

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

ZONING AND PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT

MONDAY, MARCH 10, 2003

Present: Ald. Yates (Chairman), Ald. Lappin, Baker, Johnson, Sangiolo, and Lennon

Absent: Ald. Gentile and Mansfield

Also present: Ald. Bryson

City officials: Planning Director Michael Kruse, Assistant City Solicitor Michael Baseman, Committee Clerk Linda Finucane

#196-02 NEWTON UPPER FALLS HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
submitting pursuant to MGL Chapter 40C, Section 3, a recommendation that ARTICLE III. HISTORICAL COMMISSIONS AND DISTRICTS of the City of Newton Revised Ordinances, 2001, be amended by establishing a local historic district in Auburndale

ACTION: APPROVED AS AMENDED 4-2 (LAPPIN, LENNON)

NOTE: At its meeting on January 27, 2003, the Committee had agreed to submit the proposed changes in the district to the Upper Falls Historic District Commission which had served as the Auburndale Historic District Study Committee. The question as submitted to the NUFHDC was the narrow one if whether or not the proposed historic district would still be a valid historic district if one or more of the proposed reductions were made . The District responded yes to the specific committee question, re-affirmed the preferred status of its original district boundaries, and pointed out that of the three proposed cuts; Option 3 contained the most historic resources. (See attached.)

Option A

This option removes streets on the southeastern border of the District. Only one lot is on the National Register of Historic places, and it was vacant when the lot was listed on the Register. It includes properties on the south side of Vista Avenue and on Hawthorne Avenue. Only one house in the area has even been the subject of an historic survey. The overwhelming majority of the properties in this area are much later than the target period just before and just after the turn of the 19th into the twentieth Century.

Before the vote on this specific amendment, several members addressed the general issues surrounding the proposed district. Alderman Baker based his experience as a resident of the Chestnut Hill Historic District since its beginning. He has found the

Chestnut Hill Historic District to provide him with useful advice on how to upgrade his property in financially reasonable manner and not to unduly interfere with or restrict property owners. He urged that this district be approved so that the people of Auburndale could enjoy the benefits of a district as soon as possible. Alderman Johnson said that the development of the Newtonville Historic District had demonstrated to her the benefits both in physical appearance and in community spirit of districts. She felt that Auburndale would realize similar benefits and will vote for the district. Alderman Sangiolo felt that the extensive process had demonstrated the overall benefits to Auburndale of the district and that a substantial majority of the homeowners who live in the proposed district support it.

Alderman Lennon said that the proposed reductions in the size of the district diminished its historical integrity in his view and that he would not vote for any of the reductions. Alderman Lappin was disturbed by the role that the desire to control Lasell had played in the push for the district. She was loath to take away any one's rights without virtually unanimity among those affected. She hoped that some alternative mechanism in which residents who did want to keep their homes historic would have the ability to obtain assistance in doing so. Alderman Bryson said that she felt that the process in enacting the Historic District had become flawed because of the committee's decision to consider changes from the district boundaries that had been reviewed by the Newton Upper Falls Historic District Commission and the subject of at least two public hearings. She also felt that the contribution of Lasell to the community was being undervalued and will present detailed information on that the Board.

The Committee then voted 4 (Yates, Baker, Sangiolo, Johnson) to 2 (Lappin, Lennon) to accept Option A.

Option B

The properties are in the northeast corner of the district in the Central Close area that Alderman Lipsitt had described as different from the rest of the district. The Committee voted to approve the elimination of this Option by the same 4-2 vote as had approved elimination of Option A.

Option C

The Newton Upper Falls Historic District Commission had described this option as having the largest number of historic resources of the three options. They include a single-family house on Central Street that is listed separately on the National Register of Historic Places. Alderman Yates noted that across the street from this house was also a site where an historic house had been removed and replaced with several modern buildings. The nearby residents would thus be surrendering their right to alter their property without review without acquiring a compensatory right of review of the long-since-completed new development. Nevertheless, no one offered an amendment to approve Option C.

Ordinance as Amended by Options A and B

Alderman Baker moved approval of the item as amended and spoke of his first hand knowledge of the benefits of historic districts to property owners in them like him. Alderman Johnson restated her support for the District. She was pleased that the Newtonville District had passed and hoped that the Auburndale District would as well. Alderman Sangiolo spoke passionately of the long history of the effort to establish the historic district and the strong community support for it that she was happy to reflect. Alderman Yates said that the Upper Falls Historic District had been a major factor in the revitalization of that village and that a district would similarly benefit Auburndale. As to the role of Lasell, he noted that at least half of the properties in the Lasell National Register Historic District were not even owned by Lasell. He also noted the Walker Home Historic District and other individual properties listed on the National Register further demonstrated that the historic value of properties in the proposed district had been long established and not limited to Lasell's properties. Lasell had asserted that other colleges in historic areas, particularly Harvard, were not subject to historic districts. A letter from Cambridge had explained that the city and the University had come to an arrangement in which the school agreed to recognize the National Register status of some of its properties in its future planning and development and the city agreed not place these properties in a local historic district. Lasell has made no such offer. Alderman Bryson strongly objected that several possible compromises between the school and the Lasell Neighborhood had been proposed but never fully agreed to. Alderman Yates understood the long history of attempts to develop such a compromise but the fact that they had not succeeded despite the extensive efforts of Aldermen Bryson, Sangiulo, and Stewart was the only relevant fact at this point. Lasell's speaker had brought the Harvard example.

The vote in favor of the District as amended was 4 (Yates, Baker, Johnson, Sangiolo) in favor and two opposed (Lennon, Lappin).

Respectfully submitted.

Brian Yates
Chair

Attachments: Map of District with National Register properties and options.
Letter dated 3/13/02 from Cambridge Historical Commission re Harvard agreement
Memo dated 9/9/02 from Gretchen Schuler
Relevant Sections of previous Committee reports