

NEW HAVEN HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION AGENDA

Wednesday, December 8, 2021, Regular Meeting, 7:00 PM

Location: Web-based meeting via Zoom

Commissioner Trina Learned calls to order the public hearing at 7:01.

In attendance: William Long (Deputy Director of Zoning), Maya Vardi (City Plan, Staff to the Historic District Commission, Planner II), Michael Piscitelli (Economic Development Administrator), Trina Learned (Commissioner and Chair), Susan Godshall (Commissioner), Dylan Christopher (Commissioner), Doug Royalty (Commissioner), Tom Kimberly (Commissioner), Karen Jenkins (Commissioner), Alex Eginton (New Haven Preservation Trust)

1. Commissioner 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.

2. Continued Public Hearing

2.1 21-02-CA 342 Greene Street (MBLU:208-0560-00400), Wooster Square Local Historic District. Owner: Jon Vercellone, Agent: Dan Baughman. Seeking approval for removal of existing wood porch and construction of new masonry covered porch.

Dan Baughman, 3 Danbury Place, Branford, CT

Mr. Baughman explains that he has revised materials and column design for the project. The columns (originally proposed as more decorative and fiberglass) are now proposed to be painted square wood wrapped cedar columns, measuring 5 ¼ x 8” at the base and 5 ¼ x 6” at the capitol. The railing system (originally proposed as aluminum) is now proposed to be painted red cedar with 4” spacing between 32” x 2” balusters, and 36” rail height.

Commissioner Learned asks if the door is existing or will be replaced. Mr. Baughman confirms it will remain as existing. Commissioner Learned opens the discussion for Commissioner comments.

Commissioner Godshall asks about the square column design as she thinks they seem heavy proportionally as opposed to a round column, like a nearby property. Mr. Baughman replied

that he talked to the owner nearby who has round columns and they said they were custom and more expensive, so he went with a square column. Commissioner Learned opens the discussion for public comment.

Anstress Farwell, 37 Wooster Place, New Haven

Ms. Farwell asks about the brick on the porch and if they will try to match the foundation.

Mr. Baughman says they will match it. No additional public comment.

Commissioner Learned asks Commissioners for discussion and/or a motion. Commissioner Kimberly asks where the downspout for the gutter is. Mr. Baughman says it is where the existing downspout comes down, on the right side of the building.

Commissioner Royalty wanted to correct the record that the 1880 dating from the Vision Appraisal database he previously found may not be accurate. According to the Historic Resource Inventory and Elizabeth Brown's book about Wooster Square houses, this building is likely about 40 years older than previously stated. Furthermore, he read the original guidelines for the Commission and the buildings with acorn plaques (like this one has) are the highest priority in Wooster Square. Commissioner Learned adds for clarification that the current porch has no relevance to the historic portion of the building, so no historic fabric is being taken away by removing this unsafe porch.

Commissioner Learned makes a motion to approve the application as submitted.

Commissioner Kimberly seconds.

Commissioners Learned, Kimberly, Godshall, Jenkins and Royalty in favor,

Commissioner Christopher abstains at 7:21.

3. New Public Hearing

3.1 21-07-CA Wooster Square Park (MBLU:208-0550-00100), Wooster Square Local Historic District. Owner: City of New Haven, Applicant: W. G. Iovanne- Wooster Square Monument Committee. Seeking approval for removal the existing fence, reduction in height of the existing foundation, construction of a new monument

including: A sculpture, title plates, 4 storyboards, 6 benches, 5 planters, a paved plaza area, lighting fixtures, concrete walkway.

Bill Iovanne Jr. 61 Pasture Lane, Branford

Mr. Iovanne introduces himself and the people on the monument committee who will be presenting.

Laura Luzzi, 1233 Dunbar Hill Road, Hamden (Committee Co-chair)

Ms. Luzzi gives background about the origin of the committee in June of 2020 after the city removed the Columbus statue that had stood in Wooster Park since 1892. She explains that the original intent of the monument was to celebrate Italian immigrants, welcome them and recognize their culture. Over time, public opinion changed about the monument and the removal was met with both hope from some and distress from Italian Americans. Mayor Elicker formed the Wooster Square Monument Committee to create a diverse group that included neighbors, Italian American societies, and city representatives. The Committee has volunteered many hours in weekly and monthly meetings doing research, talking to the community along with historians and preservationists to be part of a global historic movement for change. They have been sensitive to preserving the integrity of the park while bringing a more unified and educational aspect to the community.

Mr. Iovanne further explains the task of finding a suitable replacement for the statue and moving forward with both community input and the Committee's ideas. He describes the process of incorporating public input which began in September 2020 when the Committee put out a call to the community and received over 100 responses. After review, the Committee felt that replacement should not be of any particular historical figure. The common theme was a sculpture representing the family immigrant experience, symbolic of immigrant's hopes and dreams coming to America. The Committee also envisioned the space as a place to meet and to learn about immigration. They put out a call to artists to bring that vision to life and the majority voted to select a design submitted by Marc Massaro. The design includes storyboard panels with brief narratives and photos donated by the community around the existing modified pedestal with seating and planters. They propose to remove

existing wrought iron fence and preserve it for another use. They also propose to reduce the height of existing pedestal and repurpose the brownstone into the veneer of five concrete lined planters that will hold perennials, annuals, and low shrubbery. The gathering area will be constructed of 1,800 pavers that can be engraved by donors. A concrete walkway will be interspersed with five granite benches, like the base currently supporting the brownstone pedestal. Storyboards will be a resin-based material with a brushed metallic look, similar to the name plates on the benches throughout the park. The panels will be mounted on black posts with bronze finials on granite bases. The proposed sculpture will be 4' wide at the base and stand 6' 9" high, set on the existing granite and brownstone base. After the removal of the top brownstone on the base, it will be 4' tall making the entire artwork 10' 9" in total height. LED lights will light up the sculpture at the base. Two inscribed bronze plaques will be placed on the base: one on the Chapel Street side and one facing into the park. The space would be collaboratively maintained by residents of Wooster Square and the City of New Haven Parks Department. He adds that the community has shown support and has begun to heal since the sculpture design was revealed.

Marc Massaro, 483 East Main Street, Branford (Artist and Project Designer)

Ms. Massaro explains more about the intent of the overall design. He says that he had two objectives for the design: to provide an aesthetically pleasing space and to educate visitors about Wooster Square and Italian immigrant experience. He describes his personal inspiration for the design which is a century old connection to Wooster Square with family that came in 1910 and lived there for years. He created a design that embellishes the feeling of 19th century, what he feels is the ambience of the Square. He sees the project as a privilege that honors his family and leaves behind a master work for future generations. He also feels the design touches people of other backgrounds as there was an overwhelming response on Facebook to the proposed sculpture design with 2,300 people responding, many of whom say the sculpture does not just represent Italian heritage but hope of a better life. He describes the parts of the statue and what they represent, like the girl holding the book as first step towards gender equality, and work ethic and acceptance in a new land represented as what the little boy is pointing to. He feels that this monument will make history by replacing a removed monument with something that a large population has deemed appropriate, more significant,

and relevant to changing history. This project will be an opportunity to lead by example for every city.

Mr. Iovanne adds that the Committee feels strongly to preserve history in the park and learn from it. They want to find ways to accept that our understanding of history is changing and work to be a part of that positive change. He concludes that this work of public art's message will resonate throughout cultures and communities for generations and be a welcoming place for all.

Rosa Ferraro-Santana, Alder, Ward 13

Alder Ferraro-Santana explains that she came to the United States as a child and feels the sculpture is symbolic of how the country got to where it is and the importance of recognizing change. She adds that she has worked hard with the Committee to ensure they were properly guided to get to the proposed design.

Commissioner Learned thanks the Committee and those they have consulted with for the diligence and care brought to the process and the information provided in the presentation. She asks for Commissioner questions. Commissioner Godshall reiterates the Chair's comments about dedication, commitment, and thorough presentation. She asks about why they are removing a portion of the historic fence comparing it to the fences installed in 1826 on the Green and Trowbridge Square. Mr. Iovanne replies that they felt the fence looks like a barrier separating the community from public artwork and felt it would be wise to remove it and preserve it, like using it at another property development or as public art. Commissioner Godshall adds that the sculpture faces inward and there are wide openings, so she does not see it as a barrier. Furthermore, pieces of iron fences have been stored, lost and no one knows where they go so she feels strongly against taking out bits of fences and storing them. She thinks their choices overall are admirable. Mr. Iovanne specifies they want to move only the fence around the statue not around park.

Commissioner Christopher asks if the brownstone could be embraced more or if the use of granite has significance. He also questions the sign material and keeping with the integrity of

the park. Mr. Iovanne replies that he wanted to reproduce existing granite from foundation and bring it around the space. The granite bases bring the signs up to eye level. He explains the resin material for signs is low cost but aesthetically looks good and withstands time. Commissioner Christopher asks for clarification on the material. Mr. Iovanne replies that it is a resin-based panel with bronze coating which is engravable and can reproduce a photograph to scale. He will submit a spec sheet to the Commission.

Commissioner Godshall asks if the Committee considered Stony Creek granite that has warm and appealing pinkish color. Mr. Iovanne replies that he hopes that Stony Creek granite would be the primary source for the project. Commissioner Godshall adds that it is used elsewhere in New Haven so it will echo other spaces and suggests updating the rendering with that granite. She also asks Mr. Iovanne to describe how the dimensions of the proposed project compare to the dimensions of the original rectangle of the Columbus statue with fence. Mr. Iovanne replies that current dimensions on Chapel Street and north side are approximately 17' 4" in length. The east and west sides are approximately 16' 8" in length. This project has an area of 42' x 42' which is a little over double in size. Commissioner Godshall asks if that needs special permission from the Parks Commission. Mr. Iovanne says that they have been consulted and advised accordingly.

Commissioner Learned asks for an explanation of how the oval shape came about because the park has rectilinear features. Mr. Massaro replied that he felt by making it rounder it flowed more easily for people to walk around it. He feels the rectangle shape made it more intrusive with a severe 45-degree angle on the left side (in the aerial) which did not appeal to him aesthetically. Commissioner Learned asks for clarification about that the height of the pedestal and if the bottom will stay or will it be removed and reconstructed. Mr. Massaro replies that the base is 4" high and what he wanted to place the sculpture on top of. He says that will not be altered, just stones on the top would be removed to create a larger base for a four-figure monument.

Commissioner Royalty asks the Committee to speak to the evolution of the project from just removal and replacement of a monument to a larger change in landscape. Mr. Iovanne replies

that the Committee saw an opportunity from the public input to create a learning environment and social space that would be impactful. Commissioner Royalty adds that although he understands there has been a lot of response on Facebook, he senses that most people in the neighborhood are not too familiar with project except for what was in the paper. He asks if they plan on having more public input sessions. Mr. Iovanne says they have been doing it all along and will continue to throughout the process. He adds that the Committee has been transparent with all public meetings and publicized in the newspaper. Commissioner Royalty asks if they would consider putting the plans in the park for people to look at. Mr. Iovanne replies that he thinks that is a great suggestion and adds that they will be presenting the design to Wooster Square management team on December 21st at their meeting.

Commissioner Godshall follows up on Commissioner Royalty's idea of putting up the drawings that it might enliven the project to mark out the dimensions for the proposed area with tape to see where different elements would be. She also thinks the rectangular approach might be revisited after a physical model layout. Mr. Iovanne replies that a Committee member made the same suggestion. After asking for additional comments, Commissioner Learned closes this discussion and asks for public comments.

Judith Taft, 541 Chapel Street, New Haven

Ms. Taft says that he thinks the statue is beautiful and it is a wonderful project but is concerned about the size and paving over grass because there are so few green areas in New Haven. She agrees with the Commissioners about the shape and form related to the park the actual proposed size compared to the existing. Her understanding is that the existing foundation of the monument is 7'x 8' (56 square feet) whereas the project is 42'x42' (1,764 square feet), which is 32 times bigger as the existing statue. She also understands the idea of creating a gathering space in the park but people gather already without paving over green areas. Instead, they bring in bleachers, blankets, chairs as it is a park and not a plaza. She would rather sit on grass and not on pavement.

Carolanne Patterson, 1 Wooster Square, New Haven

Ms. Patterson says this is the first time that she has been able to see the plan, which she found out about through a neighbor and suggested that neighbors were not all aware of the design. She sees the design as a park within the park and agrees with the previous speaker about paving over grass area. She thinks adding benches that are not sympathetic to existing benches creates an entirely different park within the park. She also is concerned that the design embraces a historic aspect of the city that does not currently reflect the diversity of the park.

Alex Werrell, 26 Academy Street, New Haven

Mr. Werrell echoes the points of previous speakers. He also states that he resents the binary choice of the presentation to either approve and make history or oppose and therefore oppose history. He thinks the goal to educate park goers is noble and the history of immigration is rich, but also plagued by discrimination. He adds that it is also not just historical but ongoing and that is worth commemorating. He appreciates the artist but protests the present design as he feels it is pedantic and has form issues. He feels the nature of figurative art is exclusionary and suggests something more abstract. Historically, the statue and plinth were part of the park's greenery, but he feels the proposed design is apart from the green space and suggests placing it elsewhere like across the street at Paul Russo Park. He feels the press needs to slow down to make the right decisions. He thinks that not many people know about design and with no media present to publicize, the public needs more time to react.

David Atkins, 39 Wooster Place, New Haven

Mr. Atkins thanks all the Committee's efforts, the artist, and speakers. He lives at edge of the park and loves it because it is welcoming and inclusive. He is concerned that the monument is not culturally or ethnically inclusive and that others might feel unwelcome. He also feels like the sculpture does not blend in organically with its surroundings with the bigger footprint. He thought it would be the same size or smaller. He adds that the cement and panels will attract graffiti. He feels that they must protect the park's trees and grass and suggests a beautiful tree instead that would be appropriate there which is also welcoming and enhances the park. He concludes that the community needs an opportunity as people who live

there to know about the plan as they have not been involved and it is being talked about as a done deal.

Elizabeth Holt, 8036 Southeast Coleman Street, Portland, Oregon

Ms. Holt is no longer working at the New Haven Preservation Trust but was familiar with the project before leaving. She thinks that overall it is a beautiful design and appreciates the reuse of the brownstone. She thinks ensuring the historic fence is not misplaced is important. She does agree with concerns about the plaza and how it creates a separated space within the park. Leaving the space grassy would be an improvement and keep it more connected to the rest of park.

Anstress Farwell, 37 Wooster Place, New Haven

Ms. Farwell states she has lived in neighborhood for 43 years and served on the Commission when the park was renovated with the current benches, lighting, and repaved paths. She raises the issues of material and design congruence with the National Park Service standards, like the granite color, size and orientation. She also agrees that a figurative statue can be exclusionary but could be appropriate in terms of replacing like with like but not set into a plaza of this sort. She is also concerned about the panel materials which have no relationship to other materials in the park and thinks it looks more like a temporary exposition rather than permanent fixture. She says that there are three ideas being presented: what replaces the Columbus statue, an opportunity to create social and educational spaces, and ways of improving the park itself. These ideas could be incorporated with a 2016 plan to improve Russo Park as a better place for this project. She also suggests an idea about the passageway from Wooster Place to Conte School campus that has space for a public art project that is inclusive about the neighborhood and waves of immigration history. The opportunities to look at social and educational spaces are valid but creates an awkward project to put them all in one spot when there are other places that are better suited. She adds that because the Columbus statue has its own history including that it was paid for by working class people when it was made, and she hopes it finds a place where it can be appreciated, and the plinth

should go with it. She commends the Committee but thinks a lot more thought needs to be done and consideration for optimal places in the neighborhood for projects.

Mr. Iovanne replies to all that he appreciates the comments and passion for Wooster Square. He clarifies by reading the mission statement of the Committee, “The goal of the Committee appointed by Mayor Elicker is to determine an appropriate monument to honor the contributions of Italian American heritage in New Haven. The committee will research and develop the form and identity for a monument statue or similar symbol of appropriate dimension and stature that represents the Italian American experience and placed atop the existing or, if necessary, the modified pedestal in Wooster Square Park.” He adds they have worked hard over 19 months to get to where they are by listening to members of the community, historians, and preservationists. He knows it is impossible to get everyone on board. The Committee understands the project takes up green space but they feel the tradeoff is the learning experience that tells the story of immigration which is not only a story of Italian immigrants but connecting the story to everyone else’s. He says the committee appreciates everyone’s comments and will take it under advisement. He repeats that the committee has operated transparently and openly, all meetings have been posted on the City’s website, and they have had conversations with people in the neighborhood so he cannot explain why some have not heard about it. Commissioner Learned closes public comment and opens comments from Commissioners.

Commissioner Godshall asks if the Commission has final approval and where they fit in the process. Mr. Piscitelli explains that there is a review process with multiple reviewing bodies: Historic District Commission, Cultural Affairs Commission and the Parks Commission. Given the regulatory framework around Certificate of Appropriateness, it starts with the Historic District Commission. Commissioner Learned explains that the complication with an application like this is that it represents substantially new design and materials not currently in the district, so it is a process that takes working through to understand the proposed plan and public sentiments.

Commissioner Royalty adds that to talk about the preservation issues, there is a process the Commission must go through, starting with understanding the significance and level of integrity of a resource. He states that Wooster Square Park has both historic and architectural significance as an historic designed landscape starting in 1825 with its original fence. Some alterations were made in 1852 leaving what is essentially there today with intersecting paths and trees. There are only a few other resources that still exist from the maritime period, when the area was known as New Township, like a few small residences and a church so the park is a rare resource that is associated with that period. It is also significant for its role in urban planning, which made it the center around which other buildings revolve and a special green public park in dense urban neighborhood. He adds that it has high integrity on all seven levels (location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association). Some modern alterations include the WWII monument, Historic District marker monument, Cherry trees, and DeLauro Table but those are small in scale and designed to remain in the background which leaves the designed landscape as the primary resource. He further explains that when going to judge the proposed project's alteration, the Commission looks at its effect on the integrity. He thinks the proposal diminishes the design, feeling and association and suggests that three of the standards are not met. The first standard regarding that property will be used it was historically or be given a use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships. He is concerned that the design reorients the focus point, which is center of park, and messes with the traditional spatial relationships. The next standard not met has to do with changes that have acquired historic significance being retained and preserved. He explains that this is regarding the stone base of the monument being altered. And the other standard not met says new additions and alterations will not destroy historic materials, features and spatial relationships and that new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale, proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property in its environment. He concludes that in all three cases, the issue is the landscape and scale of the alteration and its effect on the character of the park.

Commissioner Learned asks for recommendation from the Commission for moving ahead. Commissioner Royalty says he thinks the public comments were interesting and creative and

that there are ways to work with the Committee to come up with solutions that may meet standards. Commissioner Learned agrees and says that the Commission making decision in favor or opposed would potentially be stopping a process that still has more momentum. With new construction or substantial changes on something so important, in the middle of one of the most important pieces of property in a historic district, the Commission must act appropriately and maintain integrity of the reason the Commission was created as well as why Wooster Square is a local and national district. She thinks that because the Committee is within a process, making a decision is preemptive and would shut down that process. Commissioner Kimberly concurs with Commissioner Learned and says that to allow the process to continue, he suggests a continuance.

Commissioner Kimberly makes a motion to continue the application to the next regularly scheduled meeting pending more information based on the discussion this evening.

Commissioner Godshall seconds the motion.

Discussion: Commissioner Godshall concurs with the Chair's words about the application being for a resource with such lasting importance and high visibility. She asks if there may not be enough of a pause by continuing until the next meeting with holidays in between. Commissioner Learned asks for clarification on the timing of the application so as not to miss a deadline. Mr. Piscitelli suggests that by January 12th there can be response to the comments about the standards. Commissioner Learned asks about schedule between all the commissions' approvals, asking if one has to approve or oppose before the next or will there be dialogue between the commissions. Mr. Piscitelli replies that each has their own purview and will move forward concurrently toward a final decision. Commissioner Jenkins asks about the process among three commissions and if the chairs of each could have a conversation with the Committee for collaborative effort. Mr. Piscitelli thinks if the Chairs wish to meet and discuss they can. Commissioner Learned clarifies with Mr. Piscitelli that they will let her know if that is the plan.

Commissioners Learned, Kimberly, Godshall, Christopher and Royalty in favor, Commissioner Jenkins opposed at 9:07.

4. Discussion

4.1 256 Shelton Avenue (MBLU:290-0469-01300)- Demolition Delay Application.

Expiration date: 02.15.2022

Kirk Gordon, 338 Grand View Avenue, Hamden

Mr. Gordon represents the Northeastern Conference of Seventh Day Adventists for their local church, Mt. Zion Seventh Day Adventists, where he serves on the building committee. They have owned this site for years where they previously had a community center. In 2019 they got an assessment done it was determined the building has deteriorated beyond repair. Once demolished, they will rebuild a community service center to provide various services like distributing clothes, food, counseling and having medical staff for basic care.

Commissioner Learned explains that the Commission under the Certified Local Government statute has an opportunity to make comments but no jurisdiction to approve the demolition or not. The Commission only gathers information to make a decision for making a public statement about concerns. She asks Commissioner Godshall if it has come up in discussion at the New Haven Preservation Trust. Commissioner Godshall replies that the preservation committee discussed it briefly and notes that City's form for 90-day demolition does not require plans for the site after demolition so it is helpful for the site owner to explain what they will do with a clear site. The preservation committee thinks that there are other projects coming along that they will need focus on in terms of finding an alternative for demolition but not this one. Commissioner Learned is concerned about the demolition for the sake of an empty and undeveloped lot. She adds there does appear to be deterioration and she does not feel like there needs to be a motion unless other Commissioners have strong feelings about it.

4.2 Next steps regarding proposal to add disclosure of Historic District designations to site plan review requirements in the Zoning Ordinance

Commissioner Godshall reminds the Commission of a process to revise site plan review requirements to add in a disclosure item for National and State Register properties. The proposal went to nine people and then to a public hearing at City Plan Commission meeting. She explains that staff recommended that it not move forward and the board of alders not act because disclosing presence or absence of district might create an expectation in public's mind that that would be considered by City Plan Commission. Since they do not have the authority to evaluate that, they felt it would create a false expectation. She adds that it was a disappointment to the Trust, and they discussed next steps.

Mr. Long further explains that the City Plan staff fully supports the preservation of historic structures. Staff are responsible for researching to make sure that the Planning Commission is exercising its full authority as it relates to historic preservation and in doing so, they came to the understanding from a legal standpoint that adding such an amendment was not the best way to do it. Staff is taking the Trust's recommendation into consideration to ensure that the zoning ordinance overall is taking into account historic preservation. Commissioner Godshall asks if she, and supporters, should go to the Alders' Legislative Committee meeting just to hear them deny it. Mr. Long would have to figure out if it is even on the agenda since the Planning Commission suggested they take no action. He needs to understand the process to recommend how to move forward. Information will be gathered by staff and relayed to Commissioner Godshall.

4.3 Section 106: 114 Bristol Street (MBLU:281-0350-03901) Installation of new antennas at overall heights of 135.5 feet and 108.2 feet on a 143-foot building

Ms. Vardi explains she has limited information about this notification. This property is on the Historic Resource Inventory but not on State Historic Preservation Office's list. The deadline for comments is January 3rd. There are already antennas on the building, which was built in 1975. She shows the elevation drawing and roof plan with the two new antennas to be installed attached to existing architectural features. Commissioner Learned

asks if the Commission has strong feelings about this. No comment from the Commission.

5. Minutes

5.1 Approval of Draft Meeting Minutes- 10/13/2021, 11/10/2021

Commissioner Learned has not been able to go through the minutes. She asks if other members have had a chance to review the minutes and if they would like to vote.

Commissioner Royalty makes a motion to table the approval of minutes until the next meeting.

Commissioner Kimberly seconds.

All in favor at 9:29.

6. New Business

Commissioner Kimberly makes a motion to adjourn.

Commissioner Royalty seconds.

All in favor at 9:30.

Respectfully submitted by Jordan Sorensen, recorder.