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**CITY OF BEVERLY  
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES**

BOARD OR COMMISSION: City of Beverly Historic Districts Commission  
DATE: January 7, 2026  
LOCATION: Beverly City Hall, City Council Chambers, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair William Finch; Vice Chair Suzanne LaMont; Wendy Pearl; Emily Hutchings; John Leahy; Christian Heath  
STAFF PRESENT: Director of Planning & Development Darlene Wynne  
RECORDER: Kristan Patenaude

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**Call to Order**

Chair Finch called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

**Recess for Public Hearing**

**1. Public Hearing – Demolition Delay Application – 38 Standley Street – Waring School c/o William Potter (owner) and Jason Garry, contractor (applicant)**

Finch reviewed the Demolition Delay process and noted that the Commission had visited the site to view the building a week prior. The core of the building appears to be a late first period house. The detailing of the framing seems to be dated to 1700-1720. Deed research suggests a date of 1718. A portion of the property may have been removed later in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. There is a small building on the property that was built as a shoe shop, which appears to date to between 1800-1830. On the 1858 Essex County Map, the structure is labeled as a shoe shop and owned by Osbourne. Additions have been made to the building over the years, to both the west and east sides. A summary of the property history was provided. The house in question was lived in by Harold Jefferson Coolidge Jr.; he was a renowned zoologist who retired to the house. Harold Jefferson Coolidge Jr. died in 1985, and his widow sold the property in 1990 to the Waring School.

William Potter, Director of Finance & Operations of the Waring School, explained that a demolition application was submitted because the Waring School is land-rich but fiscally challenged. The building has been vacant for the past ten years. There are mold/health concerns with the building. It is not fiscally responsible to renovate the building, and the request is to demolish it.

Chair Finch then opened the public comment portion of the hearing.

Shawn Mahoney, Eagle Lane, discussed the history of this building. He stated that he believes the house should be preserved. He suggested a year delay and offered to work with the applicant and the City to come up with unique preservation ideas. The whole building should have a demolition delay placed on it.

Fay Salt, 66 Haskell Street, read a letter from Abby Battis, Director of Historic Beverly, which expressed opposition to the proposed demolition of 38 Standley St. The letter was read into the record. The property represents a significant and layered component of Beverly's architectural, cultural, and social history. The house appears to be a first period structure, though this warrants further scholarly investigation. Over time, the property has passed through the hands of several prominent Beverly families and has deep roots within Beverly's early settlement patterns. Additional research and documentation are needed, rather than irreversible action. In later years, the property was owned by Harold Jefferson Coolidge who was a prominent zoologist, a Harvard faculty member, and a founding director of the World Wildlife Fund. During World War II he served in the Office of Strategic Services where he notably supervised Julia Child. In the 1960s[sic], Mr. and Mrs. Coolidge commissioned a thoughtfully designed mid-century modern addition, reflecting an important evolution of the house which contributes to its architectural significance. Mr. Coolidge, a direct descendant of Thomas Jefferson, was buried at Monticello following his death in Beverly in 1985. The proposed demolition of 38 Standley St. would result in the permanent loss of an irreplaceable historic resource and represents another potential blow to the character and continuity of Beverly's historic landscape. Given the property's architectural features, layered ownership history, and associations with both the early Beverly families and nationally significant individuals, it merits further documentation, careful evaluation, and serious consideration of preservation-oriented alternatives, consistent with the mission of the Historic District Commission and the City of Beverly's preservation goals. Salt stated that she is against this house being demolished. The City needs to put teeth into the demolition delay.

Caroline Mason stated that demolition delay ordinance is no match for greed. People who own properties of this type are stewards of history and have an obligation to preserve this for the future. Demolition by neglect is a common reason for buildings to be demolished. Each time a similar property is lost, a piece of the City's history is lost. There are so few first period properties left in the City.

Dorothy Hayes, 680 Hale Street, spoke in opposition of demolition of the structure. The building meets the criteria of distinctive architecture and social history of the City. Creative planning could help preserve the structure while also meeting the applicant's goal. Owners have the responsibility of being good stewards of these properties.

Finch noted that there is substantial deterioration to the exterior trim of the building sections.

Chair Finch closed the hearing and the Commission began its deliberations.

The Commission addressed the question of if the property is historically significant and, if so, for what reasons.

Pearl stated that the property has layers of historical significance that relate to the architectural, cultural, and economic history of the City and that the structure clearly tells a story. She noted that a letter from the Planning Department to the applicant asked for additional information including a reason for the proposed demolition and data to support that reasoning. She did not see any data regarding why this needs to be demolished. It is unclear if there is a cost estimate or

an assessment which could be offered. Pearl mentioned that during the site visit, the applicant mentioned that the 10 footer would be moved, but it is shown as being razed on all of the plans. She said that this is an example of a rare architectural and economic form in the City.

Potter explained that the Board of Directors did research and brought a contractor on site. It was determined that, due to structural issues and mold, it would be cost-prohibitive to invest in the structure. Pearl asked the cost, as was requested on December 17<sup>th</sup>. Potter stated that he would have to obtain that information. The School determined that the 10 footer building could be moved if someone wants it. It could also be moved across the street.

Finch noted that there is also a third structure, a garage, on the site. This was likely built in the late 1970s-1990s.

Leahy stated that the building is in poor condition, but he has seen worse. The structure's significance is clear.

Hutchings agreed that there is clear historic significance linked to important persons of the City, the economic development of the City, and the architectural development of the City.

LaMont stated that it is disheartening that it seems to be a foregone conclusion that these structures will be demolished. Demolition does not meet the City's preservation goals.

Heath stated that the property is an integral part of the City's historic fabric. Demolition would lead to a historic impact on the community.

Finch stated that the core of the property, as a late first period structure, is highly important. The addition, made in 1978, and renovations are interesting as an early solar thermal design. The entire structure should be considered significant to the City.

Leahy: Motion to find the property at 38 Standley Street, including the main building and the 10-footer accessory building but excluding the garage, as Historically Significant for reasons of historic associations with important persons of Beverly, economic use of the property, and architectural features. Pearl seconds. Motion carries (6-0).

In terms of the designation of Preferably Preserved, the Commission noted that the three concepts presented for the residential development plan all include one of the four parcels where the existing structures are located. A suggestion was made to explore the four unit yield in a way to retain the two buildings on one of the lots. This would protect the streetscape, and all of the cultural, architectural, historic aspects that are valued.

Pearl stated that this property, unlike some that come before the Commission, is highly visible and conveys its history in a unique architectural form. There is a public benefit to understanding why the building is being preserved and what it says about the City's history. This property is very clearly visible from the street. The relationship between the original farmhouse, the house

as a whole, and the shoe shop should be retained. Separating the structures would diminish the importance of the shoe shop. The property should be considered Preferably Preserved because of the public benefit. This property has shown that it can accommodate a lot of change; it is resilient and currently shows how architecture changes over time. This shows that rehabilitation and reuse could be contemplated, because the property has been shown to be able to withstand change.

Finch stated that the property is an example of how to add to an historic structure without overwhelming it. The addition is set back so as not to impede upon the view of the original structure. It also sets itself as being clearly modern. The framing in the historic building looks to be in sound condition.

Hutchings stated that planning tools are usually incentive-based and the City should continue to discuss how to improve its toolkit to protect historic features like these buildings.

Pearl: Motion that the Historic District Commission determine that 38 Standley Street, the main house and the shoe shop, are Preferably Preserved due to their historic significance, the public benefit of the preservation of the property, the potential for a sensitive rehabilitation, and the potential to integrate the property into a subdivision project in the future. LaMont seconds. Motion carries (6-0).

## **Reconvene Regular Meeting**

### **2. Discussion: Pre-application discussion about potential demolition (non-binding discussion and not a public hearing) – 824 Hale Street – 824 Hale Street, LLC c/o Whitney Savignano (owner/applicant)**

Peter and Whitney Savignano, owners/applicants, explained that their house is very close to the lot line of 824 Hale Street. In purchasing the 824 Hale Street property, they considered renovating the house and making it livable. They brought in contractors to review the existing structure. The staircases are very shallow and steep. Half of the house has no foundation. There are many renovations that would be needed. The structure does not seem to be particularly historically significant or culturally relevant to the area. There have been additions to the house over the years. There is a request for the potential demolition of the house in order to start conversations regarding what could be possible.

LaMont noted that the house was built by John West. Savignano stated that this was an agricultural property. The information provided seemed to indicate that it was not historically significant. Hutchings stated that the survey by the historic preservation expert found that it could be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, though it was not listed at that time of the survey. Clear historic significance is indicated through that survey. Savignano asked if the whole structure would be considered significant.

Finch stated that the core of the house shows it to be a first period structure. The first step is to hire an architect and come to the Commission with a potential plan. Hutchings stated that a

demolition delay review would seek additional information from the applicant. This will move the process forward and allow the applicant to work with the Commission on a solution that hopefully works for everyone. The Commission discussed a potential site visit with the Savignanos and stated that if they would like to go ahead and schedule a site visit, they could reach out to Planning staff to coordinate.

Savignano thanked the Commission for its input.

**3. Essex Heritage Partnership Grant – Submitting a grant application for interpretive signage at the Beverly Powder House.**

LaMont asked about the matching funds for this potential grant and the cost to make a sign. Wynne stated that there may be some budget funds that could be used as a match. There is not an in-house designer and so one would likely need to be hired for this project. Hutchings stated that she would follow-up on this item. The deadline for the grant application is February 16<sup>th</sup>.

**4. Request for Letters of Support: CPA Application for Central Cemetery and Tomb House – Scott Houseman, City Councilor**

Wynne stated that she has started a draft letter of support for this project. There was agreement from the Commission that a letter of support for the project should be submitted, as both cemeteries and landscapes are a priority for preservation. Comments to add to the letter include: the project is consistent with the goals of the priorities of the Historic Preservation Plan; the cemetery and tomb house are high-profile and threatened. Parameters for recommended approval include a request for periodic reviews to ensure compliance with the Secretary of Interior's Standards. The Commission would like to review the scope of work for any professional hired to undertake the project and to review any final products, including those for assessment and construction.

Pearl: Motion to submit a letter of support for the project. Leahy seconds.  
Motion carries (6-0).

**5. Adjourn**

LaMont: Motion to adjourn. Pearl seconds. Motion carries (6-0).  
Meeting adjourns at 8:05p.m.