

NEWBURYPORT  
PRESERVATION TRUST

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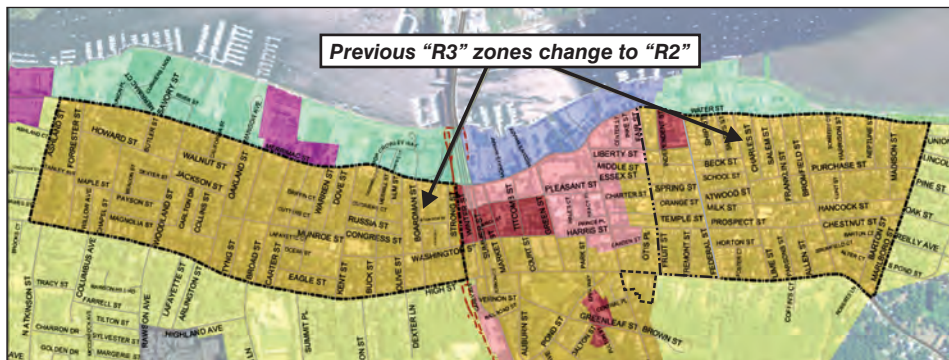
Linking the past with the present and future



Quarterly Newsletter of the Newburyport Preservation Trust

Fall 2017

## City Council approves two zoning changes that aim to preserve the integrity of the city's historic neighborhoods



The map above indicates the previously-designated R3 zones (multi-family use permitted) that have been redistricted to R2 zones (two-family use permitted). This redistricting should be effective at deterring infill and projects that carve up single-family homes into multiple units ... until developers find the next loophole!

Positive zoning reforms continued in recent weeks as the Newburyport City Council unanimously approved two zoning amendments that should help preserve the central city's historic character and neighborhood ambiance. (See map at left.)

On October 30 the City Council unanimously passed the second reading of the zoning amendment to redistrict much of the North End and South End from "R3" (multi-family use permitted) to "R2" (two-family use permitted). This amendment *should* prove effective – at least until the next loophole – in (1) preventing "infill" development projects that gobble the little remaining open space in our more dense neighborhoods, (2) preventing projects like those that formerly carved three units out of single- or two-family homes, (3) preventing projects that result in incongruous multi-unit "tower houses," and (4) preserving the smaller-footprint, smaller-price-tag single- and two-family homes in our National Register Historic District neighborhoods.

On November 13 the City Council unanimously passed the second reading of the High Street Residential Districts Ordinance that creates two new zoning districts intended to preserve historic character by limiting new developments to single- and two-family homes, and imposing minimum lot-size requirements.

Any new development within High Street Ridge Residential District A in the South End will require a minimum lot size of 1.5 acres, in keeping with the deep rear yards. The High Street Ridge Residential District B in the North End will require a minimum lot size of .75 acres.

The High Street Residential District Ordinance *should* prevent the subdivision of the deep yards of historic High Street properties. To view a map of the new districts, visit [https://www.cityofnewburyport.com/sites/newburyportma/files/uploads/high\\_street\\_residential\\_districts\\_and\\_map.pdf](https://www.cityofnewburyport.com/sites/newburyportma/files/uploads/high_street_residential_districts_and_map.pdf). ■

## Preservation restrictions required for Merrimac Street '1690 House' project & Towle Building move forward

Two preservation restrictions – one on the developer-compromised "1690 House," the other on the adjacent Towle Building – were brought before the Newburyport City Council on Monday, Nov. 13.

The preservation restriction on the c. 1730s "1690 House" at 262-264 Merrimac Street includes an exterior restoration requirement at the developer's expense ordered by the Massachusetts Historical Commission. The restoration plan was prepared by preservation architect Henry Moss in collaboration with preservation architect and NPT co-president Linda Miller. The preservation restriction must be approved before Berkeley Investments/First Republic Corp. of America can obtain all but two additional occupancy permits. Unfortunately, restoration of the interior – the developer originally promised to retain certain original features – is not part of the preservation restriction.

Also before the City Council is a preservation restriction on the former headquarters of the Towle Manufacturing Co. at 260 Merrimac Street. The brick mill

building that stretches for 200 feet along the street was built in 1866 for the Merrimack Arms Mfg. Co. Although the building has long had an iconic presence, it has no protections against removal of architectural features or demolition. In light of what has transpired with the developers in the last decade, the Newburyport Planning Board is requiring an exterior preservation restriction.

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Above is the "1690 House" at 262-264 Merrimack Street. Located on one of the city's busiest roads, the current view of the compromised structure is well-known. Above is a view from well before the last decade of conflict – and before the days of million-dollar condos – in 1980.

## City's zoning enforcement officer moves to full-time status in January

In June 2017 the City of Newburyport hired a part-time zoning enforcement officer, a response to years of questionable enforcement by an overburdened city building department.

Jennifer Blanchet, a Syracuse University educated architect and planner, began the 18-20 hour per week position in the Planning Office in support of the Building

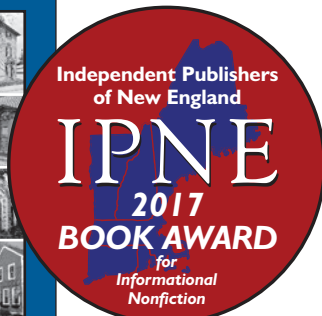
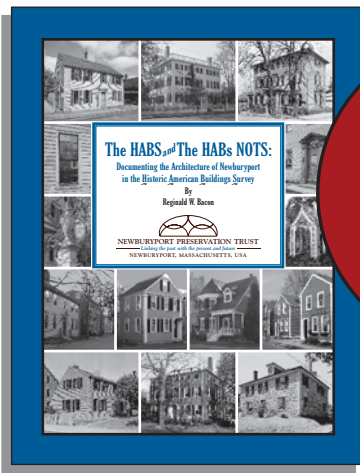
Dept., ensuring that builders conform to the permits and variances that local boards have approved.

In a development worthy of brass band fanfare, the zoning enforcement officer position is to become full-time in January 2018. The ordinance creating the position states that the zoning administrator "shall have the independent authority and duty to

cause any plans, buildings, or premises to be examined or inspected to determine that they are not in violation of any provision of this ordinance."

The appointment of a dedicated zoning enforcement officer working outside of and independently of the city Building Dept. was long overdue, and long advocated by NPT members and exasperated citizens.

On January 1, the plan is to have all building permits originate in the Office of Planning & Development. The aim is also to streamline the process for projects requiring a special permit or variance. ■

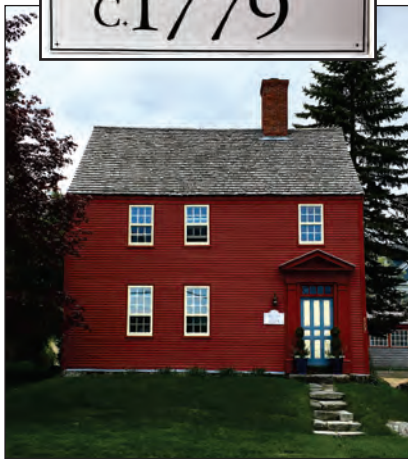


The HABS and The HABS NOTS ... by NPT board member R.W. Bacon received the IPNE 2017 Book Award for Informational Nonfiction.

## The newest 'must have' book on Newburyport architecture is recipient of 2017 Book Award

The HABS and the HABS NOTS: Documenting the Architecture of Newburyport in the Historic American Buildings Survey, published earlier this year by Variety Arts Press in conjunction with the NPT, received the 2017 Book Award for Informational Nonfiction from the publishing industry group, Independent Publishers of New England (IPNE). The author, NPT board member R.W. Bacon, accepted the award at the IPNE conference on November 4 in Arlington, Mass. The 160-page large-format hardcover is available for purchase at Jabberwocky Bookstore in Newburyport as well as online at [www.NbptPreservationTrust.org](http://www.NbptPreservationTrust.org), [www.VarietyArtsPress.com](http://www.VarietyArtsPress.com), and [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com). For information or to read excerpts, visit the publisher's website at [www.VarietyArtsPress.com](http://www.VarietyArtsPress.com). ■

Marian Leighton Levy, a longtime supporter of the Newburyport Preservation Trust, engaged the NPT Historic House Plaque Program to research her house at 323 Merrimac St. The result is the fine plaque seen below.



## NPT is front-and-center at Architecture Boston Expo

The entire arc of Newburyport's 50-year renaissance – and the recent history of the Newburyport Preservation Trust – were front-and-center at ABX 2017 at the Boston Convention & Exhibition Center on Nov. 9.

NPT board member R.W. Bacon, museum professional, author, and frequent presenter

on early American domestic architecture, was engaged to speak at the "Envisioning the Future" symposium and panel by the Boston Society of Architects Women in Design Committee. Although clearly a man, the presenter stressed that he was brought in not as a "token man," but rather as "the designated woman." (Instant applause!) ■

## ABX 2017

### "1690 House" & Towle Bldg. ... from page 1

Both measures will be studied by the council's Planning and Development Committee, and then deliberated by the full council before voting.

To summarize how the above situation evolved: The city issued a Special Permit in 2007, in which the developer was required to rehabilitate the building according to the U.S. Dept. of the Interior Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings. These requirements were ignored. Original architectural features, interior and exterior, were removed. The all-volunteer member advocates of the Newburyport Preservation Trust maintained that the original features

should be restored. Instead, the developer proposed paying the city "recompense" for its transgressions. Meanwhile, the City of Newburyport sought the opinion of the Massachusetts Historical Commission, and withheld occupancy permits for 10 units of the 15-unit Towle redevelopment project. In all, the "1690 House" issue has involved the city's planning board, the city and state historical commissions, hardy NPT researchers and advocates, valued citizen commentators, knowledgeable architects, and the developer's representatives.

At long last in this case, Newburyport citizens may ultimately see enforcement of city zoning laws. But despite the victories to date, the tussle is not entirely over. ■