

## **Westfield Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) Meeting Minutes**

**Meeting Date:** Monday January 29, 2018

**In Attendance:** Kelly Kessler, Neal Acito, Jennifer Jaruzelski, Doug Stokes, Joseph Biren, James Corcoran, Robert Wendel, Maria Boyes, Michael Fischer, David Hagan, Alison Carey, Tom Jardim

**Absent:** Jenn Czarnecki, Michael LaPlace

Minutes from meetings on 11/27/17 and 1/25/18 reviewed and approved by Commission.

### **Organizational Meeting Items:**

1. Introductions and comments from Don Gildea (Town Administrator) and Don Sammet (Town Planner). Both advised the Commission of their roles in general and how they pertain to the Commission.
2. Vote on HPC Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary
  - a. Kelly Kessler was nominated and voted in unanimously as HPC Chair for 2018
  - b. Nominations for Vice Chair included James Corcoran and Maria Boyes. Initial vote resulted in 5 for James, 5 for Maria and 1 abstention.  
Tom Jardim (Town Attorney) advised the HPC that the position should be filled at this meeting and recommended another vote and encouraged the abstainer to cast a vote. Final vote determined James Corcoran as Vice Chair.
  - c. Nominations for Secretary included Alison Carey and Maria Boyes. Answering questions regarding a split role, Tom Jardim advised that the role must be taken by a single person but responsibilities can be shared. Alison Carey agreed to nomination and was voted as Secretary and only nominee.
3. Commission reviewed and approved 2018 Meeting Schedule

### **Discussion of subdivision application for 667 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue**

- Tom Jardim advised HPC to refer to sections 6-D and 8-D of the ordinance for guidance on discussion and decision and Don Sammet clarified and confirmed the mission of the HPC.
- Michael Fischer (not present at January 25<sup>th</sup> meeting) requested clarification on purpose of that meeting and summary of discussion regarding 667 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Kelly Kessler explained that the Jan. 25<sup>th</sup> meeting was scheduled to review the documentation for the 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue decision to better prepare for our meeting and recommendation taking place tonight.
- Robert Wendell and Neal Acito reviewed historical significance of the property for those not able to attend the Jan 25<sup>th</sup> meeting. Significant emphasis was placed on the location of the front door throughout the history of the house (from historic perspective it is 4<sup>th</sup> Street) based on driveway, street access, well location, town records and the fact that Chestnut Street did not exist until the 1800's. Also during the early 1800's the Chestnut Street door was added, it is believed, for the school room that took was use at that time in the house.
- Discussion regarding the scope of the decision and the historical significance of the historic site (arguable the oldest residence left in Westfield) and prominence of the families who live there. Tom Jardim reminded HPC that proposed home should be considered in terms of its effect on the historic designation.
- The commission had several questions for Don Sammet regarding changes that would be able to take place
- Joe Biren stated his opinion based on the Commission Ordinance and his intention to vote against the recommendation.

## **Westfield Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) Meeting Minutes**

**Meeting Date:** Monday January 29, 2018

- Jennifer Jaruzelski cited the ordinance and questioned verbiage about economic hardship. Discussion ensued regarding the report submitted by the applicant's architect, which states that subdivision is necessary to fund maintenance and repairs to the main house.
- It was stated that 40% of the site would be affected by subdivision
- Don Sammet stated that from a zoning perspective the home could potentially have 3 front entrances but that zoning specifications are different than historic perspective. He also stated that no variances have been requested.

### **Discussion of 667 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue Open to Public:**

**Heather Stillfusen co-owner of 667 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue**, addressed the Commission and thanked them for the opportunity to be there

**Andrew Stillfusen: co-owner of 667 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue**, addressed the Commission regarding the following:

- advised Commission that home was purchased 9 years ago and provided testimony to the love they have for the home, it's history and it's quirks. Detailed items in need of repair include (roof, insulation, floors, etc). Mr. Stillfusen also stated that they do not want to sub-divide the property but it is their only choice to fund needed repairs for the home. Otherwise, the home will fall into disrepair and be lost.
- Mr. Stillfusen rebutted the Commission's assertion that the front door is on 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, stating that they have used the Chestnut Street entrance to the property since living there and it opens to a general living area. He also stated that 'nothing significance' happened on the front lawn.
- Doug Stokes asked Mr. Stillfusen what investment has taken place on the property to this point, which includes remodeling the kitchen.
- Several Commission members asked questions pertaining to the Stillfusen control of the design of a new property after the sale, to which they said they would not have any. Additional discussion ensued regarding qualifiers that could be put on the developers when building on the property. These were inconclusive and the Commission was reminded that the architect will have to come back to the HPC for Certificate of Appropriateness if subdivision is approved.
- Stephen Hehl (attorney to the Stillfusens) answered several general questions regarding intentions of the buyers, stipulations to selling the property.
- Mr. Acito questioned Mr. Stillfusen regarding economic hardship and ability to provide visibility into funds from sale of the subdivision going directly to improvements on the home. Detailed discussion ensued regarding, what Mr. Acito believes, would be obligations to the owner mortgage holder before any improvements could be made to the property. He also questioned the owners ability to make a direct connection to the profits of the sub-division directly to improvements to the house.

Michael Fischer requested that the discussion regarding mortgage obligations be removed from the conversation and Mr. Stillfusen stated that it was not appropriate and that he would not discuss his mortgage with the Commission.

Mr. Jardim advised that the discussion regarding mortgage is relevant due to the fact that the owners cited economic reasons for the subdivision.

- Mr. Wendell introduced several alternatives he is bringing to the Town Council to assist owners of historic homes with their preservation. These include significant tax breaks, assistance with applications for state grants and other ways the town can help such homeowners preserve these important

## Westfield Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) Meeting Minutes

**Meeting Date:** Monday January 29, 2018

properties. All members of the HPC were in agreement that the town of Westfield can and should do more to help homeowners preserve these properties. He also stated that all means necessary should be exhausted before considering subdivision.

- **Debbie Burlsem (265 Kimball Ave)** addressed the Commission regarding the following:

- stated her support of the subdivision because the house 'must be saved'
- suggested the owners consider a different type of subdivision that would be more agreeable to the Commission and better suited for the property
- requested that the HPC continue to be reasonable body and work with homeowners to find solutions in order to save more historic homes.
- requested status on Commissions application with the state to be a **governing body** (?)
- reminded Commission that Ferris Place is a significant street and should be looked at for designation soon. She in concerned it will be 'lost' soon.
- requested that the council review and revise it's Ordinance for more clarity

- **Greg Blasi 779 Carlton Road**

- Mr. Blasi is an architect (not associated with the 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue property) and brought several things to the attention of the Commission:

- the Commission is not asking the right questions regarding the specs of the subdivision and documentation provided does not include a full rendering of what the proposed property could look like (site lines, materials, etc.) and it's impact on the historic home.
- current plans show only elevations which is incomplete and recommended that the Commission have more information to make determination.
- he stated his opinion that the property should not be subdivided.

### Meeting closed to the public

- Discussion among Commission members regarding the following:

- its ability to put stipulations on an approval, alternate ideas for the subdivision (entrance on Benson Court), etc.
- historic significance of the home, the fact that homeowners bought the home only 9 years ago and inspections took place at that time.
- addition conversation about alternatives that could/should be explored before subdivision
- Tom Jardim reminded Commission to deliberate how the subdivision would impact the site

- Motion to vote by Kelly Kessler; seconded by Michael Fischer with a 'however' statement to soften the language and indicate that the Commission is open to reversing its decision if appropriate changes are made. Suggestion made deny approval 'as presented', however Mr. Fischer was still uncomfortable with that.

- Decision made for 2 part vote. Part 1: yes/no on motion without qualifications. Part 2: additional qualifications recommended by the Commission. Voting members included 8 Full Members and Alternate 1. As Town Council representative, Doug Stokes is not eligible to vote.

- Motion presented for Part 1 of vote:

*At this time, the Westfield Historic Preservation Commission recommends that the application for subdivision of the historic site at 667 Fourth Ave, Block 3303, Lot 6, as presented, be denied for the reasons set forth through the discussions of the HPC and the testimony of the applicant and the public and further in accordance with Historic Preservation Ordinance Subsection 6A*

**Westfield Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) Meeting Minutes**

**Meeting Date:** Monday January 29, 2018

*(Actions requiring a certificate of appropriateness) and Subsection 8D (Subdivisions, Site Plans, Variances).*

Majority of the Commission voted in favor of Part 1 (6 in favor and 2 not in favor). Therefore, Part 2 vote was not necessary.

**Meeting adjourned at approximately 10:32**