

**CITY OF NORWALK
HISTORICAL COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES – JANUARY 28, 2026
VIA ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING**

ATTENDEES: David Westmoreland, Rich Stein, John Cusano, Eric Chandler, Dana Laird, Lisa Wilson Grant,

STAFF: Michelle Andrzejewski, Bill Ireland

OTHERS: Doug Hempstead, Susan Gilgore, Diane Jellerette.

I. CALL TO ORDER

The regular meeting of the Norwalk Historical Commission was called to order at approximately 7:00 p.m. by Ms. Laird.

II. ROLL CALL

A quorum was present.

III. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

A. Regular Meeting: December 10, 2025

Ms. Laird noted that the minutes contained a spelling error in the name Patsy Breschia, which should be spelled B-R-E-S-C-I-A.

****MR. CHANDLER MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES OF THE
DECEMBER 10, 2025, REGULAR MEETING AS AMENDED TO CORRECT
THE SPELLING OF PATSY BRESCIA.**

****MR. STEIN SECONDED THE MOTION.**

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The minutes were approved as amended.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms. Diane Cece addressed the Commission and spoke about the proposed amendments to the Demolition Delay Ordinance. She stated that she had reviewed the agenda materials and continued to have questions about the proposed process, roles, and timing. She asked for clarification on several points including who determines the age of a structure and which records are used, whether the listed items in the pre-demolition application apply only to structures of a certain age or to all demolition applications, whether the Building Department automatically refers applications to the required parties or whether the applicant must separately send them, how the public is notified when an application is deemed filed and when the 21-day objection period starts, what standard of proof is required for an objection claiming historical or

architectural significance, whether the Historical Commission can initiate a delay on its own review or only upon a public objection, how an objector would be notified of the Commission’s decision, whether the cost of a third-party preservation professional should be paid by the applicant rather than the city, whether the proposed maximum fine is adequate, and whether the 10-day appeal period is sufficient. She indicated that she would listen to the presentation by Mr. Ireland and would submit any remaining questions by email.

V. REPORTS FROM BOARDS

A. Norwalk Historical Society – Ms. Jellerette

Ms. Jellerette reported on upcoming Norwalk Historical Society events. She announced a February 14, 2026, presentation titled “The Courtship of George Washington and Martha Custis” with a snow date of February 15, to be held at Mill Hill Historic Park at 2:00 p.m. with historical reenactors Michael and Maria Grillo, tea, and light snacks. This event will begin the Norwalk 250 celebrations. She also described a March 7, 2026, lecture at Mill Hill Historic Park at 2:00 p.m. on schoolgirl samplers featuring items from the collection dating to the 1800s and early 1900s. She noted a March 21, 2026, presentation on the 19th Amendment and women’s suffrage by Mark Alveson. Ms. Jellerette stated that the Society is collaborating with other organizations on Norwalk 250 planning and that Black History Month events marking the 100th anniversary of formal celebrations are being coordinated and posted on CT Visit.

B. Lockwood-Mathews Mansion Museum – Ms. Gilgore

Ms. Gilgore reported that the Lockwood-Mathews Mansion Museum is preparing a calendar of events connected to America 250 and other programs. She described a February 19, 2026, launch of a student art competition called “How I See America’s 250,” inspired by the American Revolution and Declaration of Independence, with winners receiving prizes and exhibiting at the mansion. She also announced the March 12, 2026, opening of a new exhibit titled “Journey of Hope: The Irish American Immigrant Experience.”

VI. REPORTS

A. Buildings

Mr. Westmoreland reported that not much activity is currently underway. He stated that the Purchasing Department is preparing to issue a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for architectural services related to the long-planned redesign of the museum basement, which represents the next step in that project. He added that he is conducting the final review of the specifications for the interior renovation of the jail and anticipates that those specifications will go out to bid within the next couple of months.

B. Cemeteries

No report was presented.

C. Financials

No report was presented.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Demolition permit walk-thru by Bill Ireland, Chief Building Official

Mr. Bill Ireland, Chief Building Official, provided a detailed walkthrough of the current demolition permit process, assisted by Ms. Michelle Andrzejewski. He explained that the process begins with an “Intent to Demolish” pre-demolition application, which is distinct from the final demolition permit. He reviewed the required information on the form, including district, block and lot (determined from tax assessor records), building age (currently 50 years triggers review), number of stories, square footage, owner and contractor details, license and insurance information, dump site, carting company, and required attachments such as photographs, tax assessor sheet, addresses of adjoining properties, plot plan, newspaper publication notice, sworn statement, on-site sign, and State Department of Health demolition notification form.

Mr. Ireland described the timeline: an initial submission date is recorded upon receipt, and if the application is complete, a “deemed filed” date is assigned. He noted a 21-day period for written objections, after which a 120-day delay may be imposed if an objection is raised. He emphasized that the pre-demolition application is not a permit to demolish but a notification step that triggers referrals to the Historical Commission, Director of Planning and Zoning, and other parties who have requested notification (including the Norwalk Preservation Trust and East Norwalk Neighborhood Association).

Mr. Ireland then reviewed the Certificate of Demolition Ordinance Compliance form, which certifies that the applicant has fulfilled notice, publication, and posting requirements under oath, and explained that incomplete applications are not accepted but applicants have 14 days to correct deficiencies while retaining the original submission date.

He walked through the final Application to Demolish (the actual demolition permit), highlighting similarities with the pre-application but noting additional requirements such as public utility clearance letters, asbestos hygienist report (if applicable), Conservation Commission or environmental officer approval for wetlands, estimated demolition cost, and specific safety and debris removal procedures (including staged lowering of materials, use of chutes for tall structures, and final inspection before backfilling to ensure no prohibited materials are buried). He stated that contractor licensing is handled by the State of Connecticut, with different categories for residential, commercial, and high-rise work.

Ms. Grant asked what measures prevent situations such as the Willow Street historic house, where a renovation turned into substantial demolition. Mr. Ireland explained that interior work is not regulated under the current ordinance, and partial demolitions are sometimes evaluated based on percentage of the structure affected (often using a 50% threshold). He recounted the Willow Street incident, noting it occurred on a Sunday, was stopped as soon as possible, resulted in fines, and led to significantly higher costs for the owner due to required special disposal of debris. He indicated that stiffer penalties were subsequently developed in coordination with others in the city.

Ms. Laird inquired about the Certificate of Occupancy (CO) fee listed on the demolition form. Mr. Ireland clarified that the demolition fee is \$25 per \$1,000 of demolition work value, and the compliance letter fee is \$50.

Extensive discussion followed among Commission members and staff regarding potential improvements to the ordinance, including: Extending the 21-day objection window to 30 days (or possibly 45 days) to allow adequate time for Commission review and public input, Increasing the maximum delay period from 120 days to 180 days, consistent with the state enabling statute maximum, to provide meaningful time for negotiation, creative solutions, or relocation efforts, particularly with developers, Making the process more transparent by including a summary of incoming intent-to-demolish applications on future Commission meeting agendas, showing which properties were reviewed, the preliminary determination of historic significance, and whether any delay was imposed, Raising fines to provide stronger deterrence against violations, Considering a standing arrangement for an independent qualified preservation professional, architect, or engineer to review claims of unsafe conditions that could override historic protection, and Clarifying that objections must be based on historical or architectural significance, not personal preferences or land-use concerns.

Mr. Westmoreland emphasized that longer delays (particularly 180 days) have historically encouraged developers to incorporate historic buildings into their plans rather than demolish them, and that the Commission frequently lifts delays quickly once reasonable agreements are reached. He noted that very few properties receive a full delay—often only 10–12 cases over several years—and that most are resolved rapidly or determined to lack historic merit.

Ms. Andrzejewski reported that recent annual demolition reports show very few or no delays imposed in recent years, with many applications cleared within days of filing. She also mentioned that the city is moving toward new permitting software that may improve public visibility of application timelines and status.

Mr. Chandler suggested publishing preliminary Commission reviews of applications as part of meeting agendas to enhance transparency. Discussion occurred about balancing citizen-driven objections with proactive Commission evaluation while avoiding the Commission becoming the primary objector.

Mr. Cusano inquired about the origins of the current ordinance and whether it drew from other municipalities or state guidelines. Mr. Ireland and others indicated that the state was involved in establishing timeframes, and the 50-year threshold aligned with federal guidelines at the time.

No formal action was taken under this item.

B. LMMM Conservatory Special Appropriation Request

Mr. Westmoreland presented the request for a special appropriation related to the Lockwood-Mathews Mansion Museum Conservatory. He explained that the conservatory has been a recurring concern for several years. He reported that he drove by the property earlier that day and confirmed the structure had not collapsed despite a significant snow load. He noted that Mike, the handyman at the mansion, had installed temporary interior support beams at key structural points to prevent collapse, but emphasized that this is not a sustainable long-term solution.

Mr. Westmoreland provided historical context, stating that in the 1970s a large branch fell on the conservatory, causing major damage. At that time, the original glass was replaced with plastic panels, which have since discolored and now appear unattractive. He added that approximately fifteen years ago, interior support beams were replaced as part of an earlier project in which he was involved, but those beams have now rotted again. He stated that it is time to undertake a proper, permanent replacement.

He reported that the total project cost is estimated to be between \$1.5 million and \$1.75 million, and that he has included this full amount in the capital budget request for fiscal year 2026-2027. He explained that waiting until July 1, assuming approval in the regular capital budget cycle, would delay critical early work. To avoid further deterioration and potential collapse, the request is for a special appropriation of \$275,000 to fund initial research, architectural design services, and engineering work now. This would position the project to go out to bid near July 1 and allow construction to begin promptly.

Mr. Westmoreland noted that the idea for a special appropriation originated from Mayor Barbara Smith during discussions about the urgency of the project. He expressed confidence that the request is reasonable and indicated that he has already raised it with the Chief Financial Officer and others in the administration. He stated that if the Commission approves the request, Ms. Andrzejewski will need to determine the exact procedural steps, as he has never previously handled a special appropriation capital request.

Mr. Cusano asked for confirmation that the Commission's role is simply to approve the request, after which it proceeds through the standard city review process. Mr. Westmoreland confirmed this is correct. Mr. Stein asked where the \$275,000 would come from. Mr. Westmoreland clarified that the funding would come from city general funds, not from the Historical Commission's budget.

**** MR. WESTMORELAND MOVED THAT THE HISTORICAL COMMISSION REQUEST A SPECIAL APPROPRIATION FROM THE CITY IN THE AMOUNT OF \$275,000 FOR RESEARCH, ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN SERVICES, AND ENGINEERING TO REPLACE THE CONSERVATORY AT THE LOCKWOOD-MATHEWS MANSION MUSEUM. ****

**** MR. STEIN SECONDED THE MOTION. ****

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY. ****

VIII. OLD BUSINESS

A. Elections

The Commission conducted the annual election of officers as required in January.

MR. WESTMORELAND NOMINATED MR. STEIN FOR CHAIRMAN.

MR. CHANDLER SECONDED THE NOMINATION.

MR. STEIN WAS ELECTED CHAIRMAN BY UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

MS. LAIRD NOMINATED HERSELF FOR VICE CHAIRMAN.

MR. CHANDLER INDICATED HIS WILLINGNESS TO STEP ASIDE FROM THE VICE CHAIR POSITION.

MS. LAIRD WAS ELECTED VICE CHAIRMAN BY UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

B. Proposed amendments to Demolition Delay Ordinance

The Commission continued discussion of the draft amendments. Mr. Chandler proposed one change to improve consistency by replacing the word “remove” with “relocate” in the last line of section 55-1 (Purpose).

****MR. CHANDLER MOVED TO AMEND THE DRAFT BY REPLACING THE WORD “REMOVE” WITH “RELOCATE” IN THE LAST LINE OF SECTION 55-1.**

****MR. STEIN SECONDED THE MOTION.**

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The Commission agreed to keep the item open. Members were asked to review the draft document, propose edits using track changes in the Word version, and consider public comments previously received. Ms. Andrzejewski was requested to provide dates of upcoming Ordinance Committee meetings to help target submission timing. Several members stressed the importance of clear and understandable language, inclusion of supporting data such as three to five years of demolition permit history, and the potential value of a joint meeting or detailed educational presentation to the Ordinance Committee.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

****MR. CUSANO MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.**

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:45 p.m.

The next regular meeting is scheduled for February 25, 2026.

Respectfully Submitted,
Courtney Baldwin,
Recording Secretary