

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

Spring 2014

Preservation zoning laws passed: Demolition control finally in place throughout National Register District

NPT documentation & advocacy efforts – plus member support – contributed to passage

April 15 is not usually a date to celebrate, but it was this spring, when the Newburyport City Council voted into law two pro-preservation zoning ordinances that offer unprecedented protections to contributing structures throughout the city's National Register Historic District.

The votes to approve the Downtown Overlay District and the Demolition Control Overlay District – both proposed by first-term Ward 2 councilor Jared Eigerman, were unanimous. Newburyport Mayor Donna Holaday signed the ordinances into law the next day.

An assist from NPT. During the three-month process leading up to the passage of the new ordinances, several councilors cited assistance of the Newburyport Preservation Trust in confirming the accuracy of the National Historic District survey records compiled for the U.S. Department of the Interior in 1984. In addition, NPT board and members alike supported passage of the ordinances with letters, e-mails, and comment at numerous public hearings.

What the laws do. The Downtown Overlay District (DOD) ordinance replaces and expands preservation protections for the downtown business district that expired in 2005. The protections include design review and demolition control. The Demolition Control Overlay District (DCOD) covers contributing structures listed in the National Register Historic District, which extends from the Joppa neighborhood in the South End to Atkinson Common in the North End, roughly between the Merrimack River and High Street. Approximately 2500

'On the same page' for historic preservation. The Newburyport City Council is all smiles after the "historic" unanimous vote on pro-preservation zoning ordinances on April 15. Left to right: Charlie Tontar, Bob Cronin, Larry Giunta, Ed Cameron, Tom O'Brien, Allison Heartquist, Bruce Vogel, Barry Connell, Ari Herzog, and Jared Eigerman. Not pictured is Megan Kinsey, who was part of the March 31 unanimous vote. (Photo by Novak Niketic)



contributing historic structures (1930 or earlier) were identified in the survey of 1984. Complete text of the new ordinances, with maps, is available on the Planning Department page at the city's web site, www.CityofNewburyport.com. (Click on "Recent Zoning Amendments.")

Coming right up: A full schedule for Preservation Week May 14-18, 2014

Preservation Week, the signature annual event of the Newburyport Preservation Trust (NPT) is Wednesday through Sunday, May 14-18, 2014. This year Preservation Week celebrates the 250th anniversary of the town of Newbury's "Waterside" separating into the new town of Newburyport in 1764. This year is also the 30th anniversary of Newburyport's designation as a National Register Historic District.

Preservation Week features a varied program of illustrated lectures, architectural tours, social events, and a closing reception to present the annual Preservation Awards. For a complete schedule of this year's Preservation Week activities, visit the NPT web site at www.NbptPreservationTrust.org.

The new ordinances also change the procedure for the demolition application and permitting process, as decision-making authority will rest with the city's Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals. The Historical Commission, which administered the now-superseded one-year demolition delay ordinance, will now serve both boards in an advisory role.

Significant in the ordinances is reliance on the best-practices in the architectural preservation field as set forth by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

It was a long time coming. The following overview is provided to supplement the depth of local news coverage:

1971. A few years after the 1960s urban renewal wrecking ball was halted, and the city turned to restoration of its downtown instead of demolition, the Market Square National Register Historic District was designated. At the same time, support mounted to protect the downtown and High Street as a Local Historic District. Even then, an LHD was already a proven approach to protecting historic architecture and streetscapes. Despite considerable public support, the measure did not attain the super-majority vote of the City Council.

In 1984, several years of research and documentation resulted in the central Newburyport area from Joppa to Atkinson Common being designated by the U.S.

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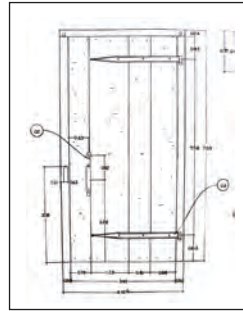
Powder House report destined for archives at Library of Congress

Formal presentation of the Newburyport Powder House Historic American Building Survey (HABS) report to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. is imminent. Last fall, students from Boston Architectural College, under the direction of Robert W. Ogle, the school's Director of Historic Preservation, and Johanna Rowley of the BAC faculty, documented the restored 1822 Powder House through measured drawings, photo studies, and historic research reports.

The HABS program, which began in 1933, has archived over 38,000 historic structures from throughout the U.S. Today the HABS program is administered by the National Parks Service, with its archives housed at the Prints and Photographs Division of the U.S. Library of Congress.



The HABS report on the Powder House includes measured drawings by BAC students.



In other Powder House news:

- Six school groups are scheduled to visit before the end of the school year.
- Tours during Preservation Week will be Saturday, May 17, 1-3 p.m., with musket-firing demonstrations at 1:30 and 2:30 p.m.
- The Cobblestone & Brick Location Plan, completed by NPT volunteer (and surveyor) Everett Chandler, has been presented to the Massachusetts Historical Commission, an important step in clearing the way for the upper landscaping at the Powder House.

Have a sneak preview of NPT's newest project: Historic House Signs

Among the latest initiatives of the Newburyport Preservation Trust is a Historic House Sign program that will at once be (1) a service to interested homeowners, (2) a way to increase awareness of our city's remarkable domestic architecture of many periods, (3) a way to increase awareness of architectural preservation, and (4) a way to increase NPT's public visibility.

Details of the program are far from refined to a finished state. Basically an interested homeowner would engage NPT to research (or verify) the history of the house, and once confirmed, produce a durable historic house sign of uniform design – with the NPT logo – ready for mounting. Cost of the research-and-sign combination has not been determined. In addition to increasing awareness of the city's historic homes, the program will also serve as a continuing fund-raiser for NPT.

As the program takes shape, more details will be available on the NPT web site.

City Council unanimous on pro-preservation zoning

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Department of the Interior as a National Register Historic District. As the largest such district in Massachusetts (7500 acres), the designation was a point of pride, but it offered little in the way of protection from wholesale changes or demolition.

In 1991, the city completed its Historic Preservation Plan. Recommended as a key component of this long-range plan was the establishment of a Local Historic District.

In 2001, the city finished a comprehensive Master Plan. Recommended for the preservation of historic architecture was the establishment of a Local Historic District.

In 2007, a Local Historic District Study Committee of citizens was appointed by the mayor to begin the procedure to establish an LHD in Newburyport according to state law. For five years the committee took surveys, held hearings, and crafted a minimally-restrictive LHD based on public input.

In 2012, misinformation about the proposed LHD created such a divisive atmosphere that even a shrunken, watered-down LHD did not attain the required super-majority (8 of 11) vote of the City Council in January 2013.

In fall 2013, the preservation issue was one of many on the minds of voters in the municipal elections. An LHD opposition group promoted a slate of candidates for mayor and council. Not one was elected.

In early 2014, shortly after the new City Council was seated, the preservation zoning ordinances were proposed by newly-elected Ward 2 Councilor Jared Eigerman.

The newly-constituted City Council worked together, studied the proposals, received civilized public comment, held joint public hearings with the Planning Board, and refined the ordinances in preparation for a vote. Votes on March 31 and April 15 were unanimous.

While the new zoning ordinances are worthy of celebration, the preservation of our historic architecture and streetscapes requires constant attention. The city's zoning laws are slated for overhaul, and its Master Plan is being revised. Vigilant representation of preservation interests is vital. Meanwhile, the usual players will continue to look for loopholes in regulations, and those with deep pockets will still try to prevail through the appeals process. That's old news. As everywhere, life goes on. And in civilized places around the world, so do worthy efforts to preserve architectural and cultural treasures.

– R.W. Bacon







Photo by Tom Kolterjahn

Words not necessary ...

Going ... going ... and almost gone.

Built about 1750.
Neglected, stripped, and set for demolition in 2014.



Photos by Novak Niketic