

City of Pawtucket

Historic District Commission

Meeting Minutes

**Tuesday, October 8, 2024 at 6 p.m.**

**Pawtucket City Hall, Planning Conference Room**

A. Opening:

The meeting was called to order at 6:06 by Chairman Bacon.

B. Roll Call:

Present (6): Jason Bacon, David Sisson, Bruce Tillinghast, Adam Beauregard, Brian Greene, and Tom Perry.

Staff (4): Bianca Policastro (Director of Planning and Redevelopment), Carl Johnson (Director of Zoning and Code Enforcement), Jason Pettinato (Senior Planner), and Officer Greg Melo (Community Police Unit).

Members of the Public (25): Michael Pompili, Nathan Luciano, Kelly Adams, Zachary Russell, David Fagnoli, Kate McCoy, Joseph (Zoom), Jay (Zoom), Bethany Gregor (Zoom), Angie Cooke (Zoom), John Okechukwu (Zoom), HK (Zoom), Kelly (Zoom), Oscar (Zoom), Diony Garcia (Pawtucket School Department Legal Counsel), Megan Havrilla (Colliers Project Leaders), Holly Demers Sawyer (Colliers Project Leaders), Jonathan Levi (Project Architect), Mark Andrade (School Committee, CEO), Joanne Bonollo (School Committee), Ed McNaught (Shawmut), Gordon S. Zaniol (Shawmut), Ludger Bain (Shawmut), Pat Ford (Coalition Radio), and Channel 10 News (Zoom).

C. Approval of minutes:

A motion was entertained by Chairman Bacon to approve the minutes from the September 10, 2024, meeting. Mr. Tillinghast made a motion to approve the minutes and amend them to correct the spelling of Mr. Greene's name. The motion was seconded by Mr. Greene and was passed by a vote of 6-0.

D. Public Input:

A motion was made by Mr. Bacon to move public input to occur before the Demolition Review. The motion was seconded by Mr. Beauregard, and was passed by a vote of 6-0.

E. Correspondence:

Ms. Policastro stated that any correspondence from the Department of Planning and Redevelopment was related to internal documents and discussions, and that there was no additional correspondence from the public.

F. New Business:

*Public Meeting*

Property Nomination

**75 Dryden Avenue (AP 660870)**

There was no representative present for the project, so Mr. Sisson made a motion to table the discussion and review it at the next meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Perry and was passed by a vote of 6-0.

Demolition Review

**2 Columbus Avenue (AP 260630)**

Before beginning discussion about the project, Mr. Bacon and Mr. Sisson recused themselves due to their outside involvement with the project. Mr. Bacon made a motion to yield the Chair to Mr. Beauregard, Vice Chair. The motion was seconded by Mr. Greene and was passed by a vote of 6-0. At this time, Mr. Bacon and Mr. Sisson became members of the public and remained in the room.

Before the public input period began, Mr. Beauregard requested that public input last no longer than 3 minutes per person, and that decorum be maintained for the duration of the period.

Michael Pompili opened the public input period. He claimed that this meeting was not a public meeting before discussing public input occurring before the agenda item, the Soloviev Group proposal, a potential precedent being set for demolishing buildings, and how stadiums in other states have been preserved and reused.

Nathan Luciano spoke next. He spoke about the approval to build the Unified High School, and stated that the site of the school was not included in the vote from a few years ago. He claimed that many people would have not voted in support of the Unified High School if they knew that McCoy Stadium would be demolished as a result. He claimed that the site location was withheld from the vote for a purpose, and that many locations and buildings in the City could support a school just as well as the McCoy Stadium site. He asked if traffic studies and impact studies had been done so that informed choices could be made.

Kelly Adams spoke next. She spoke about her early memories of McCoy Stadium, and her latest memories of McCoy Stadium. She stated that losing the Paw Sox was devastating, and that losing McCoy Stadium would be equally as devastating. She then discussed her belief that McCoy Stadium would be eligible for a listing on the National Register of Historic Places. She stated that the longest game in baseball makes McCoy Stadium eligible for a listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Zachary Russell spoke next. He began by stating that there was no posting of this meeting on the City's website, and Mr. Beauregard stated that the agenda only needed to be posted on the Secretary of State's website. Mr. Russell then stated that the Historic Preservation and Heritage

Commission felt that McCoy Stadium fell under criteria A and C, but did not specify what these criteria were from. He stated that he looked at Fenway Park's designation and felt that McCoy Stadium fell under criteria A, B, and C, but still had not specified what these criteria were. He felt that this review should have occurred sooner in the process. He then spoke about the Soloviev group proposal to keep the stadium and add a sports complex.

David Fagnoli spoke next. He stated that he had a lot of great experiences and memories at McCoy Stadium. He spoke about the history of the stadium, detailing its postwar financial struggles and it hosting the longest game in baseball. He claimed that McCoy Stadium was the target location from day one, and that he hadn't seen any other locations considered. He claimed that the stadium maintenance wasn't handled properly, and stated that there should have been at least 3 backup locations for the school.

Kate McCoy spoke last. She spoke about her responsibility to speak to the Commission, and about the Save McCoy petition. She commented on the meeting room and the posting of the meeting, and claimed that they had not been given a public meeting. She claimed that the administration has a deceitful agenda that is backed up by the testimonial evidence she has heard from thousands of people. She spoke about her discussions with Ms. Policastro where Ms. Policastro stated that the stadium could not be considered historic.

At this time, the public input period ended. Ms. Policastro then made comment on behalf of the Department of Planning and Redevelopment. She discussed the Minor League Baseball relocation regulations, the proposal from the Soloviev group and the lack of communication from the group, and the bond that had passed in 2022 that received a 70% approval. She stated that the referendum for the bond did not indicate what the site of the school would be because the bond needed to be approved first. She stated that the City Council, who were voted in by the majority of the people of Pawtucket, voted in a majority vote to place the Unified High School at the McCoy Stadium site in October of 2023. She stated that multiple public meetings had been held, and that the speakers from the public at this meeting had spoken at those meetings as well. She stated that the City Council authorized the bond to build the new high school in June of 2024. She stated that the Historic District Commission could not review the demolition of this property until the demolition phase of the project had begun. She elaborated further, stating that the stadium was being reviewed only because of its age of construction, and that it is not architecturally significant. She then stated that the only authority the Historic District Commission has is to issue a six-month demolition delay. She stated that in consultation with the Director of the Department of Public Works, the Director of Zoning and Code Enforcement, and the Chief of Police that all demolition criteria have been met. She identified the letters that have been submitted to the Commission from Chris Crawley, the Director of the Department of Public Works, from John Hanley, the Building Official, and from Major Holden of the Pawtucket Police Department and explained that they support the demolition criteria being met. She finished by stating that the future of the site is to facilitate the creation the Unified High School for the City, and that a demolition delay would create false hope and greatly hinder this project.

At this time Colliers began their presentation. Megan Havrilla introduced herself and the project, and then introduced Diony Garcia, Legal Counsel, who began the discussion. He stated that McCoy Stadium does not fall within Pawtucket's Historic District. He then spoke about the factors that determine whether a structure is deemed a National Historic Landmark as outlined by the National Park Service, and argued that McCoy Stadium would not qualify. He spoke about the stadium's decline, and the history of stadiums being left to Municipalities. He spoke about history that has occurred in the major leagues, how that history did not stop stadiums from being demolished and teams from being disbanded, and how stadiums that have made it on the National Register of Historic Places are widely different compared to McCoy Stadium. He stated that the contributions to the game that certain players have had should be weighed against the impact that the Unified High School will have for generations to come. He then discussed the four demolition criteria to be met and gave detail as to how all four are met. He stated that this project went before every required Commission or Committee, and that public input had been heard at all of those meetings. He stated that the site had been discussed with the public on numerous occasions as well.

Ms. Havrilla then went into depth regarding the four criteria for demolition. She began with a slide show that first outlined evidence regarding the hazard to public safety that the existing conditions pose. She spoke about the cost of constructing the new school, and stated that a demolition delay would result in a loss of \$35,530,672 + operational costs. She stated that this expense would be incurred by Pawtucket taxpayers. She stated that the school was voted on, and that the process has gone on for years. She stated that this development is a once in a lifetime opportunity to improve the City and community.

Ms. Havrilla then introduced Jonathan Levi, who spoke about how McCoy Stadium was going to be memorialized at the site. He spoke about the state-of-the-art education that the Unified High School will be able to provide for students. He spoke about the interpretive displays that will be implemented at the entrances of the building. He gave examples of displays that have been used at other schools and how they will be replicated at the Unified High School. He spoke about the location of the displays and how they would be seen daily by all students.

Mr. Garcia finished the presentation by re-stating that this is a once in a generation opportunity to improve the future trajectory of the City and of the community as a whole.

At this time the Commissioners discussed the project. Mr. Tillinghast introduced himself and stated that he was one of eight people who established the Preservation Society of Pawtucket in 1979. He stated that the Preservation Society has turned into more of a Historic Society over time. He stated that as a preservationist, he is more concerned with the future of Tolman High School and Shea High School. He stated that McCoy Stadium was built by two City engineers, so there is no architectural integrity to the structure. He stated that both Shea High School and Tolman High School were designed by architects, and read an excerpt from the Statewide Historical Preservation Report that details the architectural significance of Shea High School. He stated that Shea High School would be more fitting to be used as a tribute to Mayor McCoy than

McCoy Stadium. He stated that McCoy Stadium is a series of memories and is not architecturally significant. He finished by stating that the group's goal is to save the architecture of Pawtucket.

Ms. Bonollo spoke about Shea High School and stated that it would be refurbished so that it will continue to be used as a school. She stated that she believed that Tolman High School would end up going to the City, and Mr. Tillinghast stated that it would likely end up being used for housing.

Mr. Beauregard stated that the development of the Unified High School is in line with the City's Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Tillinghast agreed.

Mr. Greene asked about the Paw Sox mascot and if it would be preserved in some way. Mr. McNaught stated that they would do everything they can to preserve the mascot and as much of the stadium as possible. He stated that demolishing the stadium is a loss of memories, but the students for years to come deserve better. Mr. Greene stated that the people on the project have a history in Pawtucket, which adds heart to the project.

At this time Mr. Beauregard made a motion to approve the demolition of McCoy stadium because it is a hazard to the community, and because it would be a detriment to a major improvement project. The motion was seconded by Mr. Greene and was passed by a vote of 4-0.

G. Adjournment:

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Mr. Perry. The motion was seconded by Mr. Beauregard and was approved by a vote of 4-0. The meeting adjourned at 7:32 p.m.