



Plympton Historical  
Commission

# Meeting Summary - 07/20/15

- Meeting called to order at 7:02pm. Members present Jane Schulze, Jill Palenstijn and Jon Wilhelmsen. Associate Member Rick Burnet was present as well.
- JW advised that the first order of business of the PHC was to continue the Public Hearing with respect to the property located at 3 Forest Street which was first held on July 8, 2015 at 7pm. The 3 Forest Street Public Hearing was called to order at 7:02pm. In attendance were JS, JP, JW, RB, Bob Gosselin (contractor) and Elsie Murgida (property owner). Melinda DeSanctis and Ashley Dann joined around 7:20 pm.
- JW started by thanking Ms. Murgida and Mr. Gosselin for their time and indulgence during the site visit at 3 Forest Street on Saturday, July 11, 2015 @ 9 am. In attendance on behalf of the Commission at the visit were JS, JP, RB and JW. JW explained that such visits help to provide the Commission with additional information and facts that help it to arrive at a decision. JW also explained that the Commission is currently made up of 3 individuals - JS, JP & JW. RB is an associate member and does not have a voting seat. The Commission looks to RB's expertise as a licensed builder and contractor who has extensive experience in working with old homes in the area to provide his thoughts for the Commission to consider. JW stressed that this process is designed to solicit facts to help the Commission come to a decision as to whether the property in question is preferably preserved as required under the Plympton demolition delay bylaw. JW also noted that this is the first time that the Commission has had the opportunity to discuss the visit made on the 11th as we have not held a public meeting subsequent to that visit. To start the discussion, JW asked RB to offer his thoughts regarding the property based on the site visit.
- RB questioned whether the original part of the house (the gable end house on the right side) was a summer house (note close proximity to Silver Lake). He brought this up due to the very shallow field-stone foundation for this part of the structure. (Note: later in the conversation Ms. Murgida and Mr. Gosselin noted that the house had been moved from another location on the property - near the well - to the current location). The dutch-colonial el has a 3/4 basement which is more common for a permanent residence and was clearly added later - though before 1953 as noted by Ms. Murgida during the site visit. RB noted his concerns with the limited footprint of the home and the notable costs associated with moving or renovating the property. He also advised that there was little interior ornamentation left that provided historical reference or current day interest. He did note that the house appears to have been very well maintained and also was updated over the years - and that structurally, it did not exhibit any noticeable issues based on what could be observed during the visit. This could - at least partially - be attributed to the situation of the house at a higher level from the ground than many of the older structures.
- JW asked RB if the original cottage (the right section of the house) could reasonably be moved/lifted and placed on a new foundation to then be incorporated with a new addition to meet the requirements of the property owner? He advised that with the appropriate funds, anything is possible. He expressed concern with structural support issues given that they would typically need to remove the dutch-colonial el before moving the cottage and that could be problematic and costly.

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- JP then provided comment regarding her visit to the property. She indicated that she too is a licensed contractor. JP noted the stories that Ms. Murgida provided and how they represented a historical narrative to growing up in that part of Plympton. She raised 7 children in the house and had - at times as many as 30 kids in the backyard playing. JP noted that while the inventory form noted it as a significant structure given the limited number of homes in the area of this type, it also represented a significant place in the history of the area/composition of the neighborhood. JP also asked Ms. Murgida if she could keep her house that held so many memories, and change 5 things about it - what would it be. She responded that she is done with the house and wants it replaced with the house she wants. She did not wish to answer the question despite further inquiry from JP.
- JS noted that she has strong feelings about the house. She noted to Ms. Murgida that certain alterations had already been made to the house to accommodate needs as they arose such as the walk-in bathtub. Ms. Murgida noted that she is not a shower person and that things were done simply because they had to be. She indicated that she did not understand what right we had to tell her what to do with her house. JW explained the history of the demo delay bylaw, the changes that were made after enactment and also pointed out parallels with other bylaws - such as zoning bylaws - that prescribed certain rights to property owners as laid out by the town. She told the Commission that she was too busy to follow every little law and that we were interfering with her property and a house that she owned. JW and JP advised that we were administering the bylaws of the Town of Plympton that were voted on by Town Meeting. JW also noted that we are trying to gather the facts and to find an amicable resolution to the situation, but what is being offered is their original proposal to demolish the structure.
- Mr. Gosselin noted that he does not consider the structure to be of any value and it is cost prohibitive for him to consider moving it. It would not be in the budget. JW again explained the disconnect between what the Commission is charged with and what they are asking. Mr. Gosselin said that he really could not understand what the Commission saw in the property and JW discussed the limited number of structures of this type in town and also how this house - and others in town - make up the built environment. the fact that this house occupies the space it does in town - and is architecturally significant - makes it important. Mr. Gosselin noted that it seemed the Commission was leaning toward placing a delay on the demolition permit - JW advised that the Commission has not voted on that question, but personally, he would have difficulty at this point granting a permit to simply demolish the house and put up the proposed ranch with a farmers porch and garage. JW inquired as to whether there had been any consideration of an alternate design that incorporated the scale and lines of the original structure (cottage) with an appropriate and proportionate el and garage. After some discussion and clarification, it was determined that there has not been such a consideration. Mr. Gosselin asked if that is what the Commission was seeking and JW advised that the Commission is looking for alternatives to consider in lieu of putting the whole house in a dumpster and building a structure that is wholly inconsistent with the built environment as it exists today. As noted before - JW indicated that he was not comfortable with granting a permit as requested - and was hoping for alternatives to consider along the spectrum of possible outcomes from preserving the house in its original form to putting it all in a dumpster. After some additional discussion regarding the preservation of the built environment, the purpose of the demolition delay bylaw, the Commission's duties under that bylaw and possible outcomes of a decision by the Commission, Mr. Gosselin suggested that he work with his architect on a revised plan.
- JW advised that the Commission would make itself available to look at any revised plans or alternatives to demolition at its earliest convenience. Mr. Gosselin noted some potential conflicts - and JW again expressed that the Commission would do what it could to be available so not to unduly prolong this process. Ms. Murgida noted some confusion between the Historical Society and the Commission and JW clarified the role of the Commission and noted it was separate and distinct from the Society or the Plympton Historic District Commission which has oversight over the Harrub's Corner Local Historic District. After some discussion about whether the Commission should close the hearing and vote on the permit or continue the hearing to our next meeting (7/27), it was decided to continue the hearing until

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the meeting on the 27th - at which point it could consider any additional plans or information the applicants wished to provide. JW did assure Mr. Gosselin that it would not render any decisions that, in the absence of either he or Ms. Murgida's input, would be detrimental - rather they would continue the hearing to a next meeting if that was needed.

- On the motion of JS, seconded by JP, the 3 Forest Street hearing was continued until the Commission's next meeting on 7/27. 3-0-0 in favor of the motion. The hearing was adjourned at 8:07 pm. Ms. Murgida and Mr. Gosselin left the meeting and Ms. DeSanctis and Ms. Dunn joined the Commission at the table to discuss the Commission's initial thoughts on the pending demolition permit for 6 Cross Street.
- The Commission will be holding a hearing on this property on Monday, July 27, 2015 at 7 pm. In preparation for that hearing, the Commission arranged to visit the property on Saturday, July 18, 2015 at 9 am. Ms. DeSanctis provided the Commission with unfettered access to the property and also with a full account of the work they had done so far. She has had multiple contractors and 2 exterminators look at the property and they have advised her to remove the house. She is under contract with a builder to replace the existing structure with a modular home of a different style. JW thanked her on behalf of the Commission for the visit and the information she provided. It should be noted - based on JW's discussion with her at the site visit that Ms. DeSanctis and others have done a significant amount of work on the property to date - clearing it of the materials left inside and gutting whole portions of the building. Their original intent was to renovate the house, however after discussions with a number of contractors, they felt this was the path on which to proceed. JW provided Ms. DeSanctis with a copy of the inventory form currently on file with MHC.
- JW explained the purpose of the bylaw, the mechanics of it, and how the Commission goes about administering it. JW asked if there were questions - and upon hearing there were none - he asked RB for his input as a licensed builder and contractor. RB noted that he has had a fair amount of experience in dealing with houses similar to this - and in fact has fully renovated a neighboring property - built by the same builders - due to a lightning strike back in 2004. He noted that the insurance company gutted the entire house due to the fire and water damage and they were able to work with the good bones of the property to put in all new electrical, plumbing, mechanical, etc and to reconfigure walls to make a modern, updated old house. He indicate that he felt there was some work needed for the structure including the kitchen/bathroom floor and the area around the front door. But that was manageable. There was lots of opportunity for the house and he believed ultimately it was structurally sound. The concern regarding powder post beetles was noted and RB stated that he did not believe the powder post beetle issue was significant and that it could be treated. JW, JS and JP all noted their own experiences with these insects in their houses. RB indicated that if a client had come to him with a similar project, he would not discourage them from a renovation given the structure of the house that was observed by him and other members of the Commission during the visit. RB also noted the extremely unique basement fireplace and its intricate brick work.
- JW then provided comments similar to RB. He noted - absent the beam under the kitchen and front door, the structure has fared well over the years. The work that Ms. DeSanctis, Ms. Dunn (her neighbor) and others have done to the property have provided for a good look at the structure. JW noted that there seemed to be a lot of potential to bring this property back from its current state to a gem within Plympton. The property is quite beautiful with large, mature trees lining the area between the house and the pasture. JW noted that there was the potential - given the structure of the house - to make changes to the floor plan to accommodate the modern requirements while also allowing for preservation of the structure. JW also noted that with some thought to the future, the potential renovations of the property could allow for a thoughtful addition in the future - either another el or a "barn" off the house to expand the square footage.

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- JS and JP noted that there had been many good comments to date and didn't have anything additional to add at this time - but did note the hearing scheduled for next week. JW reminded Ms. DeScantis that she should bring any material she believes the Commission should consider in the application process.
- Ms. DeScantis and Ms. Dunn left the meeting.
- JW noted that there was a potential addition to the Commission and he would follow up with her.
- JW also noted that RB was up for re-appointment as an associate member. On the motion of JS - second by JP - Rick Burnett shall be appointed as an Associate Member of the Plympton Historical Commission through June 30, 2016. 3-0-0.
- Next meeting will be 7/27 at 7 pm
- Meeting adjourned at 8:52 pm on the motion of JS, second JP. Vote: 3-0-0.