NEW HAVEN HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

Wednesday, March 13, 2024, Regular Meeting, 7:00 PM

Location: Web-based meeting via Zoom

**Chair Trina Learned calls to order the public hearing at 7:04 pm.**

**In attendance:** Fatima Cecunjanin (Staff to the Historic District Commission, Planner II), Laura Brown (Executive Director of City Plan), John Ward (Special Counsel to Economic Development), Trina Learned (Commissioner and Chair), Karen Jenkins (Commissioner), Richard Munday (Commissioner), David Valentino (Commissioner), Cordalie Benoit (Commissioner), Dylan Christopher (Commissioner), John Herzan (New Haven Preservation Trust, NHPT)

1. **Roll Call**

**Chair Learned reviews New Haven's Zoom meeting HDC policies and procedures and the point of New Haven's Local Historic Districts and the Historic District Commission (HDC).**

1. **Public Hearing**

**2.1 24-01-CA 16 East Grand Avenue (MBLU: 098 1012 00300) Quinnipiac River Local Historic District. Owner: Putnam Cove, LLC, Carl Youngman, member. Applicant: LandTech. Seeking approval to construct a long stone slope and retaining wall along the Quinnipiac River.**

***Tom Ryder, LandTech, 518 Riverside Avenue, Westport***

***Edward Lachance, Glendower Group, 360 Orange Street***

Mr. Ryder shows an aerial map of the property and current photos of the .8-acre vacant lot. The buildings had previously been removed but one of them was located next to the water and acted as a seawall. Stone remnants of that are still present. The property is currently owned by the housing authority. The proposal is to put in a 188-foot sloped retaining wall to prevent erosion. Mr. Ryder shows photographs of other examples of the same type of wall with angled rocks. Chair Learned asks to see the detail of the top of the wall and the guard rail shown on the drawings. Mr. Ryder does not have a detailed image and does not know the materials or size because the development would likely guide the design of the guardrail. Typically, it is a post with metal wire, but he is open to suggestions. Chair Learned explains the Commission does not make design recommendations and without a design it’s awkward for the Commission to make a decision. Mr. Ryder asks if the rail can be removed from this application. Or, if they could come back with the design before installation. Mr. Lachance explains to the Commission that he is aware the design of the buildings and guard rails will need to come back before the Commission for the larger development.

Chair Learned opens it up to public comment.

***John Herzan, New Haven Preservation Trust (NHPT), 35 Flying Point Road, Branford***

Mr. Herzan asks about the drawing which implies there will be concrete showing at the top which is inconsistent with the examples shown. He also asks about incorporating the old course granite elements of the site into the wall.

Mr. Ryder explains that there were no example photographs that show this design. They are open to guidance about using the remnants of the granite on the site. Chair Learned clarifies that the stone will stop and there will be a 3-foot band of concrete at the top and she asks about the finish of it. Mr. Ryder confirms and explains the precast concrete block wall will support a future sidewalk. He adds that the concrete finish look could be changed. He shows photos of other retaining walls with similar concrete portions nearby.

***Oliver Gaffney, 210 Lenox Street, New Haven***

Mr. Gaffney comments that he is looking forward to positive engagement with the housing authority in the neighborhood. He adds that the wall was taller previously and there is enough historic stone there to put it back. It would be a tremendous loss to get rid of it and he thinks the design is going in the right direction but needs more work. He urges the Commission to think about how to preserve the importance of the site.

***Barnett Brodie, 8 Carter Lane, Munsee NY***

Mr. Brodie owns a property at 714 Quinnipiac Avenue, and he supports the application because right now it looks terrible, and it will get the property back to being functional. He adds that it will hold up the job to expect the owner to build back the historic wall.

***Anstress Farwell, Urban Design League, 59 Elm Street***

Ms. Farwell supports needing additional detail on the guardrail for this application. She thinks the application is incomplete and possibly premature as there could be changes once the housing authority develops an idea for the site. She adds the whole wall would be two feet higher so the vista from the river and across the river will be different. She’d like to see potential changes so there is public water access as that also speaks to the historic use of the site. She feels like this is moving in a good direction to get more housing built in New Haven.

***Chris Ozcyk, 603 Quinnipiac Avenue***

Mr. Ozcyk is excited about this project, and it would behoove everyone to make it a high-quality space. Reusing the stone over the concrete reveal at the top of the wall would be a good idea. He is hopeful that the owner is aware they will need fencing up once they build this wall for safety. The detail that bothers him most is about how that edge looks, which will be seen from the historic district. The site is required to have public access and he doesn’t want to see people having to climb over the fence.

Mr. Ryder responds to the comments. There is no alternative design for the wall because of Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) requirements that it cannot be steeper. Some aesthetics changes can be made to the concrete. For public access, it can be added later with a ramp, stairs, or dock. It is not part of this application because this is for stabilization of the shoreline. Chair Learned asks him to clarify “precast concrete” regarding the section at return wall. Mr. Ryder explains that DEEP requires everything to be independent so it cannot connect to another wall in case that would fail. To do that there will be a return wall to close it off. Precast means it will be poured off site and brought on site and set into place. Mr. Ryder compares it to a sidewalk look and the color varies. Mr. Lachance adds that East Grand Avenue side will have little exposure and that they will take conditions on aesthetics and adding a facing of historic rock.

***Fereshteh Bekhrad, 776 Quinnipiac Avenue***

Ms. Bekhrad has concerns about meaningful public access to the water as she was hoping the development of this property would reflect the meeting of two neighborhoods (Fair Haven and Fair Haven Heights). Thought should be given to connecting public walkways to other properties to make it continuous.

Chair Learned closes public hearing and opens up commissioner discussion. She clarifies that this application does not cover a public walkway. Commissioner Munday appreciates the thoughtful public comments, and the application is a positive city project. He adds that as an engineering structure, it is sound, but it could be refined to integrate into the setting better.

Chair Learned summarizes that this application meets the needs of DEEP and property owners but some of the aesthetics do not seem to be portrayed. She adds that there is no clarification on public access for the site and evidence of it conforming with other structures around the neighborhood. Commissioner Valentino asks about reusing the historic stone. Commissioner Christopher echoes Commissioner Munday’s sentiments but needs more insight before making a decision. Commissioner Munday adds that this is a city project and as the city’s Commission, there is an obligation to pursue courses of action consistent with the mission of the Commission. He thinks it’s in the best interest of all parties for them to come back with a design that reflects the community sentiments presented. Commissioner Jenkins adds that she can see the area from her window and one question she has is how dangerous it is to leave it the way it is while it’s delayed, and various questions are considered. She is also confused because the application seems to be incomplete, does not take it into account that it’s a park and who is making the presentation if it’s city property. Mr. Lachance replies that it is not a city owned development and the goal is to mesh the development with the neighborhood. They are hesitant to redesign the wall because it’s been approved by DEEP and the Army Corps of Engineers. Chair Learned reiterates the purpose of the Commission and she feels there is not enough information in the application. There are no questions about the construction but the details that are visible to the public and constitute the placement in a local historic district have not been identified or clarified. She repeats that it is extremely difficult to know what is being approved or not. Commissioner Benoit asks about when construction will happen and if they will have to come back before the Commission. Chair Learned replies that it will be for built structures and a walkway in subsequent applications.

**Chair Learned moves to continue the application to the next meeting asking the applicants to take into consideration all of the questions and concerns and incorporate them into the application.**

**Commissioner Munday seconds.**

**Commissioner Benoit will not vote.**

**All in favor at 8:18.**

**Motion passes.**

1. **Discussion Items**

**3.1 Demolitions Delay Items**

Ms. Cecunjanin shows the demolition delay packet which outlines details of the demolitions. Attendees are present to talk about their own property.

* **138 West Rock Avenue – Partial Demolition**

This house dates to 1916 and is a contributing property to the Suburban Westville Historic District. The front porch is proposed to be demolished and replaced due to it being unstable and pulling away from the house. The start of the delay was February 26th and it ends on May 26th.

***Marcus Walton, 138-140 West Rock Avenue***

Mr. Walton explains the current condition does not look like the photo shown and due to no footings, the porch is pulling away from the house. Squirrels have chewed through rotting wood and the balusters and floor need to be replaced as well. Otherwise, it will remain very similar. Mr. Herzan comments that the porch is a complement to the original design. He recommends looking into the historic homeowner’s tax credit which New Haven Preservation Trust is hosting a presentation on in April as it could benefit the owner.

* **714 Quinnipiac Avenue – Full Demolition**

This c.1834 residential property contributes to the Quinnipiac River Historic District (just outside the LHD). The delay started on May 1st and ends on May 30th.

***Barnett Brodie, 8 Carter Lane, Munsee NY***

Mr. Brodie explains he bought this property 1-2 years ago and the intent was to rebuild it as is. He has spent time with different professionals looking at the house, including an engineer. Prior owners had done work improperly, like an addition in back with insufficient foundation, gutting the house and cutting supporting beams. Impacts of prior owner changes created imbalances that are damaging the framing.

* **256 Whitney Avenue (Yale Wright Lab) – Partial Demolition**

This 1964 building is listed in the Modernist inventory and Historic Resource Inventory and will include demolition of the earthen berm and portions of the lab. The delay started on March 6th and ends on June 4th.

***Joseph Hammer, Attorney, 110 Whitney Avenue, Hamden***

***Stephen Brown, Associate Director of Planning, 340 Edward Street***

Mr. Hammer describes that Yale met with NHPT to formally make them aware of the partial demolitions. Yale is in the process of constructing a new science building. Some portions to be demolished are above grade and some are below grade. Mr. Brown shows aerial images of the building and parts to be demolished which total roughly 40% of the complex.

Chair Learned asks for the Commissioner’s comment on if letters should be written to oppose any of the demolitions.

One person from the public will comment on the demolition of 714 Quinnipiac Avenue.

***Anstress Farwell, Urban Design League, 59 Elm Street***

Ms. Farwell thinks there are alternatives to demolition. She does not think the house is beyond repair and it would be hard to build something new with such a narrow parcel. This house is a rare building for New Haven at 200 years old. She adds that, if possible, it help to have an independent engineer take a look as the house merits that kind of care.

***John Herzan, New Haven Preservation Trust (NHPT), 35 Flying Point Road, Branford***

Mr. Herzan comments that buildings of this era are very rare in New Haven and that adds to its significance. He wishes the Commission would submit a letter of concern. He also reminds everyone about the grants available from NHPT for homeowners to do the kind of work that would prevent these demolitions.

Commissioner Munday comments that there is time for further consideration, and he would like the opportunity to think more about it. Commissioner Christopher would not support any of the demolitions and encourage the applicants to look at it from a more practical standpoint and retain what is there for both the residential properties.

1. **Minutes**

**4.1 Approval of December 13, 2023 Meeting Minutes**

**Chair Learned moves to approve the minutes.**

**Commissioner Valentino seconds.**

**Commissioner Christopher abstains.**

**All in favor at 8:55.**

**Motion passes.**

1. **New Business**

Commissioner Benoit asks about Milford HDC training and if it counts towards their hours for continuing education (Chair Jenkins also thought that was the case). Ms. Cecunjanin will check into it. Commissioner Benoit also asks about making the application more user friendly based on an example from Woodbury. Chair Learned agrees that the application should be worked on. She will report back with the next steps. Certified Local Government funding may be available for that. Commissioner Valentino asks Mr. Herzan about the training that NHPT is hosting for the homeowner’s tax credit. Mr. Herzan replies that it will be virtual on April 18th at 6:00pm.

**Chair Learned makes a motion to adjourn.**

**Commissioner Benoit seconds.**

**All in favor at 9:03.**

**Motion Passes.**

Respectfully submitted by Jordan Sorensen, recorder.