

CITY OF CONCORD, NH
DEMOLITION REVIEW COMMITTEE
SEPTEMBER 6, 2023, MEETING
MINUTES

Attendees: James W. Spain, Richard Jaques, and Dr. Bryant Tolles

Absent: Michael Dunn

Staff: Tracey Hutton, Zoning Administrator

Meeting commenced at 6:00 pm.

Public Agenda

- 1) Call to Order
- 2) Demolition Review Board Committee Introduction
- 3) Brief overview of Demolition Review Board Function and Process
- 4) Public Hearings:
 - a) 8 Water Street - Freight House
 - i) Public Testimony
 - ii) Correspondence
 - b) 8 Water Street - CSX Switch Tower
 - i) Presentation – Elizabeth Durfee-Hengen
 - ii) Presentation – New Hampshire Preservation Alliance
 - iii) Public Testimony
 - iv) Correspondence
- 5) Hearings Closed / Non-Public Discussion
- 6) Demolition Review Board Decision
- 7) Open Forum – Public Discussion – Final
- 8) Adjournment

Chairman Spain called the meeting to order. He then provided the audience an overview of the Demolition Review Committee's role as it relates to the Heritage Commission. He further explained that while the Demolition Review Committee cannot stop the demolition of a building, they can cause a needed pause so that alternatives can be researched. The 60-day potential hold period for these buildings has about 30 days left at this point.

Chairman Spain explained that there are two building with the same address on the agenda, though their locations are not near to one another. The CSX Freight House and Switch Tower are both addressed as 8 Water Street; the freight house is off Storrs Street and the Switch Tower off Gas Street.

The Chairman opened the public hearings. The first property discussed was the Freight House. The Chairman discussed that this property had been visited by the Committee two or three years ago. The building has degraded quickly since that time. There was a question from the audience whether or not there was street access to the property and if there was potential for the City to purchase this portion of the 8 Water Street lot.

There being no other comment from the public on the Freight House the committee moved on to discussion of the Switch Tower. Althea Barton, representing the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance, and Elizabeth Durfee-Hengen made a presentation on the history of the Switch Tower. It was described how the rail was an integral

part of the industrial corridor in Concord. At one point the rail repair shops, in the area where the Switch Tower is located employed some 1300 workers. Ms. Durfee-Hengen explained the importance of the demolition review process and how the delay allows the time to seek a long-term solution.

Rick Kfoury, VP of the Boston and Maine Railroad Historical Society, explained that the Concord Switch Tower was the hub of short line railroading in New Hampshire. Now, there is only one other Switch Tower left and that is in Manchester. He stated that unfortunately the Manchester Tower is in even worse condition than the one here in Concord.

Ron Rainer, a Concord resident since 1989, commented that this building and the Gasholder go together and should be preserved together. He further added that while there may be issues to resolve in terms of ownership, access, and track crossing, that it would be a worth while endeavor for educational purposes. He also requested that the City ask the landowner to cover the roof with a tarp now that the shingles have been stripped off.

Matt Benzie, a self-proclaimed railroad enthusiast, sees value in the structure in its proximity to the Gasholder. A similar structure was restored in Portland, ME, and has been retrofitted for use. Jeff Bartlett, a youth resident of Concord who loves history, said it would be ashamed to lose a structure so rich in history. The railroad was central to Concord's economy.

Chairman Spain let the public know there had been eight pieces of correspondence sent in favor of attempting preservation of the Switch Tower. He invited Peter Dearness and Mr. Kfoury to make their presentation on the history of the structure. Following that presentation, the Committee conferred about the status of the buildings and what the disposition should be.

It was determined that both buildings are historically significant. However, due to the rapid deterioration the committee feels the Freight House could be demolished immediately. On the other hand, the Switch Tower should be delayed the 60 days. This will give interested parties time to see if they can preserve the building in some way. The Committee charged the audience to come up with ideas to see which options could be possible. The Committee directed staff to request the roof of the Switch Tower be covered. Chairman Spain and Mr. Jaques thanked the public for their interest and dedication to the preservation efforts.

A **motion** to adjourn was made by Mr. Jaques, seconded by Dr. Tolles and passed by a unanimous vote at 7:05 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Tracey E. Hutton
Zoning Administrator