

**HISTORIC DISTRICT &
HISTORIC PROPERTY
COMMISSION**

Kevin Quinlan, Chair
Colleen Fawcett, Vice Chair
Helen Whitten, Clerk
Matthew Kehoe
Allison Sanders
Al Stauderman
Alternates
Peter Gaboriault
Carol Lenihan



**TOWN HALL
238 Danbury Road
Wilton, Connecticut 06897**

**Tuesday, October 6, 2015- Special Meeting Minutes
7:30 PM Old Town Hall**

- I. Chairman Quinlan called the meeting to order at 7: 32 seating Commissioners Quinlan, Fawcett, Whitten, Kehoe, Sanders, Stauderman and alternate Lenihan. Commissioner Quinlan explained the special meeting was called because the Commission has a deadline of 15 days to determine whether or not to impose a demolition delay on a property, and that our regular scheduled meeting (2nd Tuesday of each month) did not fall within the deadline.
- II. Ongoing Business:
- A. Current Demolition Delays –
- 211 Hurlbutt Street – The owners have expressed interest through their builder in preserving the chestnut floors to be used in their new home. There is still interest in the original timber frame and the builder and interested party are trying to coordinate the possibility of removing and relocating the frame. The demolition delay expires on November 11, 2015.
- B. Intent to Demolish Notification –
- 183 Ridgefield Road – Chairman Quinlan explained the limited authority of the Commission as it pertains to the demolition delay ordinance:
1. Structures, and portions of structures more than 500 square ft, that are 50 years and older are considered for demolition delay by the Commission
 2. The Commission considers historic, architectural and/or cultural value of structures when determining whether or not to impose a 90-day delay
 3. The purpose of the delay is to allow time for the Commission and/or the CT Historic Preservation Office to find a purchaser who will retain or remove a structure or who will present some other reasonable alternative to demolition
 4. There is no authority to mandate that the owner of the structure/property sell the structure or property

5. And that at the end of the 90-day delay, the demolition permit will become effective and demolition may occur.

Chairman Quinlan reported that he toured 183 Ridgefield Road with the owner the previous morning and noted that the house, though suffering from maintenance neglect (it has been unoccupied for a couple of years) is one of the town's architecturally notable homes and that the notable architectural features are evident on both the exterior and interior. He noted rot, and other evidence of water damage in the home. He also noted the house's unique character and some features that were in good shape including some wide-board floors, marble mantles, ceiling medallions, and ceiling heights. He added that because of the extensive disrepair and neglect that it would take a lot of money and TLC to renovate. Additionally the main barn has a very significant timber frame structure that is in very good shape for its age, although the barn is dilapidated but not falling apart like the garage and shed. The barn is a notable example of Wilton's agricultural history. The garage and shed are not notable and are in very bad condition.

Commissioner Quinlan stated that the builder/developer owns the land and structures, and there is nothing that the Historic District can do to undo property owner's rights. He also noted that the town officials he spoke with about the property indicated that the town has no interest in directing funding towards any preservation of the house.

Commissioner Quinlan also said that any local news media outlets that reported that the owner made promises to keep the structures intact were reported to be inaccurate by the owner.

Commissioners explained the limited authority of the Commission, including that even if a house was located in a local historic district, a house could be demolished. The Commission reiterated the limits of their authority, but also expressed hope that a solution to save the structure/s will be found.

Commissioner Quinlan reported that the owner has expressed intent to self-delay, and does not plan to demolish for a while, which makes the Commission more hopeful that an alternative can be found. Commissioners also expressed the opinion that 90 days gave very little time to find reasonable alternatives and expressed the desire to know about historic home / properties when they come onto the market so as to be more proactive in being able to find alternatives to demolition.

Commissioner Quinlan reported that there has been much public dismay expressed regarding the intent to demolish and much passion expressed regarding trying to find an alternative to demolition. This home is one of only three Italianate Victorian homes in town.

Commissioners discussed the historic and architectural value of the structures and a motion was made by Commissioner Stauderman and seconded by Commissioner Sanders to impose a demolition delay. There was no further discussion and all voted in favor of the motion to impose a 90-day delay.

Commission Quinlan opened the floor up for comments and questions from the public, approximately 40 people. Comments and questions were:

- When was the house last occupied? – 2 years ago, and has been on the market shortly after being unoccupied.
- Saving some of these historical structures take a certain amount of magical, creative thinking – that working with a developer in a way to help them think that there is good reason – and usually it’s tied to financial reasons – to preserve a structure takes creative thinking.
- Engaging the town planner in ideas and thinking in such a way as to preserve some of these special historic places is important
- An online petition with 343 signatures to date on change.org was started by a concerned citizen interested in finding a solution other than demolition of the home
- Those in attendance decided to form a group to work proactively with the town planner and property owner to find a solution that will save this home.
- Hillside Cemetery abuts the property, Commission received an email from Pamela Brown of Congregational Church that was read into the record, stating: “One of the major concerns the Wilton Congregational Church Cemetery Committee has regarding potential development is the depth of property setbacks. It would be our desire to have very generous property setback along the border of the oldest section of Hillside; perhaps with a line of trees and natural shrubs left in place. We feel it would be intrusive to people visiting the cemetery to see the neighboring backyards, pools, playsets, etc.”
- Concern was expressed about losing the beauty of the property, and trees. Commissioners directed concerned citizens to Planning and Zoning, and the Town Planner. The Commission is unaware if there are wetlands on the property.

Commissioner Stauderman thanked all those in attendance for attending the meeting and expressing their concerns in such a helpful and constructive manner, which made him proud of his community. He was grateful that people understood the Commission was operating with limited authority to save structures from demolition. Commissioner Stauderman said that beyond the authority of the Commission, that all citizens can work to influence legislation and governance that will create conditions that will give more power to preserve some of our valuable historic structures.

III. New Business

- A. Review and Discussion of CT Trust for Historic Preservation Model Demolition Delay Ordinance – Tabled for November meeting

IV. Other – There being no further business, the meeting was ended at 9:11PM
Submitted by Vice-Chair Fawcett

