

Demolition Review Committee
Minutes of Meeting of November 3, 2017
Meeting held at 151 Portsmouth Avenue

Members Present: Nathan Merrill, David Canada, Rebecca Mitchell, Dana Dowling. Fred Emanuel arrived at 9:25 am.

Guests: Mark Morong, Stratham Building Inspector and Code Enforcement Officer; Allison Knab, Chair of the Stratham Conservation Commission; Cantrece Forest, Program Coordinator, Stratham Parks and Recreation.

Nathan Merrill, chair, called the meeting to order at 9:05 am.

Consideration of Demolition Review Applications:

#2017-755 for 149 Portsmouth Ave.

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Mr. Merrill reviewed the demolition applications for 149 Portsmouth Avenue, the Parker House, and 151 Portsmouth Avenue, the Old Town Hall, filed by Mark Perlowski, owner of Persimmon Homes LLC, the party that has entered into a purchase and sale agreement with David Short, the current owner of both properties. Mr. Short submitted a written statement giving his permission for Mr. Perlowski to submit the demolition applications.

Mr. Merrill reviewed the criteria for eligibility for demolition review and the criteria to be considered in the committee's deliberations. He further stated his estimation that both buildings are eligible for review and meet the criteria for historic significance. He noted that the Old Town Hall has been determined eligible for listing on the NH Register of Historic Places.

Ms. Mitchell stated that in her opinion each application should be voted on separately, and made the following motion:

"I move to invoke the 30 day delay for the proposed demolition of the house at 149 Portsmouth Avenue, commonly referred to as the Millie Parker House, because of its architectural interest and its historic role in the Town Center. By the same criteria the house is preferably preserved."

Mr. Canada seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Following that vote Ms. Mitchell made the following motion:

“I move to invoke the 30 day delay for the proposed demolition of the building at 151 Portsmouth Avenue, the Old Town Hall, because it is historically significant due to its architectural distinction, its position in the Town Center, and its historic role as the locus of Stratham’s governmental, cultural, and social life for more than a century. By these criteria the Old Town Hall is preferably preserved.”

Mr. Canada seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Mitchell, for the record, read the following short summary histories of the two buildings:

Parker House, 149 Portsmouth Avenue

This house, built in the early 20th c. eclectic cottage style, is unusual among Stratham dwellings of that period. Indications are that it was built by the company operating the electric trolley line, established in 1902, that travelled along Portsmouth Avenue. A car barn and water tank located just south of the house serviced the system, and at the time of the 1910 Federal Census the house was occupied by a streetcar conductor.

In 1930 the house was sold to the First Christian Society of Stratham and served as a parsonage. In 1944 the house was purchased by Charles Parker, the last pastor of that church, and his wife Mildred. Their daughter, also Mildred (“Millie”) lived in the house until 2001.

Old Town Hall, 151 Portsmouth Avenue

After at least 2 decades of deliberation the Town purchased a parcel of land from George Wingate in 1877 and in the same year the building contract was awarded to Charles Leavitt who had previously submitted plans for the building. Leavitt, working with his brother Hezekiah, completed the building in time for its dedication on Nov. 28, 1877.

In 1956 a fire that started in the highway department sheds at the rear of the property spread to the rear of the Town Hall destroying the stage. The building was renovated and continued to serve the town until the decision was made to move Town offices and departments to the then-vacant former Stratham Memorial School at 10 Bunker Hill Avenue. The move was

completed in 1991, and in 1997 the Old Town Hall was sold by vote at Town Meeting to David Short for \$165,000.

Mr. Merrill noted that he and Mr. Canada will be meeting with Mr. Perowski at 2:00 pm today.

Proposal to Streamline Some Demolition Applications

Mr. Merrill stated that at its September 13th meeting the Heritage Commission expressed its support for simplifying the review process for properties that, while meeting the criteria for review, clearly did not require consideration either because the structure in question obviously lacked historic significance or because the proposed demolition was insignificant in its scope or nature. Mr. Merrill further stated that while the details of the procedure need to be fleshed out the general idea is that in such cases the Demolition Review Committee chair could determine that no review was necessary and would notify committee members of that decision. If any single member objected, then a meeting of the committee would be held. Lacking any objections, the chair could notify the Code Enforcement Officer that the demolition permit might be issued without further review.

In ensuing discussion there was general agreement that this is a suitable approach to formulating a procedure that would streamline the committee's operation and ease the burden on some applicants.

Mr. Merrill suggested that Demolition Review Committee members attend the Nov. 8 meeting of the Heritage Commission.

The meeting adjourned at 9:40 am.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rebecca Mitchell
Secretary pro tem