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CITY OF NEWTON

Planning and Development Board

2/24/2022

To: Newton Historical Commission Chair Peter Dimond
City of Newton
1000 Commonwealth Avenue
Newton, MA 02459

Subject: Planning & Development Board Recommendation on the
Proposed Landmark Designation for 206-208 Concord Street

CC: Honorable Newton City Councilors
Planning & Development Board
Valerie Birmingham, Chief Preservation Planner

The Planning and Development Board is authorized under Newton's Landmark Ordinance [Section 22-64 (d)] to make recommendations to the Newton Historical Commission regarding properties that have been nominated for landmark designation. This Ordinance provides that the Board "may make a recommendation which evaluates the relationship of the proposed designation to the city's adopted policies and plans and the effect of the proposed designation on the surrounding area. The planning and development board shall also make recommendations regarding any other planning considerations relevant to the proposed designation."

The Planning and Development Board received a memorandum on February 4, 2022 outlining the historical significance of a property at 206-208 Concord Street that had been nominated to be designated as a local landmark. This is a two- and one-half story structure constructed around 1830 (with newer additions to the rear of building) that sits on a lot of more than 28,000 square feet. It was later owned and occupied by members of the Crane family, known for its paper mills in Newton Lower Falls and elsewhere in Massachusetts. Upon the death of one of the Crane family owners in 1846, his widow and three children remained residents of the property and also housed boarders connected with the local paper mills.

The property is located in a modest residential neighborhood of similarly-sized residences and is close to the Newton Lower Falls Historic District. It is also near the main commercial street in the Newton Lower Falls village and within a mile of transit hubs at Riverside and Wellesley Farms. The

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current structure is configured as two units and it was reported that the current owner is a developer whose intent is to maintain the two units as condominiums (or possibly as rental units). The future plans for the remainder of the large lot, however, remain unclear.

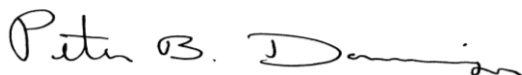
The Board relies on the expertise of the Newton Historical Commission for assessing the historical importance and historical context of individual properties. In this case, the architecture is described as “vernacular federal style” and is considered to be representative of houses where workers as well as owners of paper mills lived during the much of the 19th century. More important, however, is the connection of the property to member of the Crane family who, by all accounts, were important contributors to the cultural as well as the economic life of the community.

There was widespread agreement among individual Board members that 206-208 Concord Street represents the type of property that played an important role in the lives of paper mill owners and their employees during the period from the late 18th century through the mid-19th century when the paper industry was central to the Newton Lower Falls economy. Some members spoke to the importance of the connection of the house and its residents to the historical fabric of the neighborhood and the wider community. It was also mentioned that the property is adjacent to, but not part of, the historic district around St. Mary’s Episcopal Church and that it is one of a cluster of three houses of the same vintage on Concord Street.

The Board then turned to a discussion of the status of the current property, the relationship of the proposed landmark designation to the City’s adopted policies and plans, and other planning considerations that Board members felt were relevant to the proposed designation. Much of this discussion focused on the consequences of the historical preservation of the property for Newton’s goal of increasing its stock of more-affordable multifamily housing. Board members raised a wide spectrum of questions about the possible futures for the property including whether historic preservation would ensure the continued availability of two housing units and avoid the teardown and replacement of these units with a larger single family or would inappropriately interfere with adding additional housing units to a large lot that is near village amenities and within an easy commute to good public transportation.

While individual Board members were inclined in somewhat different directions on the question of whether or not to recommend landmark status for 206-208 Concord Street, it was also clear from the discussion that the available evidence provided to the Board was not sufficiently compelling to vote for or against the preservation of this property. Accordingly, the Board decided that this was a case where it should exercise its option of taking no action on the nomination. The Board voted six in favor, none opposed, with Planning and Development Director Heath abstaining on a motion not to recommend or oppose the landmark nomination for 206-208 Concord Street.

Best Regards,



Peter B. Doeringer, Chair