

# **Appendix A**

## Sections from Phase I Report

### **Statistical Analysis of the Demolition Review Ordinance**

Attached are permit reviews in chart and graph form. Both illustrate the increase in the number of permits over the 1987 to 2000 period. As expected, the numbers of properties found both “Historic” and “Preferably Preserved” increased correspondingly. Demolition delay waivers, as judged as a percentage of the number of properties found “Preferably Preserved,” have remained fairly high. This appears to be for two main reasons. Many waivers were granted for the partial demolition of insensitive additions to historic houses. The second common occurrence of waivers resulted when buildings were in such poor condition that they were beyond saving, including instances where the Building Inspection Department condemned properties because they posed public safety hazards.

Analysis of this data must be very general due to inconsistent record keeping over the years. When a permit was applied for in December, it sometimes but not always got listed in the year that final action was taken rather than the year the review was initiated. Data was tracked by calendar year until 1992, when the reviews are listed by fiscal year, which resulted in at least 7 property reviews not listed for 1991. Other files were somehow omitted from the review lists. In Fiscal Year 1999, properties that have separate items being reviewed, sometimes with one being found “Historic” and another not, are duplicated on this data base. The same holds true for the 2000 and 2001 data. In addition, some properties are simply listed under the wrong fiscal year.

### **Initial Observations on the Application of Newton’s Demolition Delay Ordinance**

1. Historic documentation is vital to making informed decisions as well as contributing to later analyses of the types of properties that may become more rare and therefore more significant. However, at present, not all properties are photographically documented and background research on many is sketchy at best. One of the primary benefits the Demolition Delay Ordinance provides is the opportunity to document historically and architecturally significant properties for posterity, whether or not it results in the resource being preserved.

2. Properties that have been surveyed receive the greatest consideration for protection and implementation of the demolition delay provisions. Consequently, the lack of survey information on more recent structures has substantially lessened the careful review and protection of the 50-year-old structures built in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
3. The NHC has grown more sensitive to 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings in recent years, as requests to alter and/or demolish them have increased.
4. On numerous occasions, restoration or rehabilitation efforts coming before the NHC have received timely and critical review resulting in discouraging poorly conceived alterations to historic homes from being implemented. The NHC has also acted on behalf of property owners to request the Building Inspection Department to allow flexibility in application of the current building code to allow the retention and replication of important design features, such as porches with low railing heights and window dimensions.
5. The analysis of properties as to their being termed “Historic” is almost exclusively based on their visual and aesthetic merits, rather than explicitly related to their importance to the historical development of the city.
6. Over the years there has been confusion between what is being termed “Historic” by the NHC. At times this finding has referred to the house in question, sometimes to an accessory structure such as a garage and other times to individual elements of a building such as a roof, porch or ell. In at least a couple of instances, what was initially viewed as “Historic” was, several years later, viewed as “Not Historic.”
7. Attendance by Commission members is somewhat sporadic, with “alternates” sitting in when a quorum of regular members is not available. This creates a situation where similar situations can easily be treated quite differently and raises equity issues for applicants.
8. There are virtually no references to the Secretary of Interior Standards for eligibility in the official record of actions on these applications, which suggests that the judgments being made by the NHC are inconsistent and less rigorous than they might be.
9. Additions and alterations to a residential structure, such as being resided, have often been used as rationale to find it “Not Historic” or “Not Preferably Preserved.”
10. The workload of the NHC over the past few years has significantly increased in tandem with the dramatic rise in demolition review applications; and as a consequence, at least some of the reviews have become more cursory.

Suggestions as to how to address the issues raised by these observations will be included in later phases of this study. However, some issues may be more immediately tackled, and thus suggestions are made in the Summary and Preliminary Recommendations section of this Phase I Report.

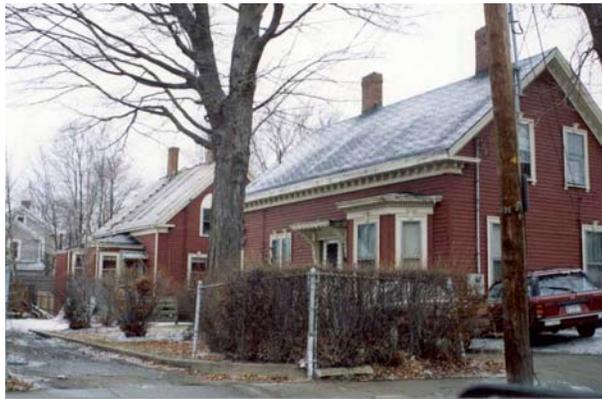
## **In Depth Review of Selected Properties**

### **Successes!**

The following properties are examples of where the effect of Newton's Demolition Review Ordinance can be considered to have been a success.



29 Pearl Street – File Photo



29 Pearl Street – File Photo

29 Pearl Street - On February 5, 1998, three members of the of the NHC voted unanimously to find the two modest mid-19<sup>th</sup> century vernacular cottages on this property “Historic.” One month later, the request to waive the one-year demolition delay was denied by a unanimous 5 to 0 vote with the comment that plans submitted for replacement construction were not consistent in size and scale with the fabric of the neighborhood. Three years later, the two properties are extant and reveal investment in the property with an addition to one of the dwellings. This property was surveyed in January of 1977, providing historical background for the property and a clear basis for the NHC’s decision.



29 Pearl Street – Feb. 2001



78 Hawthorne Street – Feb. 2001



Hawthorne Street Neighborhood Context – Feb. 2001

78 Hawthorne Street – Back in 1991, this c1912 three-story building, constructed of rough-faced concrete block, was reviewed by the NHC. A request was made for partial demolition impacting the porch, balconies and roof. The Commission determined that the building was “Historic” but allowed that the seriously deteriorated wooden appurtenances were “Not Preferably Preserved.” It is unclear from the file whether the Commission was involved in any real review of the design of the replacement balconies, but the results in place 10 years later clearly provided for the ongoing use of the historic property and demonstrates how a modern approach to the design of reconstructed elements can still be sensitive to the scale and original architectural character of the building. The 78 Hawthorne Street building, in its prominent corner location, continues to anchor this largely intact working class neighborhood made up of modest, homestead style frame dwellings.



24 Nickerson Road – File Photo



24 Nickerson Road – Feb. 2001

24 Nickerson Road - This 1941 Cape Cod cottage is a good example of where a house was given the protection of demolition delay based on its high quality architectural character *and* context. Surrounded by similarly styled and scaled buildings, its loss would have certainly impaired the cohesiveness of the neighborhood. The 5 unanimous votes of Commission Members to find the house “Preferably Preserved” confirm this understanding. It appears from

information on the application that the house was up for sale as a part of the settlement of an estate. It is difficult not to speculate that a realtor felt the value of the property was primarily in the land and that the “highest and best use” of the property would be for new construction. Fortunately, given the one-year waiting period commencing April 2, 1998, the home still stands today, occupied and fixed up; a continuing asset to this intact mid-20<sup>th</sup> century neighborhood.



134 Vine Street – File Photo



134 Vine Street – Feb. 2001

134 Vine Street – Here we have an example of where NHC Members were divided in their opinions as to whether this altered 18<sup>th</sup> century dwelling should be protected. This property was reviewed twice: once in 1995, when the NHC determined the building to be “Historic” and “Preferable Preserved” and where the demolition delay was waived by a 3 to 2 vote, and again, in 1999, when the Commission found the property “Not Preferable Preserved” on a 4 to 1 vote. A 1983 survey form for the property provided background research revealing that the house is historically significant even though it had undergone many changes. In spite of the decision to waive the demolition delay, the property was sold to a new owner interested in preserving the house, according to a postcard from the owner attached to the file.

This example indicates that there are willing buyers for smaller historic properties in Newton, and that a reasonable economic use of a property is evident, thereby supporting future decisions of the NHC to uphold the demolition delay. Indeed, even though the 1999 decision did not find the house preferably preserved, “due to its lack of original material and setting,” the house still stands and is occupied. Historic structures are often prematurely written off because they have been resided, even though original massing, windows and design are visible, not to mention other historic fabric or significance not evident in a cursory review. How many large high-style homes have been resided and then restored to their original condition at a later date? Further, updating exterior cladding materials, particularly on modest

vernacular houses is ubiquitous to the extent that it can legitimately be viewed as a part of the history of the structure and should not be considered a condition to support its destruction. In any case, the fact that this historically significant structure remains today should be counted as a success.

76 Dalby Street – Feb. 2001

76 Dalby Street – In early 1997 a request was made to demolish a c1870 workers cottage/vernacular two-story home. By a 5 to 0 vote, the NHC’s initial finding in February of that year was that the home was “Historic” and “Preferably Preserved for its context, spacing on the streetscape, setback, scale and minor detail.” A 1976 survey form was attached to the file to support this finding. Unfortunately a significant settling problem as well



as a siting issue made rehabilitation of the property uneconomical according to testimony. Thus, the demolition delay was waived upon approval of plans that were not only sensitive to the design and scale of the neighborhood but that replicated in an acceptable way the historic character of the original home. The NHC gave full consideration to the impact of the infill structure and provided appropriate and constructive design directives. This type of careful review and consideration is a good model for similar situations concerning contextual design review for new construction following demolition of historic buildings.

73 Beecher Place – Feb. 2001



73 Beecher Place – Older buildings, such as this c1885 Queen Anne residence seem to be more often protected than those dating to the early- to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. In this case, the NHC voted 4-0 in March 1995 to find the house both “Historic” and “Preferably Preserved.” That evidently was the end of the matter, and though the demolition delay expired in six months later, the building remains today, a substantial

investment in its renovation having been made. It is a visible example of how such homes can be preserved so as benefit an entire neighborhood of older working class homes from the same period. In this case, the presence of a

survey from 1983 was supportive of the Commission's decision to uphold the demolition delay.

### **Problematic Cases**

The properties discussed below were selected to show both the range of issues that have emerged over the 14 years the NHC has been reviewing demolition proposals and the most typical situations that have occurred. Unfortunately, examples of problematical reviews and regretful results outnumbered the success stories. However, without this study and the information it provides, the NHC would have no way of knowing what reoccurring issues there are and how their mission might better be accomplished.



26 Beecher Terrace - Just a few doors away from 73 Beecher Place, cited as a success story, above, another, more modest dwelling, which also contributes to the character of the historic neighborhood was found by a 4 to 1 vote "Not Preferably Preserved" in May, 2000. In this case, the finding that the c1896 workers home is "Historic" based on "its age, context and architectural detail and significance" appears to be

inconsistent with the rationale not to uphold the demolition delay: "lack of detail and later additions which are not consistent with the original structure." A site visit to these two proximate houses, suggests that the second was as worthy of protection as the first and that the "later additions" did not negate its architectural integrity as viewed from the right-of-way. In spite of the decision, the building remains standing, and one might hope that it may yet be saved for the integrity of the entire neighborhood; for if a new large-scale house is built there, it will likely lead to other demolition requests.

67 Wildwood Avenue - After reviewing hundreds of demolition review files, the NHC's split decision on this rather attractive c1890 gambrel-roofed cottage comes as no surprise. Virtually all "Dutch Colonial" homes coming before the Commission have been allowed to be demolished without delays as they have typically been seen as "Not Historic." According to the photo submitted, the house retained much of



its original character and the neighborhood context would seem to have supported giving this building an opportunity of being bought by someone appreciative of its historic quality. The NHC's finding that the house had been "significantly changed," citing the dormers, which were located on the side elevation, appears to be incorrect as the dormers were almost certainly original, despite the downsizing of windows within them. Alteration of a porch floor is a change that is likely to have occurred in any building this age and certainly a minor, virtually invisible change at that. This example is not unusual, but a frequently occurring situation where lack of survey information and a rather superficial, visual review of a plain house, has resulted in the loss of a historic building in sound condition. An inspection of the site confirmed that the building has been demolished.



69 Webster Park – File Photo



69 Webster Park – Feb. 2001

69 Webster Park - In August of 1996, the NHC was approached by an elderly couple in dire financial straits asking for permission to demolish their c1870 Italianate residence in the Webster Park National Register Historic District. A lengthy list of structural deficiencies by Black Paw Home Inspection, Inc. was presented to prove that the "house was falling down around" the owners. Plans for a replacement duplex in a Colonial style were presented to the Commission, which, in spite of finding the home "Historic," voted 3 to 1 to waive the six-month delay "due to hardship...and the fact that the new design does not substantially degrade the character of Webster Park." This is probably the most serious example of the Commission not having sufficient tools to protect the historic properties under its purview. While it is extremely difficult to ignore the personal financial hardships individual owners might be facing, the definition of "hardship" in land use decisions such as this means physical difficulties that run with the property rather than personal ones. In addition, it appears that the Commission may not fully appreciate the impact of the loss of even a single dwelling in a historic district. Further, even if this was an issue of simple design review, the plans submitted for the replacement structure have little relationship to the character of the district. This decision, more than any other, suggests that specific criteria need to be developed by which to evaluate such situations and that Commission members should receive

orientation and refer to established preservation standards for historic districts.



1964 Beacon Street – File Photo



1964 Beacon Street – Feb. 2001

1964 Beacon Street – As recently as last year, in May of 2000, an intact c1929 bungalow in a residential neighborhood with various styles and dwelling sizes was found to be “Historic” (unanimous 5 to 0 vote) but “Not Preferably Preserved” (4 to 1 vote). Here, the neighborhood context was presented as the rationale for not protecting the home: “...it is an aberration in the neighborhood which is not similar enough to the surrounding homes to be in context and not special enough to stand on its own.” Ironically, the replacement home appears to be every bit as much an aberration in the historic streetscape as the bungalow was. No design review of the replacement structure is indicated in the file documents, so this result was probably bound to occur. Again, no background research on the possible historic aspects of the structure appears to have been done, but rather a perfunctory review based on a quick visual analysis. Without a survey of these homes, by which their relative merits can be better analyzed, it will be difficult to maintain consistency in the Commission’s decisions over time. In this case, there also appears to have been some opposition from neighbors to the home’s demolition. One can imagine that had a demolition delay been upheld for the property, the bungalow might have found an appreciative owner who could have the option of adding on to the home in an architecturally sensitive way, thereby enriching the architectural character of this neighborhood and the city as a whole in a way the replacement house is unlikely to do.



Neighboring Building to left of 1445 Centre St  
File Photo



1445 Centre Street (on Right) – Feb. 2001 Photo

1445 Centre Street - In contrast to the above example, this property is one where the Commission by a 5 to 0 vote in 1998, upheld the demolition delay on a high quality 1925 Craftsman bungalow. The reason this is problematic is that the request was to remove the roof to allow for the addition of a second floor in a neighborhood context where the building is surrounded by larger two-story dwellings. This raises the issue of whether historic buildings can be altered in any way and if the Commission is following the Secretary of Interior Standards in reviewing proposed changes. Rather than being able to directly address the issue of sensitive alterations, the Commission seems to be backed into a corner of determining only whether a historic residence can or can't be altered. In a case such as this, a more reasonable approach may have been to give more precise direction as to what kinds of alterations would be found acceptable. A site visit revealed that the dwelling remains unaltered after three years and in good condition, a testimony to its continuing functionality.



39 Fernwood Road – File Photo



39 Fernwood Road – Feb. 2001

39 Fernwood Road - The home in question here was one of a neighborhood full of Cape Cod homes built in the 1940s. In 1996 this home was considered “Not Historic” and “Not Preferably Preserved” in a determination made by staff to the

Commission, and thus no public hearing was held. There is no indication that any of the Commission Members conducted a site visit in this instance (though there are numerous other examples of 1940s homes that did receive such review and were evaluated similarly). File documents do not suggest that any background research was done and since there has been no survey of properties from this era, there is no real basis for the finding of “Not Historic.” This scenario is typical of how such modest homes have been viewed over the years. In action after action, the Commission has cited “lack of architectural detail” or “no defining features” as reasons to find simple workers housing, modest cottages, and vernacular architecture “Not Preferably Preserved.” On one level, this indicates a strong bias in favor of high style residences and on another, a lack of appreciation for the fact that these types of dwellings are *defined* by their lack of architectural embellishment. It is their stripped down simplicity that distinguishes them. What will hopefully be recognized at this point, is that these houses, few of which may be determined significant in and of themselves, when clustered in distinct groups or neighborhoods, may very well be eligible for the National Register as districts. Ongoing and spotty replacement of these dwellings, driven by current market conditions, without any sort of design review, will likely eliminate the possibility of certain neighborhoods ever making it to the stage where they can be appreciated and preserved.



72 Charlemont St. -File Photo



Charlemont St.- Neighborhood Context  
Feb. 2001



Replacement Building for Bungalow at  
72 Charlemont St. - Feb. 2001

72 Charlemont Street - This 1996 request for demolition of a 1920s bungalow is one more of numerous examples of early-20<sup>th</sup> century neighborhoods being disconcertingly altered by newer, out-of-scale developments. In this case the rationale cited for finding the dwelling “Not Preferably Preserved,” that it “...does not contribute to the streetscape and neighborhood,” is questionable. This is illustrated by the photos presented here. Interestingly, the home itself was found to be “Historic” unlike the one described in the next example.



Cape Cods to left of 11 Bunny Circle  
Feb. 2001



Replacement House at 11 Bunny Circle



Cape Cods to right of 11 Bunny Circle

11 Bunny Circle - Like the above examples, the immediate neighborhood context was evidently not given any weight when the decision to find it “Not Historic” was made. In this case, the dwelling was in a “keyhole subdivision”—at the center of group of 5 Cape Cods arrayed around a cul-de-sac. However, there are a number of other problems illustrated here as well. One is that the actual file is missing, therefore no photo documentation of the property exists, no record of who made the decision (staff or the NHC) or what the rationale was. Such holes in the record are not uncommon—most 1998 files are missing—which makes ongoing tracking of NHC decisions difficult. Only an entry of the address in the listing of Demolition Reviews for FY1999 indicates this was considered. The list actually indicates that only a garage demolition was requested; yet the minutes reveal that the entire house was being proposed for demolition. Regardless, the replacement structure is so out of scale with the neighboring dwellings, it pleads the case for limits on the size of infill structures and some level of design review to assure harmonious integration of new and old structures for the greater welfare of the community.



581 Saw Mill Brook Parkway – File Photo



Saw mill Brook Parkway – Context – Feb. 2001

581 Saw Mill Brook Parkway - This Oak Hill Park dwelling was reviewed in May 2000. Demolition was requested for the garage, which was still extant as of February 2001. Here the issue is a questionable finding by the NHC, as indicated by its resolution to “find the attached one-car garage to be ‘Not

Preferably Preserved’ as it is not original and does not contribute to the architectural character of the house.” Contradicting this observation is the fact that neighboring dwellings have similar attached garages and photos in the April 1999 Report on Oak Hill Park produced on behalf of the Commission seem to illustrate that these types of attached garages were original. Whether the garage “contributes to the architectural character of the house” may be a somewhat subjective opinion, but it can be argued that its massing and scale is consistent with the modest character of the house itself and the original character of the neighborhood, which has begun to be recognized as worthy of protection. What seems more to the point, is that garages which have become functionally obsolete, are not generally seen as “Preferably Preserved” by the Commission, as the results of many other demolition reviews demonstrate.

### **Other Issues**

Beyond the issue of successful outcomes and indefensible decisions, there are many hundreds of properties that fall in a grey zone. These include clearly historic homes in mixed neighborhoods, dwellings whose conditions act as a blight on a neighborhood, potentially historic properties which have not yet been surveyed, and homes whose determined owners vow to raze them. The following examples raise issues that need to be considered in a more deliberate and perhaps rigorous fashion.

100 Hull Street – This c1925 Colonial Revival house is one that lacks survey data (or any background information) and therefore a basis for any decision to allow demolition. Survey of early 20<sup>th</sup> century homes in the city is incomplete, and without that, this very intact example of a clear architectural type typical of this period of development in Newton, cannot be adequately evaluated.



Two NHC members evidently conducted a site visit, which resulted in the finding of “Not Historic” and “Not Preferably Preserved.” While the architectural context in this situation certainly compromises the dwelling’s significance (given the proximity of a large brick high school building with minimal setback across the narrow street), the lack of survey data by which to judge such structures creates the impression that the Commission sees no value in modest housing types of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Fortunately, photos of the dwelling are attached to the file—though unlabeled—which provides some record of the property. Interestingly enough however, the dwelling was still standing six months after the request to demolish was submitted. One can speculate that the setting of the home is such that it does not support the economic investment required to both demolish the old and build anew.

112 Norwood Avenue – In addition to the lack of a survey of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century houses, this 1997 file indicates a problem with documentation. There is none. All that is noted on the sheet filled out by staff is that a 1946 Cape Cod style dwelling was built on a 19<sup>th</sup> century home's foundation as the original home burned in 1946. No photos of the house or surrounding properties are attached, and no review by any of the Commission members appears to have occurred. The structure replacing the Cape is a duplex in a traditional design. This brings up the issue of whether Newton's current zoning classifications help or hinder the ability of the NHC to protect potential historic districts—for certainly, the economic return of a duplex on what was previously a single-family lot, will make these properties ripe for dramatic changeovers.



348 Hartman Road - This file represents a looming issue—the many 1950s modern ranches, split levels, and Cape Cods that will come increasingly under the Commission's review in coming years. The tendency will be, based on most people's gut-level reaction, to find these "Not Historic" and "Not Preferably Preserved." And yet, if we can remove our cultural biases, imagine ourselves 20 years hence looking at these collections of homes, one can understand that they

do indeed have something to say about the time in which they were built and the styles that were once but no longer prevalent. Neighborhoods made up of such homes are the historic districts of tomorrow, if they are not allowed to be unduly altered in a piece-meal, lot-by-lot fashion. To date, none of the homes from this era, such as the c1950 ranch noted to occupy this property, have been recognized by the Commission as historic, even though they are potentially eligible for listing on the National Register. Although these homes are quite numerous due to the post World War II building boom, this should not automatically mean they have no historic value. Survey work is needed to detail the extent and qualities of these newly historic enclaves so individual properties within them can be adequately and fairly evaluated.

### Garages

Throughout the city of Newton there are garages, carriage houses and barns of all ages in a variety of architectural styles. After reviewing all of the available Demolition Review files, it was found that the accessory building determined to be both "Historic" and "Preferably Preserved" is rare. Generally they are limited to late-19<sup>th</sup> century carriage houses designed in the same style as the house they originally served. However, because Newton developed as a suburban

community and exhibits the three main historic waves of suburbanization—the street car suburbs of the late 1800s, early-20<sup>th</sup> century garden suburbs at the beginning of the auto era, and the post World War II housing boom supported by interstate highways which enabled mass automobile commuting—garages can be viewed as very significant and interesting historic structures. Indeed, the size and location of a garage provides an immediate clue to the age of a residence. Those large barn-like carriage houses located far to the rear of the house, often off an alley, indicate a pre-1900 building date when horses provided conveyance, while single-stall garages located closer to the main structure but remaining detached, accessed either via an alley or a driveway past the house are indicative of early-20<sup>th</sup> century dates when cars were still relatively rare. By the 1940s, the garages were moved even closer to houses and attached via breezeways or as a one-story wing. When one sees a single-stall tucked-under garage, the building date is almost invariably in the 1950s, and after that garages are predominantly two-stalled and often the most prominent architectural expression of dwellings built in the 1970s and 80s. Obviously the design of the structure is very much tied to its function, to the types of vehicles commonly used and there’s the dilemma. Older garages become functionally obsolete. So even though they may well contribute to the historic character of any given property, and convey the historic development pattern of a neighborhood, they are the often the first change to be made. Two ways of immediately addressing this issue come to mind. First, require photo documentation of all garages over 50 years of age that are being demolished so that at a minimum, a record of these patterns is preserved. Second, where space permits, adapting small one-stall garages to other complementary uses—a potting shed for example—could be encouraged.



House at 91 Waban Avenue – File Photo



Garage at 91 Waban Avenue – File Photo

91 Waban Avenue – This property contained a small, detached garage clearly built in the same Arts and Crafts style of the main house but which was found “Not Preferably Preserved.” Despite neighbors’ letters attesting to the poor condition of the structure, photos reveal it to be well kept.

Another concern is the noted tendency on the part of the NHC (though less so in recent years) to find a home “Historic” its companion garage of the same era “Not Historic.” More troubling yet are contradictory statements such as those made in response to a requested garage demolition at 142 Woodland Road, which reads: “Resolved to find the garage to be historic as it was designed to be in keeping with the main house which is part of a National Register District” and “Further resolved to find this garage to be ‘Not Preferably Preserved’ as it is not a compelling piece of architecture for the neighborhood or main house.” Given that garages are mainly functional structures and seldom “compelling pieces of architecture” such reasoning does not lend credence to the Commission’s actions.

### Subdivisions

In several instances it was noted that subdivisions had occurred for large historic lots that have had the effect of dividing off a carriage house from the main dwellings, which was then used as justification to demolish it. This is a situation where the planning board should request formal input from the NHC prior to granting approvals of such divisions. Planning staff coordination so that these impacts make it into staff reports would also be helpful.

9 Cedar Street – The Wales Jam Factory is an example of the impact that proposed subdivisions will have on significant historic properties. Despite the NHC upholding the six-month demolition delay, the economic benefit of being able to subdivide this property was too great an incentive to allow for restoration, rehabilitation or adaptive reuse of any of the historic structures on it. When situations such as this come to light, other methods of protecting such properties may be justified and legally defensible, including seeking landmark status.

## **Phase I Summary & Preliminary Recommendations**

Newton's Demolition Delay Ordinance has clearly resulted in preserving some historic buildings and in protecting the architectural character of the community. However this tool has shortcomings that limit its effectiveness. One of the most evident is that the NHC's lack of direct design review powers has encouraged it to allow demolitions it might otherwise have opposed in order to gain some input into the design of a proposed addition or infill structure and consequent impacts on historic neighborhoods. The lack of good solid background information of historical and architectural significance of residential structures has also limited the ability of the Commission to act decisively in protecting threatened properties, particularly those built in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Suggestions for NHC Reviews

One change in NHC's reviews that should be considered immediately is to look at a property in its entirety when making a determination of "Historic" or "Not Historic" and then evaluate the requested demolition, total or partial, in this context. This would establish a clear record for future actions and holds the potential to streamline future requests concerning a given property. In addition, this is more in line with national preservation standards and recognizes the potential importance of historic landscape designs and features, site plan, and accessory buildings.

The Commission should also routinely extend its review to the entire neighborhood context. The City of Newton's Draft Framework Plan dated August 2000 supports this approach: "Land use decisions should be sensitive to preservation of and compatibility with historic building, landscapes, and wider historic contexts. Decisions should encourage preservation of historic commercial and industrial buildings and historic landscapes, as well as preservation of historic residences

Special attention should be given to the remaining pockets of intact neighborhoods comprised of early- to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century housing, since a great number of them hold the potential for being eligible for future district designations. Indeed, Sec. 22-44(b)(3)b. of the Demolition Ordinance specifically states that one reason the Commission may find a structure "Historically significant" is that it is "Historically or architecturally important by reason of period, style, method of building construction or association with a particular architect or builder, *either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures.*" [Emphasis added.] Encouraging sensitive treatment to these dwellings serves not only preservation purposes, but other broader planning goals of the city as well. Specifically, the Framework Plan Draft

states: “We are committed to providing housing which matches the economic and social diversity of our City and responds to under-served citizens.” Such a goal can be furthered by protecting historic neighborhoods of workers housing, single-story structures and modest homes. However, to adequately justify such protection, survey work must be initiated at the earliest opportunity.

The terminology of findings used by the NHC could also be easily modified to allow for more precision. Rather than finding a property “Historic” or “Not Historic,” a property could just as well be found to be “Significant” or “Not Significant” with qualifying rationale, i.e. “based on it’s architectural merits” or “based on its contribution to the historic neighborhood context.” A review of the Demolition ordinance by Newton’s City Attorney should be undertaken to confirm the legitimacy of such a change in language.

The Commission is also urged to regularly refer to National Park Service/National Register standards and definitions for Historic Significance, Historic Integrity and Historic Context. While the NHC’s standards need not be as high as required for National Register nomination, this discipline will help establish certain principles and criteria to use as a checklist to enable the Commission to more consistently, equitably and quickly establish a finding of “Historic” or “Not Historic.” These materials would also help guide decisions regarding whether the property or some part of it should be “Preferably Preserved.”

#### Suggested Improvements Demolition Review File Information Handling

A database consisting of all Demolition Review Applications from the 1987 start date through current reviews should be created to allow analysis of the impact of demolitions on individual streets and neighborhoods over time. An initial listing illustrates how readily neighborhood impacts can be seen. Files for each application should list cross-streets at both ends of the block on which the subject property is located. This will enable staff to easily check the database for all other demolition actions within the immediate neighborhood, report it to the NHC and thereby enable the Commission to consider these impacts in its deliberations. An electronic file providing the beginnings of such a master database is provided with this report. Changes to the data base format to accommodate information that should be tracked over time and facilitate analysis should also be considered.

Another method of easily tracking demolition delays occurring in any given area is creation of a rolodex file with a card for each demolition request listing all pertinent information—whether the property was found “Historic,” and “Preferably Preserved,” and for what parts of the property, whether the demolition delay was waived, what actions happened when in the case of repeat

applications, and what the cross streets are. A city map showing age of structures, mounted on foam core and marked with all demolition delay reviews can be helpful and easily brought to a meeting for an easy visual reference.

Each address should receive its own file. Photos of all requested demolitions, labeled with the property address, should be required. This should include photo documentation of each facade that would be changed by the requested demolition. Garages are especially important to document since they are disappearing so rapidly.

Complete street names should always be listed so as to avoid confusion between streets, avenues, terraces, places, etc. that share similar names. The FY92 listing in particular should be updated.