



NEWBURYPORT
PRESERVATION TRUST

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Linking the past with the present and future



Quarterly Newsletter of the Newburyport Preservation Trust

Winter 2022

Deteriorating Fowle's sign has become a symbol ...

But symbolic of what?

Planning Board to consider plans for windows and sign at public hearing February 16

The Art Deco sign on the facade of the former Fowle's newsstand and soda shop has long presented its symbolic quality on Newburyport's lower State Street.

But after a year of public hearings before city boards – and multiple strategic continuations by a tenant seeking to install operable windows for a restaurant – one might fairly question just what the long-neglected sign has now come to symbolize.

- The building owner's years of neglectful and irresponsible stewardship?
- The tenant restaurateur's curious definition of a proposed "restoration"?
- The legal representative's apparent contempt for the city's pro-preservation zoning laws?
- The public's fatigue, as evidenced by declining participation at public hearings?
- A general indifference to real historic preservation in Newburyport?
- And to some, is advocacy for saving a worn-out sign of a defunct business an irrational attachment to the past by backward-looking preservation fanatics?

At the Newburyport Planning Board meeting of January 19 (via Zoom), the board heard the tenant restaurateur's application for a Downtown Overlay District (DOD) Special Permit. The applicant's representative presented plans for the installation of automated rail-mounted sliding-and-stacking windows. (These systems are designed mostly for indoor applications like shopping malls.) While the installation is reversible and allegedly would not alter the window openings, restaurant patrons in winter would need lap robes and hot cider upon arrival ... as the heat – and any concerns for energy conservation – would rush out through the gaps between window sections.



At the same meeting, plans were also presented for a "restoration" of the Fowle's sign. This "restoration" would include cleaning the sign, removing all the black paint from the original incised architectural glass (and from the several more recent flat plastic replacement panels), and then painting in the current restaurant's name in a cobbled-together typographical facsimile.

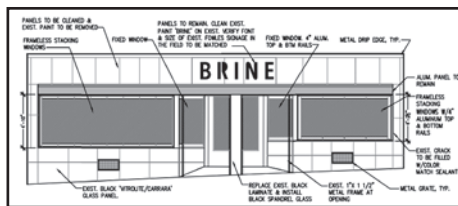
During the public comment period, the most passionate speaker about the value of preserving the Fowle's sign was a longtime visitor to Newburyport calling in via Zoom from Pennsylvania. Four NPT members (three speaking as private citizens, and one

speaking for NPT) expressed reservations about the plans. Just one public commenter expressed support for the plans.

The plans for the windows, however, were not specific enough for the Planning Board, which requested corrections and more details from the applicant. The public hearing was continued to **Wednesday, February 16, at 7 p.m.** (via Zoom).

Up-to-date details are at the city's website: <https://www.cityofnewburyport.com/planning-board>. It is also important to note that the restaurateur's separate challenge to the validity of the city's pro-preservation DOD law is still active.

Despite other pressing concerns of global, national, and local import, if you support Newburyport's pro-preservation zoning laws like the DOD, mark your calendar for February 16 and contribute your thoughts about the plans at the public hearing. Let's not let this case become a symbol of our public indifference. ■



It's NPT Annual Meeting time once again! Mark your calendar for Sunday, February 27

Mark your calendar for Sunday, February 27 at 4 p.m. and "Zoom in" with fellow members for the Newburyport Preservation Trust 2022 Annual Meeting.

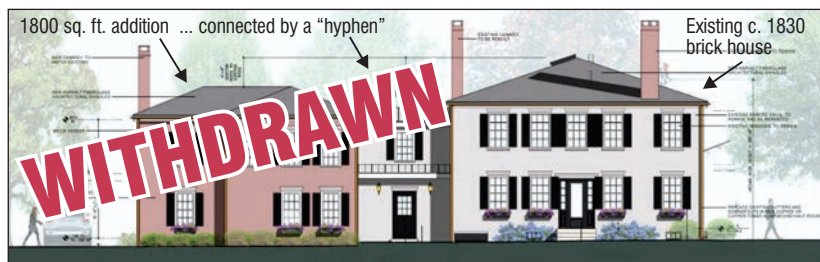
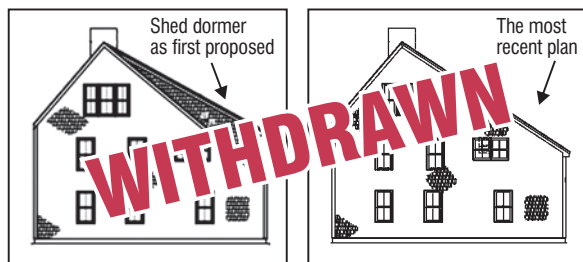
Just like last year, public health conditions at this time preclude a large indoor in-person gathering, so once again meeting via Zoom was deemed the best alternative. Log-in information will be sent to members as the event draws near.

Although Zoom participants are on their own for the usual delectable refreshments, attendees can thrill as NPT board members

review activities of the past year, including accomplishments in preservation advocacy, growth of the Historic House Plaque Program, sponsorship of the annual William Lloyd Garrison Lecture, and completion of the Historic House Buyer's Guide.

As we reflect on the last two years, the NPT's 2020 Annual Meeting, a convivial event at the Riverside Café in the Towle Building, was only a few weeks before the abrupt pandemic shutdown.

We hope to "see" you among the Zoom attendees on February 27. ■



Preservation advocacy notes: Tiny tidbits of tentative good news

In resistance to the ongoing pressures of growth, development, and profit, public opposition to two recent proposals led to the plans being withdrawn at hearings before the Newburyport Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA).

Both proposed projects threatened the integrity of contributing structures in the city’s National Register Historic District with decidedly incongruous additions.

In both cases, however, the applicants seeking special permits from the ZBA were allowed to “withdraw without prejudice” just before a board vote of certain denial. This means that tweaked proposals just a few inches smaller will likely be back before the ZBA – and the public – sooner than later.

On November 23, 2021, just days after circulation of the last issue of NPT’s *Quarterly News*, the owner of 2 Neptune Street, which is one of the few remaining 17th-century homes in the city, presented

new plans for the highly-visible saltbox form along Water Street. In this sixth continuation of the hearing before the ZBA, the owner abandoned previous plans for a giant shed dormer on the saltbox roof that generated vocal opposition, and instead proposed raising the entire back wall and changing the pitch of the roof. After public comment and ZBA deliberations, it was clear that the special permit would not be granted if a vote was taken, so the applicant requested to “withdraw without prejudice.” The request was granted unanimously.

At the ZBA meeting of January 11, 2022, the would-be developer of the distinctive c. 1830 brick two-family home at 22-24 Olive Street presented another iteration of plans for a two-story 1800 sq. ft. addition on the leafy corner lot. In the first round of plans – months ago before the first of seven continuations – the bland infill addition suggested a minimum-security barracks designed from the inside out. One might

wonder if this was a deliberately shudder-inducing starting point, so that the developer’s subsequent concessions to design changes would be met with neighborhood relief and acceptance.

But the coalescence of neighborhood opposition in the form of letters, emails, petitions, participation at public hearings, and the tenacity to hang in through months of continuations could not be ignored. When it became clear that the special permit would not be granted if the ZBA proceeded to a vote, the applicant requested to “withdraw without prejudice.” The request was granted unanimously.

In both of these cases, the Newburyport Preservation Trust stated its opposition to the proposed plans at the public hearings. In addition, several NPT board members and general members spoke as private citizens. The Olive Street and Russia Street neighborhood made an impression in forging its unity against profit-driven infill.

Meanwhile preservation-conscious concerned citizens have to stay in game-time condition, because it appears that the game of “kick the can down the road” is always in season. ■



Edward Carson, above, Dean of Multicultural Education at The Governor’s Academy in Newbury, Mass., presented the 2021 William Lloyd Garrison Lecture on December 10 at Newburyport’s Old South Church.

W. L. Garrison Lecture addressed the imperative of facing up to the legacy of white supremacy

In 2020 the Newburyport Preservation Trust initiated and presented the first William Lloyd Garrison Lecture, featuring Harriet Tubman scholar Kate Clifford Larson. The receptive online audience of hundreds in that pandemic year was a clear message to continue the topical series.

As a co-sponsor in 2021, NPT joined with several like-minded co-sponsors and presenting partners to engage Edward Carson, Dean of Multicultural Education at The Governor’s Academy in Newbury, to present “The Gospel According to Garrison: Anti-Racism and the American Truth.” The lecture drew a wide audience both in-person and online, and can be still be viewed on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0jcHPqrgsc>.

Some might ask “What does this topic have to do with preservation? Or Newburyport?” Well, our National Register Historic District is peppered with Federal-era structures from our city’s period of late-18th-century prosperity. As we take pride and pleasure in the architecture, we can also acknowledge that it is the surviving material representation of gains from the region’s slavery-dependent West Indies trade economy. At best, awareness of this connection may help us better understand the present and navigate the future. ■

Preservation Week 2022? It’s a definite ‘maybe’

Public health concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic have put NPT’s usual annual spring Preservation Week activities on hold since 2020. For 2022 the board is *considering* a Preservation Week of outdoor walking tours based on our deferred topic of Newburyport’s 19th-century mill buildings. Stay tuned.