

**CITY OF NORWALK
HISTORICAL COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES - DECEMBER 10, 2025
VIA ZOOM VIRTUAL CONFERENCE**

PRESENT: Dana Laird, Eric Chandler, Rich Stein, John Cusano, Lisa Wilson-Grant, Jim Frayer, David Westmoreland.

STAFF: Michelle Andrzejewski.

OTHERS: Patsy Brescher (Lockwood-Mathews Mansion).

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Laird called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Ms. Laird conducted roll call and a quorum was established.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

A. Proposed Demolition Delay

Ms. Andrzejewski provided a brief overview of the purpose of the meeting, explaining that it was scheduled specifically to receive public comment on the draft demolition delay ordinance revisions developed by a subcommittee of the Commission. She noted that the Commission has been discussing the ordinance for some time and wished to obtain public input before finalizing a draft to forward to the Ordinance Committee of the Common Council. Ms. Andrzejewski then turned the floor over to Mr. Stein for additional introductory remarks.

Mr. Stein thanked members of the public for attending and for submitting written comments. He emphasized that Norwalk possesses a wealth of historically and architecturally significant structures and that the Commission's mission is to encourage their preservation. He stated that recent experience has demonstrated the need to improve the demolition delay process, that the proposed changes represent a new direction intended to provide greater accountability while ensuring applications move smoothly, and that public feedback is essential. Mr. Stein asked that comments remain concise and respectful.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner, 7 Outer Road, spoke first. She identified herself as speaking in a public capacity and noted her background in art history as well as her recent work on housing affordability. She argued that the current demolition delay ordinance is not serving housing affordability, is applied to properties that are structurally unsound and unlikely to be saved, increases costs for developers with no preservation benefit, and should be significantly pared back to apply only to buildings of true historical significance. She recommended replacing the rolling look-back period with a fixed cutoff date (suggesting approximately 1940), creating a

proactive historical registry with designations placed on deeds, and questioned whether the ordinance has ever actually saved a building.

Mr. Thompson spoke next and stated that he agreed with everything Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner said. He cited the recent Cemetery Street project (a 1968 building) as an example where the ordinance delayed a housing project without preservation benefit and only increased costs ultimately passed on to residents. He noted that a 70-year look-back period would still capture a large percentage of Norwalk structures that lack historical merit and supported flipping the process to require buildings to be affirmatively placed on a registry.

Ms. Cece, Olmstead Place, stated that she strongly disagreed with the previous speakers. She argued that the ordinance does not need to be watered down but refined, that no one intends to delay clearly insignificant properties, and that recent changes in the draft address many concerns by allowing quick dismissal of non-significant structures or consultation with preservation experts. She agreed on the urgent need for a comprehensive inventory of significant structures that could be noted on property cards and deeds. Ms. Cece raised questions about integration of the demolition delay process with the City's forthcoming online permitting software and offered additional detailed suggestions on the draft language, noting that the written comment period remains open.

Mr. Jack Pavia of 32 Vanderbilt Avenue spoke last, briefly echoing Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner and Mr. Thompson, stating that if the ordinance in practice stops necessary housing rather than serving legitimate preservation, he as a young Norwalk resident would err on the side of allowing development to keep costs lower.

Ms. Andrzejewski and Mr. Stein confirmed that written comments will be accepted until January 22, 2026, and that several written submissions had already been received.

IV. DISCUSSION

****MR. WESTMORELAND MADE THE MOTION FOR DISCUSSION ON THE PROPOSED DEMOLITION DELAY**

****MR. CHANDLER SECONDED THE MOTION.**

****THE MOTION PASSED WITH ONE OPPOSED- MR. FRAYER.**

Mr. Frayer stated he was opposed, noting that not all comments have been received, additional written comments are expected, the meeting notice only called for public participation and not discussion, and it would be unfair to respond to the speakers without giving others a chance to weigh in. Mr. Chandler acknowledged Mr. Frayer's concerns but pointed out that Item IV on the agenda simply reads "Discussion," which is broad enough to include the demolition delay ordinance.

Mr. Westmoreland emphasized the need to explain the current demolition delay process, stating that some council members who previously voted against the ordinance clearly do not understand how it works, have mischaracterized both the existing and proposed ordinances, and

that the public needs accurate information. He cited the former bank building in East Norwalk where the Commission lifted the delay within approximately thirty days after determining it had no historic significance, and called the claim that the ordinance stops affordable housing ridiculous. Mr. Westmoreland further stated that the Ordinance Committee rejected the prior draft without understanding the process and wasted the Commission's time, and that Ms. Cece's suggestion of a flowchart would help clarify the process for council members and the public.

Mr. Frayer, while not wishing to discuss the specific public comments, highlighted the upcoming city-wide online permitting system that will make permit status visible to all departments and the public, digitize field cards within the next month, and may render portions of the current draft moot or require revision.

Mr. Westmoreland discussed the challenges and high cost of creating a comprehensive city-wide inventory, noting that state grants allow only about three hundred buildings to be surveyed every six months, making a full inventory of over thirty-five thousand structures impractical without millions of dollars.

Mr. Frayer suggested using the digitized field cards to flag all structures over fifty years old for review. Mr. Westmoreland explained that the fifty-year threshold is set by the National Park Service and is intended to capture architecture that may not yet be appreciated.

Ms. Wilson-Grant noted examples of mid-century structures that have proven significant.

Several members recounted past cases (Stevens Street, Mill Hill area, Shorehaven Road, and others) where the Commission successfully worked with developers to preserve or rehabilitate historic structures while allowing development, and emphasized that delays are rare and almost always lifted quickly when structures lack significance.

Mr. Westmoreland stated he will not support any revised ordinance without restoring the 180-day maximum delay period, as it serves as an effective deterrent that encourages developers to incorporate preservation into their plans.

Members discussed the \$30,000 / 10% fee cap, whether it is a state requirement, and examples of illegal demolitions (Willow Street).

Ms. Andrzejewski offered to compile all written and verbal comments, prepare a flowchart, invite Corporation Counsel Bill Ireland to the January meeting to explain the building department process, and explore a possible joint meeting with the Ordinance Committee before resubmitting the draft. Mr. Stein suggested hosting a community education session once the ordinance is finalized.

Mr. Cusano asked for clarification on the process once the Commission approves a final draft; Ms. Andrzejewski explained it would go to the Ordinance Committee and then to the full Common Council.

Members briefly discussed the Cemetery Street project's affordable housing component and agreed the Commission's purview is historic preservation, not housing policy.

No formal motions were voted upon under Item IV.

V. ADJOURNMENT

****MR. CHANDLER MOVED TO ADJOURN.
**MR. FRAYER SECONDED THE MOTION.
THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:17 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Courtney Baldwin,
Recording Secretary