

NEWBURYPORT
PRESERVATION TRUST

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www.nbptpreservationtrust.org

Linking the past with the present and future



Quarterly Newsletter of the Newburyport Preservation Trust

Fall 2022

Two new historic site interpretive panels installed at William Lloyd Garrison birthplace



Low-key ceremony on September 25 gets national publicity

On September 25 NPT celebrated the installation of two new historic site interpretive panels about anti-slavery crusader William Lloyd Garrison across from his 1805 birthplace on School Street.

In 2020 NPT began consulting with the developer on the renovation of the Garrison birthplace. The 24x36 panels about the house and Garrison's life complete that project. Production of the panels was coordinated by NPT member Andrea Eigerman, and was funded by NPT, the Morrill Foundation, the Newburyport Bank, and the city's Community Preservation Act Committee.

The ceremony at Garrison Gardens drew about 40 invitees. Brief remarks about the legacy of William Lloyd Garrison were presented by NPT board member R. W. Bacon. A longtime member of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), Bacon also highlighted the relevance of Garrison's fortitude as a champion of free speech. SPJ followed up with surprisingly far-reaching national publicity for Garrison and NPT. ■

Regulation of short-term rentals exposes the clash of profiteers vs. neighborhoods

Proposed ordinance fails, but now-illegal STRUs still operate

After two nights of debate, discussion, and public comment on the reasonable regulation of short-term rental units (STRUs like Airbnb) in mainland Newburyport, two votes of the City Council on September 12 illuminated a clash of real estate investor interests vs. neighborhood resident interests.

Way back in December 2021, after months of hearings with public input, the outgoing City Council completed the draft of a comprehensive zoning ordinance to regulate STRUs that was ready for a vote. In early 2022 the newly-elected City Council began eviscerating the prior council's work.

On August 29 the watered-down version of the ordinance was introduced to the full City Council – and full house of citizens. But prior to a vote, Councillor-at-Large Connie Preston introduced an 11th-hour amendment to grant “amnesty” to all current absentee owner-investors and multi-property investors to continue in an unregulated free-for-all. This

was not palatable to ward councillors more tuned-in to resident concerns – concerns of not only parking, trash, and noise, but also of the short supply of long-term rentals, and the eroded social capital of neighborly relations. Discussions were then continued to Sept. 12.

The September 12 meeting was another full-house of stirred-up residents. After more public comment and discussion, the amnesty amendment came to a vote and failed to pass (6-5). Then the watered-down version of the STRU ordinance came to a vote *without* the amendment. In a vote that suggested spite, four proponents of amnesty voted against *any* STRU regulation – even a relatively toothless version. The ordinance needed eight votes to pass. It failed 7-4.

The result is that at present *all* STRUs in mainland Newburyport are technically illegal. STRU operators have been notified, but the city will send enforcement orders – with notice of fines – only after complaints.

The hope is that the City Council revisits the reasonable, enforceable STRU ordinance that was ready to go in December 2021. ■

Coming in 2023: A newly conceived NPT newsletter

Relief is on the way! In 2023 look for a fresh new conception for NPT's email newsletter. Ideally the new format will be more compatible with 21st-century reading habits. Your current editor/designer, who for the last decade has crafted articles for the NPT *Quarterly News* in complete sentences within logically connected paragraphs, now hopes for the best as we adjust to the reality of evolving attention spans. Thank you for reading through the years. – R. W. Bacon ■



Above is NPT board member Rita Mihalek ... also a federally-licensed customs broker.

Newburyport's 1835 Custom House recognized by NPT's Historic House Plaque Program

A new bronze plaque from NPT's Historic House Plaque program is now in place on the corner of Newburyport's 1835 U.S. Custom House building.

The October 21 ceremony to introduce the plaque on the building, home of the Custom House Maritime Museum since 1975, featured remarks of customs-relevance and preservation-relevance by Rita Mihalek,

the NPT board member and federally-licensed customs broker who sponsored the plaque and the research behind it.

The new plaque recognizes the building's architect, Robert Mills (1781-1855), known for his later design of the Washington Monument. An adjacent existing plaque recognizes leaders of the Custom House restoration in 1972-1975. ■

Zoning Board of Appeals denies special permit to add shed dormer on First Period saltbox

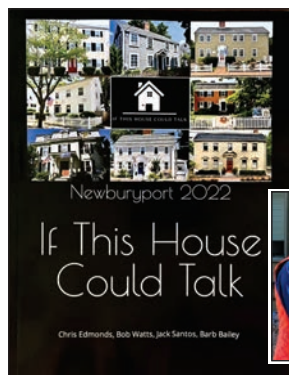
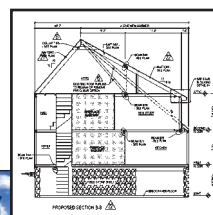
September 13 was a momentous date for the Newburyport Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA). The application for a special permit to add a massive shed dormer onto the roof of a c. 1657 saltbox house at 2 Neptune Street was finally voted on and denied.

The long slog began in August 2020, when the Historical Commission, after a public hearing on the dormer plan, voted 6-0 that the house be "preferably preserved," and imposed a one-year demolition delay.

The first ZBA hearing on the special permit was in April 2021, and the plan for the gross alteration of the iconic form prompted considerable public comment. Then, in at least eight continuations and microscopic revisions, every time the board was about to vote, the owner-applicant was allowed to "withdraw without prejudice."

At the October 11 ZBA meeting the owner requested "reconsideration" of the vote. This was denied. The decision stands. ■

Below is a recent view of the 17th-century Pettingill House as seen from Water Street. At right is the plan for a shed dormer. The request for a special permit was denied by the ZBA.



At left is the cover of the 2022 edition of *If This House Could Talk*. Below, (l. to r.) are two of the four co-authors, Barb Bailey and Chris Edmonds.



The greatest gift book idea of the season: *If This House Could Talk* – all new 2022 edition

Hot off the press for the holiday gift-giving season is the 2022 edition of the *If This House Could Talk* book – in hardcover and paperback editions! (\$49.95 & \$25.00)

This year's book is a high-quality 148-page photographic record of all 80 of the homeowner-crafted posters for the 2022 "If This House Could Talk" event during the city's mid-summer Yankee Homecoming.

The city-wide event began in 2016 as the initiative of NPT member Jack Santos. The volunteer-powered event is sponsored by NPT and the Newburyport Archival Center.

Speaking of quality, the credited authors of the book are Chris Edmonds, Bob Watts (photos), Jack Santos, and Barb Bailey.

Buy the book at Jabberwocky Bookstore in Newburyport or at www.Amazon.com. ■

William Lloyd Garrison Lecture to feature Prof. Kabria Baumgartner



Kabria Baumgartner, Ph.D., is an author and historian of the 19th-century United States, with a specialization in African American history.

This year's William Lloyd Garrison Lecture features Kabria Baumgartner, Ph.D., presenting "I Will Be Heard: Antislavery Printing and Youth Activism at William Lloyd Garrison's Liberator Office." The program is 7 p.m. Saturday, December 10, 2022 at the Old South Presbyterian Church, Newburyport.

Kabria Baumgartner is Professor of History and Africana Studies at Northeastern University.

The program is made possible by a Bridge Street Grant via the Massachusetts Council on the Humanities. ■



At left is the Oakland St. house before crews from *This Old House* began their work.



This Old House TV series features Oakland St. home

In late August 2022 the crews of the television series, *This Old House*, wrapped up their work on a home on Oakland Street in Newburyport. The project will be shown on season #44 of the series.

On the last day of filming, a plaque based on research by NPT's Historic House Plaque Program was mounted on the c. 1902 house that recognizes the original owner, Hannah Twomey. ■