understood what it would take to renovate the building.

Marco Crescentini asked if any of the building materials would be salvaged. Eddie Fernandez explained that wooden timbers will be salvaged, some of the brick and that there is a local group in Holyoke, DieselWorks, that may take the metal in the building. Frances Welton asked about the demolition timeline and Mr. Fernandez explained that salvage of wood timbers and bricks will take about three weeks and the demolition will take about a week. Christopher Gauthier asked how the building will be demolished when it has a party wall with its neighbor. Mr. Barley explained that 134 Middle Water Street utilizes the end wall of 140 Middle Water Street and the integrity of that wall must be maintained, repaired, and repointed so that it will become the exterior wall for 134 Middle Water Street. The new building at 140 Middle Water Street will be built separately but close to 134 Middle Water Street. Mr. Fernandez added that it will cost about \$115,000 to demolish the building and that they will use cranes and forklifts to take down the building after it has been cut away from the party wall.

Paola Ferrario commented that building in Massachusetts is expensive and it costs around \$275 sq. ft. for a new building and she asked if the cost would be around \$50 million. She also asked about the life expectancy of the new building. Mr. Fernandez indicated that the new building will be about 28,000 to 30,000 sq. ft. and he has received estimates for between \$5 million to \$7 million. He indicated that he hopes the building lasts a hundred years.

Ms. Welton asked if financing was in place and if all permits have been received, and if not all permits have been received, what will the applicant do with the vacant property. Mr. Fernandez indicated that they were required to provide proof to the state Cannabis Control Commission that they have \$3 million in bank. Attorney Dannenberg explained that they will need to return to the City Council to update their cannabis special permit, but do not anticipate having a problem receiving the special permit due to the support the project has already received. If a permit is not granted there is no other plan for that property.

Mr. Ahlstrom asked about the condition of 130 Middle Water, which is under the same ownership, and Mr. Fernandez shared that asbestos abatement has been completed and the building appears to be in much better shape than 140 Middle Water Street. Additional work has not taken place yet because the priority has been on 140 Middle Water Street. Mr. Fernandez indicated that they may use 130 Middle Water Street for an indoor vegetable growing facility.

Elana Aubrey asked if there was any concern about the proximity of the project to the river and Mr. Barley responded that a tall flood control wall separates the property from the river, which would stop any debit from the demolition going into the river. There will be a filing with the Conservation Commission, and they will review the project.

Mr. Ahlstrom stated that there was no one in the public to comment on this proposal and Mr. Murphy indicated that no correspondences were received about the proposal.

A motion was made by Frances Welton and seconded by Marco Crescentini to close the demolition delay public hearing for the 140 Middle Water Street application.

The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Ahlstrom, Ms. Welton, and Mr. Crescentini all felt that 140 Middle Water Street could not be reasonably repaired due to the advanced deterioration of the building. There was consensus from the Commission that the new building to be built at 140 Middle Water Street should compliment the remaining historic mill buildings in design and scale.

A motion was made by Marco Crescentini and seconded by Paola Ferrario to impose a delay for the demolition of 140 Middle Water Street.

The motion failed. 0 Yea. 4 Nay. 2 Abstentions (Paola Ferrario, Frances Welton).

4. CPA Preservation Restrictions

Ben Murphy shared that he met with CPA Administrator Amy Landau and Assistant City Solicitor Jenna Wellhoff to receive an update on the preservation restrictions for non-City historic preservation CPA projects. The Law Department has been working on three preservation restrictions for the first round of CPA funding. OneHolyoke was allocated a grant but has declined it because they were unwilling to agree to a preservation restriction. The City is working with the Victory Theater on their preservation restriction but they are concerned that the HHC would make a decision on the project that is counter to requirements that the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) have imposed based on the historic tax credits that the project is receiving. In discussing this with Attorney Wellhoff, Mr. Murphy made it clear that it would be very unlikely that the HCC would make a decision that is counter to MHC requirements. To resolve this, Attorney Wellhoff is going to propose that the preservation plan, which has been approved by MHC, be included as part of the preservation restriction. The other preservation restriction will be with Valley Opportunity Council for apartment blocks on Franklin Street. Their attorney does not appear to have a problem with the preservation restriction. That project is also planning on utilizing historic tax credits.

The most recent round of CPA funding includes a grant for the Armour & Co. building, which is not pursuing historic tax credits, so it will be a template on how the HHC reviews historic preservation projects to ensure they are being done correctly.

5. Demolition Delay Ordinance

Ben Murphy reviewed a document he produced with some suggestions to revise the demolition delay ordinance with a two-part process and some changes to the hearing notification requirements. Mr. Murphy explained that the proposed revisions are meant to make the process easier for applicants and City staff. Creating a two-part system would mean that not all proposed demolitions would require a hearing if the Commission decided the building or structure was not historically significant. If a hearing were required, the revisions would remove the requirement that notice be published in a newspaper and that abutter notices be sent certified mail. In place of those requirements, applicant would need to post a notice at the property about the demolition hearing and only director abutters would receive notices via certified mail.

Other abutters within 300 feet would just receive a postcard notice or simple first-class mail. The changes are meant to simplify the process and created the best process that creates the best outcomes for those involved.

There was some discussion on the timing of the HHC meeting where the determination of historic significance is made and when the public hearing would be held. There was consensus that 35 days would be appropriate so that the hearing could be held at the next regularly scheduled monthly meeting and a special meeting could be avoided.

There was consensus from Commissioners that the proposed revisions be incorporated into the amended ordinance and that Mr. Murphy would provide the revised document to the Commission before the next meeting for review. There will be a focus on moving the ordinance forward at the October HHC meeting.

6. Holyoke Armory Study

Mr. 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 the document first. The Commission requested that the report be resent to the Commission and that it be reviewed at the next meeting. There was consensus that it is important to at least save the façades of the building but that an attempt should be made to also save the interior.

7. Survey & Planning Grants

a. Main Street Corridor Historic Survey Project

The Main Street Corridor Historic Survey Project was not discussed.

b. Canal System Industrial Area Survey Grant

Ben Murphy shared that the Finance Committee of the City Council did not recommend accepting the MHC grant. Councilors voting against the grant shared concerns about CDBG funds being utilizing as the match for this grant. Mr. Murphy explained that the CDBG funds have already been allocated for this grant. Mr. Murphy asked if Commissioner would contact City Councilors to ask them to support accepting the grant at the next City Council meeting. He will send information to the Commission about the grant and an email from the Office of Community Development that explains that CDBG funds are available for the grant match.

8. Old Business – No old business was discussed.

9. New Business–Paola Ferrario shared that the Catholic Diocese of Springfield has announced a possible merger of three Holyoke parishes; Immaculate Conception, St. Jerome, and Our Lady of Guadalupe. Ms. Ferrario made the point that updating the demolition delay will be important.

10. Next Meeting – October 2020

11. Adjourn

At 8:49 p.m., there being no further business to come before the Commission, a motion was made by Paola Ferrario and seconded by Elana Aubrey to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried.

Sincerely,

Holyoke Historical Commission