



Holyoke Historical Commission (HHC)

Meeting Minutes

Monday January 11, 2021

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

Zoom Meeting ID: 882 7824 6213

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

Not in Attendance: N/A

Municipal Staff: Ben Murphy (OPED)

Others in Attendance: Carl Cameron, John Therrien, Jacob Waah, Tom Douglas

1. **Call to Order** – Richard Ahlstrom called the meeting to order at 6:34 p.m. and announced that the meeting was being recorded.

2. **Review of December 14, 2020 Minutes**

Christopher Gauthier requested that the word “listing” be replaced by leaning. Elana Aubrey, Frances Welson, and Richard Ahlstrom requested some small changes to the minutes to correct grammatical mistakes.

A motion was made by Christopher Gauthier and seconded by Paola Ferrario to accept the minutes from December 14, 2020, as amended.

The motion carried unanimously.

3. **Public Participation** - There was no public participation.

4. **Public Hearing Continuation**

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

Ben Murphy shared that he consulted the Holyoke Law Department regarding Commissioners missing a public hearing and the City Solicitor explained that if Commissioners who missed a public hearing listened to that hearing and then completed and signed a form stating they have listened to the public hearing; they can then participate and vote. Marco Crescentini and Harry Montalvo, who both missed the last meeting, listened to the public hearing, and completed the form. Marco Crescentini asked if he could vote as an alternate and Richard Ahlstrom stated that he thought he could vote because Christopher Gauthier was abstaining due to a conflict of interest.

A motion was made by Frances Welson and seconded by Marco Crescentini to concurrently continue the demolition delay public hearing for the 12 Corser Street, 14 Corser Street, 605-607 Beech Street, and 1840 Northampton Street applications.

The motion carried 7 yeas, 0 nays, 1 abstention (Christopher Gauthier).

Carl Cameron, Chief Operating Officer for Holyoke Medical Center, shared that he submitted to the Commission the documents from the previous presentations and additional renderings of what the project would look like if 1840 Northampton Street was retained. He reviewed the new renderings with the Commission and stated that this was the current design, but that the Planning Board still needs to review

and approve the project. He also stated that he is prepared to withdraw the request to demolish 1840 Northampton Street if the Commission can come to an agreement on moving forward with the demolitions of 12 Corser Street, 14 Corser Street, and 605-607 Beech Street.

Frances Welton asked if 1840 Northampton Street will be renovated and Mr. Cameron indicated that he will work with the architects to look at rehabilitating the building as part of the project because it cannot stay as it is now. Marco Crescentini asked if 1840 Northampton Street was going to be incorporated into the project and Mr. Cameron stated that it would be integrated into the project including adding signage at the corner. Mr. Cameron shared that he has been in touch with the abutter at 1846 Northampton Street, and let them know that the Medical Center would be putting up a new fence to separate the properties. The abutter has not voiced any objections. Elana Aubrey asked if the property at Beech Street was going to be used for parking and Mr. Cameron stated it would be.

Richard Ahlstrom asked if the Medical Center would agree to document, through photography, the three buildings slated to be demolished and Mr. Cameron indicated that they have staff that could photograph the buildings.

Mr. Ahlstrom opened the hearing up to public comment. Hearing from no one from the public, Mr. Ahlstrom ended the public comment period.

Ms. Welton stated that at the last meeting, Mr. Cameron stated that the buildings would not be demolished until the Medical Center received all its approvals for the new facility. She asked if that was still the case and Mr. Cameron replied that he has received state approval and plans to move forward with the demolitions if the Commission does not impose a delay and if there is nothing else preventing the demolitions. Mr. Cameron stated that the properties will be used for something, even if it is not a behavioral health facility.

A motion was made by Frances Welton and seconded by Luis Salazar to close the demolition delay public hearings for the 12 Corser Street, 14 Corser Street, 605-607 Beech Street, and 1840 Northampton Street applications.

The motion carried 7 yeas, 0 nays, 1 abstention (Christopher Gauthier).

Harry Montalvo asked if the Commission could place a condition on the Holyoke Medical Center that they must receive approval from the Holyoke Planning Board before moving forward with the demolitions and Paola Ferrario stated that the Commission could only impose a delay on the demolitions and that the Commission is not approving the project itself. Ms. Welton stated that the only way to have control is to impose a six-month delay and then the Medical Center would work with the Planning Board to get approvals during the delay.

A motion was made by Frances Welton and seconded by Elana Aubrey to impose a demolition delay on 605-607 Beech Street.

The motion failed 0 yeas, 7 nays, 1 abstention (Christopher Gauthier).

A motion was made by Frances Welton and seconded by Luis Salazar to impose a demolition delay on 14 Corser Street.

The motion failed 1 yeas, 6 nays, 1 abstention (Christopher Gauthier).

A motion was made by Frances Welton and seconded by Luis Salazar to impose a demolition delay on 12 Corser Street.

The motion failed 1 yeas, 6 nays, 1 abstention (Christopher Gauthier).

Mr. Murphy asked Mr. Cameron to send a letter stating that the Holyoke Medical Center withdraws the demolition application for 1840 Northampton Street and Mr. Cameron stated he would send that letter to Mr. Murphy the following day. Mr. Murphy stated that he would send the Commission determination letters for the three other properties to Mr. Cameron within the week.

5. 1748 Northampton Street

Ben Murphy reminded the Commission that at their November meeting there was a discussion about having an informal discussion with a potential developer about the redevelopment of 1748 Northampton Street before a demolition application was submitted.

Jacob Waah, prospective developer of 1748 Northampton Street, explained that he is a Holyoke resident and operates a small home health care business in Holyoke. The business needs to move from its current location on High Street and Mr. Waah wants to stay in Holyoke and own the property where the business is located. He has identified 1748 Northampton Street as a good location for the business, but the current building requires significant updates and an addition to make it usable for the business. Mr. Waah would like guidance from the Commission on how to proceed.

Tom Douglas, of Thomas Douglas Architects and the developer's architect, shared information on the current structure, which is a simple Victorian house with a hipped roof, with exterior shingles, decorative chimney, and first and second floor porches. The house sits on top of a hill and a large site and has a small garage. There is a lot of space in front and behind the house. Mr. Douglas explained the layout of the house will not work for the business and all the systems need to be upgraded, which would require gutting the building to update it for the business. Due to these circumstances, it was determined that constructing a new building in place of the current building is much more feasible. Mr. Douglas shared preliminary conceptual designs for a new building on the site that would consist of space for the business on the ground floor and large apartments on the upper stories. The new building would be closer to the street, taller and about 50% larger than the existing building. The design is meant to emulate the existing Victorian house. The plan includes additional parking and a new garage for the residential units.

Frances Welson asked if there is information on the history of the building and Ben Murphy stated that there is not a historic survey for the building, and it was owned by the neighboring synagogue for quite some time. He stated that it is older than the buildings in the immediate area.

Paola Ferrario shared her concern that there are some in Holyoke who want to see Northampton Street turned into a road like Memorial Drive in Chicopee but there are some who want to preserve the historic streetscape. She feels that the existing house is a perfectly nice house that is proposed to be replaced with a generic new building. She was concerned about the large size of the proposed new building and Mr. Douglas responded that there are ways to reduce the scale of the building. Ms. Ferrario stated that Holyoke has many empty lots and encourage Mr. Waah to look at those for new construction. Mr. Waah stated that he has been looking at properties for a long time and he feels that this is the best site for his business in Holyoke. Ms. Ferrario shared that there is an example of moving a historic house down the street and suggested that the developer should advertise the building to be moved, which could save money on demolition costs.

Ben Murphy commented that if demolition is inevitable, the Commission could help steer the project to fit the historic streetscape of Northampton Street. He felt that it would be important that the proposed new building be parallel to the street and that it be set back to the front foundation line of its neighbors.

Richard Ahlstrom stated that while he does not like to lose old structures, he thought the new building would fit on the site and feels that there is an effort to blend the new building into the existing streetscape. He felt that unless information is found that the building is historically significant, this project is potentially a win for the street.

Ms. Welson explained that the official process would proceed once a demolition application is submitted and the applicant submitted information for the Historical Commission to hold a public hearing. She clarified that the Historical Commission only could delay a demolition, it is up to the Planning Board to approve projects. Ms. Ferrario stated the Commission can send comments to the Planning Board about the project and added that she thinks the discussion was productive and would like to see a better rendering of the proposed building.

6. Demolition Delay Ordinance

Ben Murphy shared that, with the help of City Councilor Rebecca Lisi, the proposed ordinance and a letter describing the ordinance were submitted to the City Clerk. The ordinance was placed on the January 5th City Council agenda and has been sent to the Ordinance Committee for their review.

Richard Ahlstrom stated he spoke to Councilor Lisi, Chair of the Ordinance Committee, and she stated the ordinance would be heard at the February 23rd meeting of the Committee. He stated that the plan now is to schedule a meeting with Building Commissioner, Damian Cote, to update him on the ordinance. The Commission also plans to reach out to the Ordinance Committee members to discuss the ordinance before the meeting. Mr. Ahlstrom stated that Councilor Lisi recommended contacting the Committee members right before the meeting. Committee members include Rebecca Lisi, Juan Anderson-Burgos, Libby Hernandez, Terence Murphy, and Linda Vacon. Ben Murphy will work on assigning Commissioners to contact Committee members for the next Commission meeting. Mr. Ahlstrom will contact Mr. Cote to set up a meeting and Frances Welton, Mr. Ahlstrom, and Mr. Murphy will participate.

The Commission discussed getting public support for the ordinance at the Committee meeting and having people speak at the meeting in favor of the ordinance.

7. Community Engagement – HHC Social Media and Webpage

Luis Salazar stated that the most immediate task that can be accomplished is to update and improve the website. Ben Murphy explained that he can edit the page and welcomes feedback on what content should be changed. Mr. Salazar explained that there is a lot of good information, but it needs to be better organized and additional information added.

8. Discussion on Wyckoff Park Historic District

Ben Murphy shared that he took some time to view the neighborhood using street view and he stated that there is a mix of architecture, which may make it difficult to identify a unifying theme for a historic district. He stated that the area includes some run-of-the-mill post World War II housing, some good examples of modern architecture, and some early twentieth-century houses. He encouraged the Commission to think of a unifying theme to the district.

The district would include Mountainview Drive, Central Park Drive, Briarwood Drive, Steiger Road, and it may include some properties facing onto Northampton Street. Paola Ferrario stated that she will do some work on the district before the next meeting.

9. Survey & Planning Grants

Ben Murphy shared that there is a kick-off meeting scheduled on January 13th for the Canal System Industrial Area survey. The City is now under contract with Zachary Violette and while the project is a little behind, Mr. Murphy stated he is confident Mr. Violette will be able to get the project caught up.

10. Historical Commission Annual Elections

Richard Ahlstrom explained that the Commission is meant to elect officers annually at the beginning of the fiscal year in July. Officers that need to be elected are chair, vice chair, and recording clerk. He stated that Ben Murphy and City staff take on the responsibility of the recording clerk. Mr. Ahlstrom shared he is willing to stay on as chair.

A motion was made by Frances Welton and seconded by Elana Aubrey to elect Richard Ahlstrom as the chair of the Holyoke Historical Commission.

The motion carried unanimously.

A motion was made by Christopher Gauthier and seconded by Harry Montalvo to elect Paola Ferrario as the vice chair of the Holyoke Historical Commission.

The motion carried unanimously.

A motion was made by Frances Welson and seconded by Harry Montalvo to elect Christopher Gauthier as the recording clerk of the Holyoke Historical Commission.

The motion carried unanimously.

11. Old Business – No old business was discussed.

12. New Business

- Richard Ahlstrom congratulated Paola Ferrario on her documentary film about Mater Dolorosa Church.
- Mr. Ahlstrom shared that Aaron Vega, the new director of the Office of Planning and Economic Development, contacted him to schedule a meeting to speak about the Historical Commission. If interested, Mr. Ahlstrom invited other Commissioners to participate in the phone call on Wednesday the 20th at 3PM. He stated that he plans on sharing that Ben Murphy is an important asset to the Commission. He also plans on encouraging Mr. Vega to include the Commission on projects earlier in the process and to hold public forums to receive feedback from the community on what areas should be redeveloped.
- Ben Murphy shared that he sent documents to the Commission related to 106 Review for telecommunication equipment being installed on the penthouse of 76 Maple Street, an eleven-story residential building off Lyman Street near Pulaski Park. He explained that the Commission can review and comment on government activities that may affect historic resources. Activities can include government funding, permitting, or licensing. The Commission can choose to submit comments or take no action.
- Christopher Gauthier shared that he recently spoke to former Historical Commission member, Olivia Mausel, who is involved with the Holyoke Preservation Trust. She stated that they have the materials for the historic plaque program and wanted to know if the Historical Commission would like to take on the program again. Jim Sheehan, who was formerly on the Historical Commission, oversaw the program, but it was discontinued when the person who produced the plaques could no longer provide the service. Mr. Gauthier stated that the Commission may want to take on the program again as part of a community engagement initiative. There was consensus from Commissioners that they would like additional information to determine if it makes sense to revive the program. Mr. Gauthier stated that he would obtain additional information to share with the Commission at the next meeting.

13. Next Meeting – February 8, 2021

14. Adjourn

At 8:31 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