



Holyoke Historical Commission (HHC)

Meeting Minutes

Monday November 9, 2020

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

Zoom Meeting ID: 895 5826 9165

**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, Spiros Hatiras, Carl Cameron, John Therrien, Rebecca Lisi, Yoni Glogower

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 October 19, 2020 Minutes**  
Frances Welson requested some small changes to correct grammatical and spelling mistakes. Paola Ferrario requested that a line be added that Mr. Montalvo was invited by the Director of Planning and Economic Development to join the Commission.

*A motion was made by Christopher Gauthier and seconded by Elana Aubrey to accept the minutes from October 19, 2020, as amended.*

*The motion carried unanimously.*

3. **Public Participation**

Ben Murphy clarified that this agenda item had previously been on agendas when meetings were held in person and at the last meeting Commissioners discussed adding it back to the agenda. There was no public participation.

4. **Public Hearings**

- a.** Demo Delay - 12 Corser Street and **b.** Demo Delay - 14 Corser Street and **c.** Demo Delay - 605-607 Beech Street and **d.** Demo Delay - 1840 Northampton Street

*A motion was made by Frances Welson and seconded by Christopher Gauthier to concurrently open a demolition delay public hearing for the 12 Corser Street, 14 Corser Street, 605-607 Beech Street, and 1840 Northampton Street applications, with the understanding that the Commission will ultimately be voting on them individually.*

*The motion carried unanimously.*

Carl Cameron, Chief Operating Officer for Holyoke Medical Center, introduced himself and Spiros Hatiras, Chief Executive Officer of Holyoke Medical Center. Mr. Hatiras provided an opening statement that explained that the four properties are part of a project to construct a behavior health facility that will have about 84 beds. The Medical Center has determined that there is a need for this type of facility and has been developing this concept for several years. Preliminary plans have been sent to the state for their review. It is expected to take a couple of years to complete the facility and the Medical Center is now moving forward with plans to clear the site.

Mr. Cameron shared a short presentation with the Commission that explained the properties involved with the proposed new facility, which is on about a two-acre site. Mr. Cameron showed renderings of the proposed new building, which is to be a three story, 68,000 sq. ft. facility with 84 beds. He also explained the need for the behavioral health facility and its program layout.

Mr. Cameron explained that 12 and 14 Corser Street were part of the old Yankee Pedlar and sold to Holyoke Medical Center from Peoples Bank and they are vacant. Those two properties are on the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System and therefore notice of the proposed project was sent to the Massachusetts Historical Commission. The Commission did not comment on the project within the required thirty days. The Northampton Street and Beech Street properties are also vacant.

Paola Ferrario indicated that she would like to see a 3D rendered view of the proposed facility from Northampton Street and asked if the Medical Center has considered the surrounding architecture, the welfare of the surrounding homeowners in the design, and if they have considered a two-story building constructed to keep it similar in height to the neighborhood. Mr. Hatiras answered that they had considered the surrounding area with the design and asked the architect to provide a pleasing aesthetic to the building and surroundings and does not feel the neighbors will be impacted negatively.

Marco Cresentini commented that the new building is a medical building that will be placed in an area of smaller buildings. It is an exciting modern building, but the size of the building is going to overwhelm the existing buildings in the area.

Elana Aubrey asked if the Holyoke Medical Center birthing center or the Providence Hospital facility, both of which have recently just closed can be repurposed for the behavioral health facility. Mr. Hatiras responded that it was his understanding that Providence Hospital behavioral health services were being closed primarily because the current facility is to be demolished because it is at the end of its useful life and is not going to be repurposed for inpatient care. Mr. Hatiras also indicated that the new facility needs to be close to the Medical Center campus because it will not be entirely independent and will utilize services of the current facility. Ms. Welson asked if the Medical Center has investigated alternatives to demolishing the buildings such as repurposing them for medical space and then putting the behavioral health beds in the freed-up space. Mr. Hatiras explained that there were no viable alternative uses for the buildings and that they are unsuitable for medical use because regulations are strict on what medical space should look like.

Ms. Aubrey asked if there needed to be a variance due to the height of the building and Mr. Cameron responded that there will be a need for a variance, but the regulations allow the hospital to build higher than two stories. Frances Welson asked if there were concerns about the planning board approving the plan, specifically approving the location of a parking lot at the corner of Northampton and Corser Streets and demolishing the entire south side of Corser Street. Mr. Hatiras responded by stating that they need to take the process one step at a time and there will be time for input from the community and the project will be looked at by a variety of constituents. Ms. Welson was concerned about allowing the entire side of Corser Street to be demolished and then the Planning Board not approving the plan, losing buildings that are historically significant because there are very few of that type in the City. Mr. Cameron responded that the Medical Center has already started discussions with the Planning Department about the plan and the look of the building has already been changed based on feedback. The Medical Center has worked with the Planning Board on projects in the past. Once the state provides approval for the project then the plans will be submitted to the Planning Board and Building Department. Mr. Cameron indicated that the buildings will not be demolished before the Planning Board approves the plan.

Mr. Ahlstrom explained that Oakdale is a 100-year-old neighborhood with a very interesting assortment of as-built two-family homes and that while the four buildings being proposed for demolition are not the nicest in the neighborhood, they are historically significant for their age, but they are also the same vintage as other buildings in the neighborhood and are therefore an important part of the neighborhood. He explained, for clarification, that there are two homes on Northampton Street and that the Medical Center only owns the one at the corner of Corser, and that if that building is demolished, the other house will be

left by itself on that section of the street. He also stated that the brick buildings on Corser Street are unique for the neighborhood. He stated that while the Medical Center is part of the neighborhood, the campus is made up of disjointed buildings and he would like to make sure that the new facility fits into the neighborhood. He shared concerns about the facility being a very large presence at three stories high with additional height because of rooftop mechanical systems.

Mr. Ahlstrom shared his concern that if the buildings are demolished and the project is not ultimately approved, more surface parking lots would be built instead of a new facility. He was also concerned about the amount of additional surface parking lots that are proposed to be constructed as part of the project and asked if structured parking was considered. Mr. Cameron responded that there is some structured parking that will be built as part of the project. The plan is to place a raised parking deck above an existing parking lot, which will be accessed from Isabella Street.

Ms. Welson asked if the parking structure was for the entire campus or just the new facility and indicated that she was concerned about the parking lot proposed to replace the house at 1840 Northampton Street. Mr. Cameron stated that all the parking served the entire campus. He also explained that Holyoke has high parking minimums that required all the parking spaces that are shown on the project plans, including the spaces shown at the corner of Northampton and Corser Streets. Marco Crescentini also shared his concern about the loss of the house on the corner of Northampton Street and Corser Street for a parking lot and asked if the Medical Center could look at alternatives, like making up those parking spaces somewhere else and using the building for a smaller hospital department. Mr. Hatiras stated that they could revisit the parking requirements with the project architects to see if anything else could be done. He stated that another consideration would be to construct a three or four level parking structure, but he did not think the neighborhood would support that and they are trying to keep the buildings as low as possible.

Mr. Ahlstrom stated that the windows have been removed from the Beech Street house and the gas has been shut off in the buildings. He stated that the Commission has struggled with this in the past with properties being incrementally demolished before they go through the demolition delay process. He shared his concern that with the windows removed there is no protection for the building. Mr. Cameron confirmed that the utilities have been turned off because the buildings are vacant and that the Beech Street house has had asbestos abatement, which included taking out windows.

Ms. Welson asked how the buildings have been maintained by the Medical Center and Mr. Cameron responded that the Medical Center has not done any work to the buildings because they are vacant. Ms. Welson asked how long the Medical Center has owned each of the buildings and Mr. Cameron responded that the Medical Center has owned the Northampton Street house for quite a long time and the Beech Street house for about a year-and-a-half to two years. He indicated that the two Corser Street buildings were purchased from Peoples Bank within the last year. He added that the Yankee Pedlar had approached the Medical Center previously to offer them for sale, but the Medical Center was not interested at that time and there did not appear to be others interested in the properties.

Ms. Ferrario asked if the Corser Street buildings had been publicly listed for sale because she could not find them listed on the MLS database. Mr. Cameron stated Colebrook Realty had reached out to Holyoke Medical Center on behalf of Peoples Bank and that before that the owners of the Yankee Pedlar had been trying to sell the properties. He is not sure if the Yankee Pedlar had hired a realtor.

Ms. Aubrey asked about the financial health of Holyoke Medical Center considering the recent closure of the birthing center and her knowledge that inpatient settings are losing money. Mr. Hatiras responded by asking the Commission Chair to focus the meeting on what it is supposed to be and that he did not think it was appropriate to discuss with the Commission the strategic plan related to the financial standing of the Medical Center. Ms. Welson stated that she believes it is in the purview of the Commission to have some assurance that the financing is in place to construct a \$40 million facility considering that the birthing center closed because of finances. Mr. Hatiras responded that the financing is in place with the partner that has agreed to finance the project and he added that they have submitted all the information to the Department of Health that is required to move forward with the project.

Mr. Ahlstrom opened the public hearing for public comments.

City Councilor Rebecca Lisi of 25 Reservation Road spoke about her concerns about Holyoke Medical Center's long-term planning fitting the needs of the community. Ms. Lisi stated that she was concerned about the future of the hospital considering the closure of the birthing center and the Providence Behavioral Health Hospital. She did not want to see empty buildings become the responsibility of the City, like the Geriatric Authority building and the Lynch School. She questioned whether the hospital was optimizing their existing available spaces to service the community.

There were no additional public comments.

There was interest among Commissioners to continue the public hearing until the next Commission meeting on December 14, 2020 to allow time to conduct a site visit to the four properties.

Mr. Hatiras reiterated that there is a need for behavioral health beds, and he shared his concern that putting off the decision for the demolition of the four structures for another month will delay the project. The hospital plans on temporarily providing some additional behavioral health beds in existing space, but all the behavioral health beds need to be combined into one unit to realize efficiencies.

Mr. Ahlstrom stated that the mission of the Historical Commission is to protect, preserve, and develop the historic assets of the City and that the Commission takes the mission seriously. The four properties in front of the Commission under the demolition delay ordinance have been in the City for a very long time and the Commission will do its work to make sure it comes to a decision as quickly as possible.

Ben Murphy stated that he would work with the applicant to schedule a site visit for Commissioners to the four Holyoke Medical Center properties.

*A motion was made by Frances Welson and seconded by Luis Salazar to continue the demolition delay public hearings for the 12 Corser Street, 14 Corser Street, 605-607 Beech Street, and 1840 Northampton Street applications until the next meeting of the Holyoke Historical Commission on December 14, 2020.*

*The motion carried unanimously.*

## **5. Demolition Delay Ordinance**

Ben Murphy reminded the Commissioners that they had agreed to some changes to the ordinance at the last meeting. Those changes included:

- 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.

Mr. Murphy stated that there were some additional small changes to correct grammatical mistakes and formatting. He reminded the Commission that there was concern about ensuring that applicants send in the required information to the Commission for the public hearing. The language was adjusted in section C.4 and C.5 to state that once the Commission makes a determination on the historic significance of a building a public hearing will be held within thirty-five days of the applicant sending in the required materials. This language ensures that the materials are sent to the Commission, otherwise a public hearing will not be held, and the building cannot be demolished.

There had been a question about C12 which pertains to “Section 106 Review” and Mr. Murphy stated that he contacted Chris Skelly at the Massachusetts Historical Commission to find out if this was typical language for demolition delay ordinances in Massachusetts. Mr. Skelly responded that he had not seen it before and recommended that it be removed. Mr. Murphy stated that he also recommends removing the language.

Frances Welson stated that she put together a list of communities that have demolition delay ordinances in Massachusetts and she plans on also compiling a list of those communities that have recently increased the demolition delay period, which she feels will be helpful to make the case to the City Council. She also shared that the Chair of the City Council’s Ordinance Committee, Rebecca Lisi, said she would support reviewing the proposed ordinance and thinks most City Councilors want to be supportive.

Mr. Murphy stated that he will send the ordinance to the Law Department for their review if the Commission agrees to the changes.

*A motion was made by Frances Welson and seconded by Christopher Gauthier to prepare to move the Preservation Ordinance as drafted to the City Council.  
The motion carried unanimously.*

Mr. Murphy stated that he will work with Ms. Welson on producing a letter to City Councilors that he will then provide to Commissioners, so they have talking points to speak to City Councilors one-on-one. Mr. Murphy asked Commissioners to send him the names of City Councilors they are willing to speak to about the ordinance.

Paola Ferrario indicated that she would draft a letter from the Historical Commission to the Planning board with comments about the redevelopment of 140 Middle Water Street including stating the importance of preserving the “front” building at 130 Middle Water Street.

Mr. Murphy stated that there was a property owner that has been in touch with the City about a project that may involve a demolition, but the owner has not yet decided on the direction of the project. Mr. Murphy asked the Commission if they would be willing to speak to the owner informally about the project and Commissioners were agreeable to the idea.

Mr. Murphy shared that there will be another demolition delay hearing at the December meeting for a carriage house at 58 Waldo Street.

## **6. Emergency Demolition – 106 Pine Street**

Ben Murphy shared that 106 Pine Street has been owned by the City and it was put out for public bid, but no proposals were received for the property and then there was a fire in the building. He stated that it is a very interesting building, but it is in very bad shape. The Building Commissioner has moved forward with an emergency demolition, which does not need to go through the demolition delay process. This review is coming to the Commission as part of the 106 Review process and the Commission may choose to comment on the proposed demolition or may choose not to take any actions. There was consensus from the Commission that the building was in very serious disrepair and that they would not comment on the proposal.

## **7. Community Engagement – HHC Facebook Page**

Paola Ferrario shared that Elana Aubrey and Luis Salazar did not meet to discuss this topic. Mr. Salazar asked what is the message of the Commission, and what should be preserved. Ben Murphy pointed out that because the Commission is part of City government, a Facebook page would be a public forum where comments could not be deleted and that should be kept in mind. Frances Welson stated that the Commission webpage on the City’s website should be strong and Mr. Murphy responded he can edit the City webpage and asked Commissioners for any suggested changes. Mr. Salazar explained that the website is important, but social media, like Facebook or Instagram, is a way to get the message out to the community. He also suggested that the resources section of the Commission’s webpage should be

expanded. Mr. Murphy suggested that this agenda item be expanded to include social media in general and the Commission's webpage.

## **8. Letter of Support for Anniversary Hill Park Grant**

*A motion was made by Frances Welson and seconded by Elana Aubrey to take up agenda item 8 out of order.*

*The motion carried unanimously.*

Yoni Glogower, Director of the Holyoke Department of Conservation and Sustainability explained that he is working on an emergency application for CPA funds to purchase a large parcel of land adjacent to Anniversary Hill Park and Scott Tower. Mr. Glogower made a brief presentation about the history of Anniversary Hill Park and the current plans to apply for funds to purchase the adjacent land and to restore the park and make it a desirable place to visit. The adjacent land will allow for an additional entrance point off Old Jarvis Road and make the park more accessible. He is asking that the Commission provide a letter of support for the grant to help purchase the adjacent land. Commissioners voiced their support for the project.

*A motion was made by Paola Ferrario and seconded by Elana Aubrey to provide a letter of support for the Anniversary Hill Park grant.*

*The motion carried unanimously.*

## **9. Survey & Planning Grants**

### **a. Main Street Corridor Historic Survey Project**

Ben Murphy shared that the project is complete, and he plans on uploading the completed forms to share with the Commission. He also stated that he planned on getting the forms up onto the City's website and will be completing a final report to send to the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

### **b. Canal System Industrial Area Survey Grant**

Ben Murphy shared that the City Council accepted the grant and that request for quotes have been sent to preservation consultants and are due back on November 23rd. Mr. Murphy stated that he will be scheduling a selection committee to review the submitted quotes. The committee will be made up of Mr. Murphy, Alicia Zoeller from the Office for Community Development, and Commissioners Frances Welson and Christopher Gauthier, who have volunteered to serve on the committee.

## **10. Old Business – No old business was discussed.**

## **11. New Business**

- Richard Ahlstrom stated that the Commission is to elect officers annually and before the next meeting he will get the list who is in what position and the terms of the current Commission members.
- Frances Welson asked about the possibility of making Wycoff Park an historic district and there was consensus that the Commission should discuss the merits at a future meeting. Ben Murphy explained that the Historical Commission would have a role in the process, but that the Historic District Commission would take the lead on the process.

## **12. Next Meeting – December 14, 2020**

## **13. Adjourn**

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

**Sincerely,**

**Holyoke Historical Commission**