

MINUTES OF WEST HARTFORD TOWN COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING ON AN
ORDINANCE AMENDING THE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
ORDINANCE TO ENHANCE THE HISTORIC AND ARCHITECTURAL
PRESERVATION FUNCTIONS OF THE COMMISSION

December 2, 1997

Council Chambers

999, 1166

President Rob Bouvier called the hearing to order at 7:24
p.m.

Present were Councilors Holly Abery-Wetstone, Rob Bouvier,
Kevin Connors, Carl Donatelli, Liz Gillette, Jim O'Brien,
Patrick McCabe, Jim O'Brien and Al Turco.

President Bouvier: Any comments from the administration?
Mrs. Wilder.

Mrs. Wilder: Yes, very briefly. Mr. Hughes from the
Historic District Commission is here and he can give you the
background but let me just point out a couple of things. It
looks like we have a new function for the Historic District
Commission in Subsection C but that is not a new function.
That is the existing function of that commission which is
spelled out in detail in the Code of Ordinances, Section
103-6. It is merely a suggestion to reference that function
of the Historic District Commission in this section of the
ordinances as well. When somebody looks up the functions of
the Historic District Commission they can see this as an
easy reference so it is not a new function at all but just
a reference to an existing function in another section of
the ordinances.

The new functions of the Historic District Commission are
outlined in Subsection D which is underlined here for you.
The impetus to this proposal came from Mr. Hughes to the
Council asking or suggesting that the Historic District
Commission might have a role to play in architectural
preservation in the town's education and the type of things
listed in one through four in Subsection D. Mr. Hughes is
far better qualified to discuss those than I am but just as
outline of what this ordinance does I hope that helps.

President Bouvier: Thank you, Mrs. Wilder. Anything
questions? Why don't we proceed to public comment.

Mr. Hughes: Good evening. I am Richard Hughes with the
Historic District Commission. I also live in West Hartford
and reside at 34 Ten Acre Lane. The ordinance before you
adds to the current responsibilities of the Historic
District Commission's certain activities which were
heretofore performed by the Architectural Heritage
Committee.

The Architectural Heritage Committee was created in 1986 by

Council resolution and therefore needed to be recreated by every new Council. It was charged with monitoring the historic buildings in West Hartford to become acquainted with their imminent demise through demolition or destructive alterations. It performed that role for a half dozen structures, some successfully, some not. Over the years, though there hasn't been that much demand for the committee meetings on a regular basis it was hard to keep a committee going with sporadic meetings.

In discussing, I discussed with the former Mayor Nan Glass two or three months ago the problem of recreating the Architectural Heritage Committee and she suggested and we both collectively wondered whether it made more sense to vest these responsibilities in the Historic District Commission. The Commission as you know was created by ordinance which is permanent until you revoke the ordinance. We meet monthly and we are already performing some of the functions of the Architectural Heritage Committee had chosen to do and we are committed to do these things through the Connecticut, State of Connecticut enabling legislation.

Recently we worked with the Town Plan and Zoning Commission and planning staff in writing a historic preservation chapter to the new plan of development. We, at your request, have developed a historic preservation awards program which you will be hearing about at your meeting on the 16th. We are working with the Connecticut Historic Commission mapping the historic properties that were identified in the survey of 1979 through 1985. We intend to working with that document update the survey and include properties which were maybe overlooked or properties which are now qualify for recognition as historic properties.

We feel that the extension of our responsibilities into looking after threatened buildings is a logical one and we urge you to act favorably on this ordinance.

President Bouvier: Thank you, Mr. Hughes. Any questions? Mrs. Gillette.

Councilor Gillette: Having followed your Commission fairly closely, it is my understanding these are functions that you have been doing almost on a routine basis. For instance, you do get notification of demolition of buildings currently, don't you under State statutes?

Mr. Hughes: We do under the Town, from an agreement with the Town we do.

Councilor Gillette: I guess the education portion, I was wondering if you could elaborate on what your Commission had in mind in terms of D-3, what ideas you have with that. It is the portion that is of educating the general public

concerning the historic and architectural heritage.

Mr. Hughes: We are citing in that the awards program and that is a beginning. I think that the purpose of that program is to raise awareness in the community of the historic preservation issues by recognizing projects, renovations, adaptive reuse projects which have been done which we consider very successful.

Councilor Gillette: The kind of brochure that your Commission did on the Buena Vista area, is that the sort of thing that you see coming under educating, under this portion as well?

Mr. Hughes: Quite possible, yes.

Councilor Gillette: That is terrific thing.

Mr. Hughes: In fact we have talked about a brochure, although we haven't, there is only so many things we can do at once, but it is on the calendar to do a general brochure from the Commission to the community on historic districts and their preservation in general.

Councilor Gillette: Thank you.

President Bouvier: Thank you, Mr. Hughes. Any further questions? Is there a sign up sheet? Mr. Norman Asbridge.

Mr. Asbridge: I am still the same person and am still in the same face. Norman Asbridge, 24 North Quaker Lane. As I read this proposal, it seems to me that we are lucky to get a little more power and a little more choice in what we can save in West Hartford and I am all for it. I think this is our town. We should have as much choice as possible. We should be notified as directly and as quickly as possible of any changes or threats of demolition of what we consider to be historically valuable property, aesthetically or in any other way. Again, I just think we have a town here that is unusual if not unique and if we don't look after it and add more power to the Historic Commission and more power to any aesthetic improvers then there could be a conflict. Let's go with it. Let's hang on to and put all the power we can in the hands of people determined to preserve what we have and to oppose those who threaten it in whatever way is possible. That's all I have to say.

President Bouvier: Thank you, Mr. Asbridge. Mr. Genduso.

Mr. Genduso: Domenico Genduso, 80 Blue Ridge Lane, West Hartford. Mr. Mayor, members of the Town Council. I never cared really about the Historic District Commission because we have nothing in West Hartford really that we can call historic. The only one that I can think of is the Webster

House not because it is historical because of the house by itself when it was built, historical because it was owned by Noah Webster. That's all. I don't see any Visinteen, Greek, Roman or even the Incan or brick Columbian houses in West Hartford. I have one next door to me on Flagg Road that nobody wants to buy when the guy died and house that is assessed for \$204,000 I think it was the assessment. It sold for \$85,000. Then the guy in order to use it, used it to have a tag sale but he cannot have more than three tag sales, and resorted to renting. In order to rent he had to spend \$1,500, you should see the basement still with small stones like this, no concrete, no nothing, they tried to reinforce the foundation, the basement you have to go like this. He cannot change the floor because he has to change the house new because the floor boards, the ones they used to use a few years ago. They didn't have parkade floors you know.

He wants to do something but he cannot do it because I don't think they permit him to do it. I heard other people say the same thing. Like they have here on the Boulevard. It is declared a historic district and Raymond Road? I didn't see anything there, special houses. I don't see an estate. You can say it is an architectural something. The only one in Hartford you know, but here in West Hartford really I don't know why we have this stuff.

Once your house is declared a historical district you are in trouble because if you have to go find a bathroom the way they used to a few years ago, or the kitchen and stuff like that, I don't know if that is included in preserving the ambiance and the environment, the old style of the house if it is included in this requirement but I mean it is something that doesn't work.

I want to tell you something. I just came back from Italy a month and a half ago and looking every time and people tell me grandfather stuff like that because they were the founders of the town. One day I said I want to go and see it because when I was a kid I didn't know this stuff. I went over there and I asked somebody where is my ancestors, which one was the first house here. Who knows he said. They were over there but now it is all down. They have been building new houses. That is good and this way we don't have junk around because that is what they look like after a while, junk buildings.

I will say forget about giving a prize because that is what this is all about, the ordinance, from what I understand, to give a plaque for the best house, the big house, or architectural, that is nothing. Thank you very much.

President Bouvier: Thank you, Mr. Genduso. Any other public comment on this ordinance amending the Historic

District Commission ordinance to enhance the historic and architectural preservation functions of the Commission? Mr. Thomas. Any comments on this public hearing?

Mr. Thomas: (Inaudible).

President Bouvier: Does it have to do with the subject of this public hearing?

Mr. Thomas: I don't even know what the public hearing is on.

President Bouvier: Okay. All right. Then we will take any other questions here from the Council. If not, we will close this public hearing. Thank you.

The hearing adjourned at 7:42 p.m.

Norma W. Cronin
Town Clerk/Council Clerk

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