

NEWBURYPORT PRESERVATION TRUST

P. O. Box 184, Newburyport, MA 01950
www.nbptpreservationtrust.org

Linking the past with the present and future



Quarterly Newsletter of the Newburyport Preservation Trust

Spring 2016

Preservation Week 2016 showcases church architecture

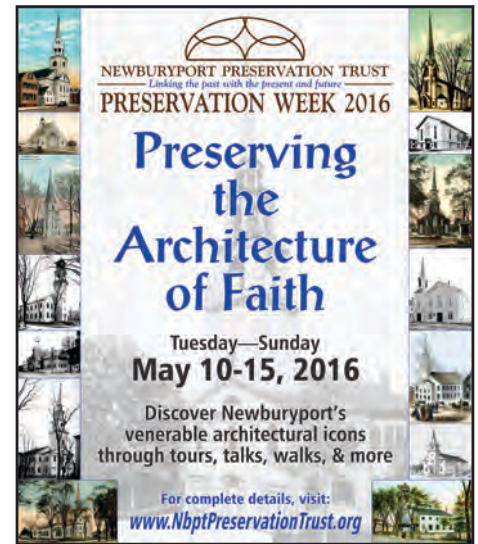
Newburyport celebrates historic preservation during the 10th annual Newburyport Preservation Week, May 10-15, 2016. This year's theme, "Preserving the Architecture of Faith," salutes the preservation of the city's religious architecture, and its presence on the horizon and in our neighborhoods that contributes to our sense of place.

This spring, the signature event of the Newburyport Preservation Trust presents six days of activities, including tours, lectures, concerts, and the annual Historic Preservation Awards. All events are free and open to the public. (Donations are gratefully accepted at all venues.)

The schedule of events is available at the Newburyport Preservation Trust website, www.NbptPreservationTrust.org, on the Preservation Week page. Also available is a downloadable version of the schedule.

The celebration begins **Tuesday evening**, May 10 at 7 p.m. with a preview and presentation by museum/history professional R.W. Bacon, "Newburyport's Architecture of Faith," a lively overview of the topic packed with photos of the city's churches – old, new, past, present, defunct, restored, and re-purposed. (St. Anna's Chapel of St. Paul's Church, 166 High Street, Newburyport, 7 p.m.).

The "can't miss event" is the Friday evening (May 13) presentation at the Custom House Museum, "A Preservation Commitment Journey: The First Religious Society Steeple Project," by William Heenehan, which details, through photos and artifacts, the planning, commitment, surprises, and cost escalations that extended the multi-year preservation project at the 1801 Newburyport landmark. (Custom House Museum, 25 Water Street, 7 p.m.).



The climax of the week is the presentation of the 2016 Preservation Awards. Each year the Newburyport Preservation Trust recognizes the finest preservation efforts in our city during the past 12 months. Join us for the celebration! (Custom House Museum, 25 Water St., 4:30 p.m. reception & awards). ■



Artist's renderings of the 48 Boardman Street project.



NPT's consultation with developer results in positive preservation outcome

Passersby at Boardman and Washington Street may be alarmed at first to see heavy equipment gnashing away at a later rear addition to the 1790 Capt. James Clarkson House at 48 Boardman Street. But what is really happening there is a remarkable and rare collaboration of development and preservation interests that could serve as a model for such cooperation in the future.

On February 23, the Newburyport Zoning Board of Appeals approved, by 4-1 vote, a dimensional variance to split the 48 Boardman Street lot into two non-conforming lots, clearing the way for the preservation-friendly project.

On the original large lot, the developer could have butchered the 1790 home into a sprawling two-family, casting original

features into the dumpster, all without the need for variances or special permits.

Instead, after consulting with dozens of people in the neighborhood, and with the Newburyport Preservation Trust, the developer (Adam True, The True Co., working with consultant and former Newburyport city planner Nicholas Cracknell) proposed to preserve the house as a single-family home with 1790 features intact, and add a second "carriage house" home on the lot. The developer's choice makes for a more complex project, and required ZBA approval, but the result will be the preservation of an authentic 1790 structure, and a neighborhood that, though far from unanimous on the "infill" issue, can feel like its concerns were accommodated. ■

Punitive settlement may be in sight for 77 Lime Street 'Frankenstein House' fiasco

The monster of 77 Lime Street was back before the Newburyport Zoning Board of Appeals on April 12, but it appears that a solution – imperfect as it may be – is in sight.

The “Frankenstein addition” to the Federal-era home at 77 Lime Street already prompted changes to city zoning laws on connected additions. Now the issue is the height of the addition, which exceeds approved plans. On April 12, the attorney for the developer presented three remedies, each costing more than \$125,000. All deemed too complex and expensive, the developer’s fourth offer was to be allowed to get away with the violation in return for

tossing crumbs – donations of \$15,000 each – to the Unitarian Church Steeple Fund ... and the Newburyport Preservation Trust(!)

At this key hearing the Newburyport Preservation Trust engaged and paid for the services of a certified court reporter.

A dozen people spoke against allowing the excessive height, including Mayor Donna Holaday and representatives from the Newburyport Preservation Trust. No one spoke in favor. One speaker referred to the builder as “a serial offender.”

A continuance was granted in order that the developer and the mayor might work out a financial settlement beneficial to the



Above left: The “Frankenstein addition,” 77 Lime St.

city in exchange for allowing the building to remain as-is. In a follow-up letter to the mayor, the Newburyport Preservation Trust encouraged a settlement amount equal to or greater than the cost of the remedies, and that funds be directed to the neighborhood.

The “Frankenstein House” is next on the ZBA agenda on Tuesday, May 24. ■



Everybody gets into the act at NPT's Do It Ye Self program April 16. (Photo by Novak Niketic)

Lime mortar expert Fabio Bardini a hit

Lime mortar expert Fabio Bardini was a hit at the most recent in NPT's “Do It Ye Self” series, “There's More to Lime Mortar” on Saturday, April 16 at the Perkins Mint.

The master mason, a native of Florence, Italy, introduced the evolution, composition, and application of masonry mortars through history. Then participants mixed their own and repointed bricks on a practice template.

Have a new topic? Contact Matt Blanchette (978-697-5135; email: bchette@gmail.com). ■

Historic house pride!



Homeowner Dixie Patterson installs her plaque from NPT's Historic House Plaque Program.

Opinion: City approval of 114-118 Merrimac Street project would reward speculation – and encourage demolition-by-neglect

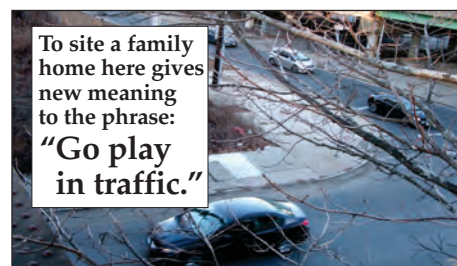
By Reginald W. Bacon,
Member, NPT Board of Directors

On Tuesday evening, May 10, 2016, at City Hall, the Newburyport Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) will hear the latest plan from the non-owner real estate speculators hoping to plunk a two-family home on a too-small lot at the craziest free-for-all intersection in the city: Merrimac Street and Rte. 1.

Yes, this location is the now-vacant lot of the former Mr. India restaurant, an 1846 brick building that was ordered razed in 2015 after years of neglect. The owners of the restaurant, now in business on High Street, still own the vacant land at 114-118 Merrimac Street. The land sale is contingent on approval of the non-owner's proposal.

In my view, the proposal for a two-family home looming over the noisy and fume-fogged intersection was ill-advised in the first place, and remains so. Further, ZBA approval of this proposal would reward speculation and encourage demolition-by-neglect.

The saga began in June 2014 when the prospective owners, in hopeful speculation, sought approval to demolish the former 1846 firehouse, a contributing structure within the city's National Register Historic District. After plans became known, public opposition to variances and special permits was raised in meeting after meeting. The day before one hearing on the oft-continued issue, Mother Nature took over: On February 23, 2015, snow loads caused a partial collapse of the roof, creating a public hazard. The city building inspector issued the demolition order.



To site a family home here gives new meaning to the phrase: “Go play in traffic.”

Since then opposition has intensified, not only to the traffic hazard, but also to the tall building's negative impact on the adjacent Rail Trail. At this writing, it appears the ZBA hearing on Tuesday, May 10 will go forward.

Two good reasons for opposition:

(1) **Public safety.** The plan of cars blindly nosing out of the cave-like garage right at the craziest free-for-all intersection in town is just as insane as it was at the last hearing.

(2) **Approval sends the wrong message.** If approved, the *property owner* would, in effect, be rewarded for neglecting the building that was on the site until it began to fall down, and the *speculator* would be rewarded for pressing forward with a too-big and too-dumb project on a too-small lot.

The astute reader of the Preservation Week schedule will note that I will be giving a presentation elsewhere on May 10. A full house is welcome, but on this night I say “Skip it.” Go to City Hall instead, and speak against rewarding demolition by neglect. ■