

**CITY OF NORWALK
HISTORICAL COMMISSION
PUBLIC HEARING
MARCH 2, 2016**

ATTENDANCE: David Westmoreland, Chair; Suzanne Betts, Holly Cuzzone,
Tom Livingston, Rick McQuaid.

Call to Order

Mr. Westmoreland called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. stated that the purpose of the meeting was a public hearing, and read the notice as follows:

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Norwalk Historical Commission will hold a Public Hearing in regards to the objection filed to the application for demolition of 78 Cranbury Road/450 Newtown Ave pursuant to Chapter 55 of the Norwalk City Code on March 2nd, 2016 at 7:00 P.M. in the Common Council Chambers, 3rd Floor of Norwalk City Hall, 125 East Avenue, Norwalk, Connecticut 06856.

Attorney Steven Nevas provided an overview and background on the White Barn and the purpose of the hearing as set forth by the Mayo foundation. He outlined the historic importance of the theater, the barn's architectural significance and the impact of it being restored as a living theater and urged the Commission support of the delay in demolition to bring the parties together. He asked the Commission to take the time to explore alternatives--the foundation is prepared to sit down, but we need time.

Mr. Nevas introduced Vince Curcio who shared his memories and experiences of involvement in the White Barn Theater over the last forty years.

...In 1947, the daring and visionary producer, later dubbed "The Queen of Off-Broadway", Lucille Lortel, turned an 1850's barn into a modern day experimental theater for up and coming actors, directors, and playwrights. Never before had America seen a regional theater receive so much fame and respect because Miss Lortel made it a fostering ground for many great talents would then go on to extraordinary Broadway and International successes, some of the theater's greatest actors and playwrights came to the White Barn to try out works, ideas, many of which were destined for Broadway and beyond.

Mr. Curcio read a letter from Donna McKechnie as follows:

It is an absolute crime and travesty to lose this part of our cultural heritage, the historic importance of this theater goes beyond real estate development. The barn's architectural significance has a tremendous the impact and I share the view of many other local and New York actors and playwrights on this being restored as a living theater and urged the Commission to save the White Barn from demolition.

Mr. Nevas went on to describe the nature of the clientele that were a part of the musicals in the Norwalk/Westport theater and performances in plays that originated there, including Philip Huston, Eva Marie Saint, Zero Mostel, Geoffrey Holder, Tennessee Williams, Sam Shepard, Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Athol Fugard and Steven Boyer. He then described Ms. Lortel as a woman with a courageous, independent, ground-breaking spirit, as follows:

Mr. Curcio then addressed comments made by Blanche Marvin, asserting that Ms. Lortel did not want the theater to continue. He explained that Lucille, as Attorney Nevas has said to us, put it in her will that she wanted the White Barn to continue. There are some who say the theater is in tough shape, beyond repair. Curcio said he had been inside it in 2012 and it was in wonderful shape. Some things have been done to the building, some with proper permits and others it seems not that way, you can put it back together again and I'll bet you it would be less than you would think to change it around again.

After Mr. Curcio's presentation the list of those that had signed up to speak was followed:

1. Marilyn Robinson stated she was a former president of the Historical Commission and said she echoed comments made and called the White Barn Theater, hallowed ground and a place where young actors can gain confidence.
2. Actress Joan Copeland, sister of the late playwright Arthur Miller, read her comments to recommend saving the theater from an approved housing development. She added that her work at the White Barn was more than a job--that was a dream come true. That beautiful space that hallowed ground was the creation of one of the great women of the theater: Lucille Lortel. It's too important to just let die--this dream is too important to let die.
3. Carmen Del Lavalade introduced herself as wife of Geoffrey Holder and spoke of the history of the theater that was the lifeblood of playwrights and Broadway performers. She described the list of clientele that were a part of the musicals in the Norwalk/Westport theater and performances to not only include those previously mentioned but to include Paul Newman, JoAnne Woodward, and those here that she gratefully acknowledged those attending to urge the demolition delay and preservation of the historical gem of the county.
4. Erik Funkelstein, Broadway Producer, gave an overview of his background and thanked all those that came out and acknowledged the wonderful attendees. He urged the commission to pay attention to the value that this property has beyond the construction of cluster homes and echoed previous comments adding that there is no price on such a property with history. The barn's architectural significance has a tremendous impact and he shared the view of many other local and New York actors and playwrights on this being restored as a living theater and urged the Commission support of the delay in demolition to bring the parties together
5. Barbara Schottenfeld spoke and also echoed the comments and acknowledged Paul Bogave an Emmy award winner that also got his start at the White Barn. She read a letter from Tova Felenchek that echoed others and shared the view of many other actors and playwrights on this being restored as a living theater and urged the Commission to save this historic White Barn Theater.

6. Sandy Starr introduced herself as personal assistant and secretary for Ms. Lortel and gave an overview of her background and years of involvement with the theater. She spoke on the legacy of those that performed there, the acreage and surrounding pond and landscape. She reviewed the Barn's architectural significance and tremendous impact it had and continues to have on many other local actors and playwrights on this being restored as a living theater and urged the Commission support save the White Barn from demolition.
7. Gigi VonDehtor introduced herself a member of a nonprofit organization formed to save the theater. The foundation, formed by Lortel's great grandnephew Waldo Mayo, is asking for time to raise money to purchase the property and revive it as a thriving theater for the next generation of artists. She stated that this is just the beginning of continuing a legacy, and for 50 years, 400 productions, 15 years laying fallow, how can we knock this thing down? She added that many of those who couldn't attend, including actor Kevin Spacey, had letters read...

Please consider the cultural value that this White Barn Theatre will provide for the people of Norwalk, to halt a plan for a 15-home conservation development on the former White Barn Theatre property along Cranbury Road.

Waldo Mayo asked for time, a little bit of time, a win-win for situation for both parties and it can really be the future. He thanked the audience and spoke on how thrilling it was to have the esteemed guests and actors and playwrights in the audience. The Lucille Lortel and Waldo Mayo White Barn Foundation was formed before the hearing that Fieber keeps moving the target for the foundation, and we met him a year ago to start the discussion. Raising money takes time as potential donors need to liquidate assets to come up with the funds, she said.

8. He presented excerpts of a power point presentation and outlined a plan for workshops and a renovation for a revival of the White Barn and the concepts where there would be a collaborative effort with other theatres places such as the Maritime Aquarium and Stepping Stones Museum among other gems of the City.
9. Diane Keefe, 247 Newtown Avenue spoke of her involvement in CT Friends School and as a Quaker that spend a great deal of time in the White Barn Theater building and property. She used the comparison to Fodor Farm that was a visionary acquisition of property by a former mayor and brought open space and organic gardening on the political landscape for real estate. She spoke of the significance of the property and asked not to rush it to give it away to a developer of cluster homes. The barn's architectural significance has a tremendous the impact and shared the views of many other local supporters of arts and artistic education for this being restored as a living theater and urged the Commission support of the delay in demolition to bring the parties together to the benefit of all involved.
10. John Levin, 247 Newtown Avenue spoke of the political landscape for real estate, said he wanted to echo those that spoke of the significance of the property and asked not to rush it to give it away to a developer of cluster homes. The barn's architectural significance has a tremendous the impact and shared the views of many other local supporters of arts and artistic education for this being restored as a living theater and urged the Commission to save the White Barn from demolition.
11. Diane Lauricella, Blue Mountain Road, Norwalk read her letter (attached) and spoke in support of reviving the theater "holds such great promise for Norwalk and its surrounding community.

This revival project holds such great promise for Norwalk and its surrounding communities, our society is realizing that the arts can help solve many of our social ills and are a crucial pathway for our youth to explore their future and solve their problems.

12. Barbara Schottenfeld, spoke to echo the sentiments displayed tonight and White Barn Theatre will provide for the people of Norwalk, to halt a plan for a 15-home conservation development on the former White Barn Theatre property along Cranbury Road. The barn's architectural significance has a tremendous the impact and shared the views of many other local supporters of arts and artistic education for this being restored as a living theater and urged the Commission support of the delay in demolition to bring the parties together to the benefit of all involved.
13. Vivian Sorvall quoted a reading by Edgar Landsbury she added that it is critical that the commission recognize the barn's architectural significance has a tremendous the impact and shared the views of many other local supporters of arts and artistic education for this being restored as a living theater and urged the Commission support of the delay in demolition to bring the parties together to the benefit of all involved.
14. Jim Gordon added reading by Lyle Kessler and highlighted the note on the tremendous the impact this property has and the legacy that can be labeled as timeless. He added that he shared the views of many other local supporters of arts and artistic education for this being restored as a living theater and urged the Commission support of the delay in demolition to bring the parties together to the benefit of all involved.
15. Todd Bryant, Norwalk Preservation Trust spoke of his involvement with other properties and noted the significance of the White Barn Theater. The barn's architectural significance has a tremendous the impact and shared the views of many other local supporters of arts and artistic education for this being restored as a living theater and urged the Commission support of the delay in demolition to bring the parties together to the benefit of all involved.
16. Christine Bisceglie read a letter from Gail Wall and asked the Commission to please pause and consider their actions that can have a life long effect on so many in the industry.
17. Mary Jane Schaefer read a letter from Page Cameron (as attached) The crowd also included theatrical folks from Westport. Melody James said the "vibrant, provocative" White Barn changed her life and inspired her, and Madame Lortel was a very important woman to the theater. We never know where the next artist that will really change the world will come from. One of the most critical things artists need is space and time and safe places to do their work. I beg of you to give space, time to this endeavor, allow the torch to be passed.
18. Barbara Smith, introduced herself as a playwright and noted that the support in the room tonight is overwhelming and inspiring. She urged those in decision making positions to realize the barn's architectural significance has a tremendous the impact and shared the views of many other local supporters of arts and artistic education for this being restored as a living theater and urged the Commission support of the delay in demolition to bring the parties together to the benefit of all involved.
19. Melody James, Theatre Artists Workshop, said it was such a shame not to incorporate the barn's architectural significance into City plans for Open Space and Land Trust. It has a tremendous the impact and artistic education for this being restored as a living theater and urged the Commission support of the delay in demolition to bring the parties together to the benefit of all involved.

20. Elaine McCarthy, Newtown Avenue spoke to support this and who presented herself as a parent, theater artist and “future lifelong resident of Norwalk.” She shared her experiences as a young parent when she received a flyer to “Save Cranbury Park.” She added that it is too important to see here something so precious — not just to her but to the city of Norwalk.
21. Jane Bergiere said she was of Kinky Boots and shared the views of many other local supporters of arts and artistic education for this being restored as a living theater and urged the Commission support of the delay in demolition to bring the parties together to the benefit of all involved.
22. Lana Turner spoke as a member of the NY Arts and resident of Harlem and shared her memories of a similar theater that had been torn down. She had picked up a brick as a piece of the legacy and memory of the importance of the arts and theaters, and asked those involved to fight to keep these special places.
23. Jane Russell Tracey – National Registry of Historic Sites asked the group to make this another property that is categorized under the historic protection. She asked to take charge of weighting the responses and to be a hero to save the White Barn Theater. She added that it is too important to see here something so precious — not just to her but to the city of Norwalk.
24. Peter M. Nolin, his attorney, prefaced his remarks by summarizing and providing to the commission an engineering report that found the theater building in poor condition in January 2015, producing a study done a year ago for Fieber by Aschettino Associates LLC, a structural engineering firm. He read an excerpt of the study:

Based on our observations, it is our opinion that the building has suffered more than 50% damage due to mold, rot and termites mostly in the additions. While the original barn roof framing does not appear to have been severely damaged, the framing appears to be undersized and in some cases inadequate for the building code prescribed snow loads requirements.

In order to restore the building to a normal building code compliant use, in addition to all the architectural compliance issues that must be addressed, which are not part of this report, there are major structural sections of the building that must be replaced and/or reinforced and all the interior and exterior finished including the walls and roof sheathing most replaced. It is therefore our opinion that the building may be beyond a feasible repair project and should be demolished.

Mr. Nolin said the theater is likely in worse shape now, given the work to remove asbestos and the massive snows last year. Surprisingly, we are not here on the 10th day not here on the 20th day, we are here on the 100th day--so if these people want to save this building you have to move and move quickly. He said his client's offer to Mayo's foundation to transfer the property to the foundation is still on the table but he added that the foundation must move quickly to assemble money to that end. We are willing to listen. He is willing to sell the property. What's required is money, frankly, we will listen, we will talk and we have nothing against the theater -- hopefully the discussions will proceed. If these people are serious, they're going to have to do some serious work

Copy of study attached)

Atty. Nolin added that as far as he knew we have never gotten an answer, we have never gotten a counter proposal and we have never gotten an answer to the outstanding offer. I checked with my client again tonight, that offer, despite all the money he has spent on the applications to get this through Zoning and Conservation, is still on the table, unchanged as to exactly what he offered many years ago. We are willing to listen, he is willing to sell the property, what is required is money frankly.

Atty. Nolin said these are some very rich people outside of Norwalk. We will be reasonable but my client has invested quite a bit in moving forward and we can't wait forever. They may be able to come up with some ideas and recommendations that we will make to the developer as well as to the city. Maybe there are some things the city can step in and do like they did with Fodor Farm and some other things. Then the Commission will review them and vote on the recommendations

Mr. Westmoreland noted that the Historical Commission has the option of making a recommendation to the city's building department regarding the future of the property.

Hearing no further requests for public comment, the public hearing was closed.

There was no further business discussed.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn Knox, Telesco Secretarial Services

Attached: letters to the Commission as presented by Mr. Westmoreland

Re: Demolition Delay Ordinance Request

Thank you for your decision to hold a public hearing about this legacy property.

I filed the request because I felt that all parties, including the City of Norwalk, needed to come together and find a way to preserve and revive this former incubator for the creative and social arts.

I ask that this Commission join us and vote to make several recommendations to the Chief Building Official. In addition, I ask that you please assign some of your Commission members to assist us in trying to save this site. Help us negotiate.

As a founding member of Save Cranbury Association, I have experienced the highs and the lows of a difficult, 15-year effort to preserve a precious resource. I believe that the value and dollars earned with this kind of economic development will more than make up for the property taxes lost from the homes.

Both the buildings and the natural setting hold a symbiotic relationship, for it has been shown that calming, natural environments can help stimulate the creative juices. Well, we saved 5.5 acres of the property for open space; now let us ensure that the rest of the property is saved in order to revive a cultural arts center.

I filed this request because I was incredibly disappointed in the land use application process, fully expecting that the staff of the Conservation and Zoning Commissions would educate their respective commissions about existing City plans, including the Master Plan of Conservation and Development, that desired protection of this valuable cultural, historic AND natural resource. The barn building itself seemed to become an example of "Demolition by Neglect".

The Conservation Development Regulations of the Zoning Commission need to be reformed, for this applicant should never have been allowed to include land that the taxpayers paid him *not* to develop in order to calculate the house density, as well as using an industrial utility right of way to calculate the construction density.

The Demolition Delay Ordinance is in need of reform, as I was saddened that this owner and his contractor were allowed to begin Asbestos Abatement while we were still trying to negotiate saving the historic Barn elements. We have proof that there were no asbestos floor tiles in the auditorium underneath the Metropolitan Opera seats, as an example. This should not have been allowed by our Building enforcement officials. FYI: there is a bill in the general assembly in Hartford where abatement work would not be allowed if historic demo delays are in force. Please help advocate for this!

This revival project holds such great promise for Norwalk and its surrounding communities. Finally, our society is realizing that the arts can help solve many of our social ills and are a crucial pathway for our youth to explore their future. **STEAM: Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math** curriculum are becoming the new normal.

Let us make sure that Norwalk schools do not lose out on the legacy that Lucille Lortel set out to achieve so many years ago, when she dared to allow the controversial play, A Walk in the Woods, to be highlighted in a time of fear, and when she helped support those artists defending their freedoms during the McCarthy era.

I gladly add my voice here tonight to the many who feel that we must save this White Barn Theater site.

Sincerely

Diane Lauricella

21 Blue Mountain Ridge Road, Norwalk Connecticut

Re: 78 Cranbury/450 Newtown Ave (White Barn)

February 10, 2016

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing to support the theater proposal for the White Barn property. I think that it would be an honor to have the family member continue the legacy that was started there. and it would be an asset to Norwalk and the surrounding communities.

I have visited the site, and know it to be a beautiful and contemplative space. I had been strongly opposed to the development of the cluster houses and disagreed that the utility easement be considered as part of the conservation area. I was saddened to see this site potentially developed as such.

It would benefit many if the site could be opened up and enjoyed by the public. we need more positive things for people to do not just add more housing.

Sincerely,
Lisa Wilson Grant
Commissioner, Norwalk Historical Commission
**377 Highland Avenue
Norwalk, CT 06854**

Subject: White barn hearing /letter

From: joanne jackson (joannemkjackson@yahoo.com)

Dear David, Suzanne and Commissioners:

I am unfortunately in Washington DC today for a conference and meetings. I am not optimistic about being able to return in time for this evening's public hearing regard the White Barn.

Waldo, Gigi and the White Barn Theater Foundation have my utmost support. For nearly 15 years, Save Cranbury Association has been the principal champion of preserving the historic white barn theater and the open space that surrounds it. We have been joined by the Preservation Trust, Land Trust and Historical Society. Many elected officials, community groups and more recently the Broadway community have come together in support of this plan.

Any community would be envious of Norwalk's opportunity to preserve, protect and cherish this historic and iconic part of American Theater history. The plan to continue the barn as a theatre and as a place where emerging artists can come together with master craftsmen to Create new works is strongly supported by a broad ban of people

From: Gail Wall <gailwall@optonline.net>
Date: February 29, 2016 at 8:13:52 PM EST
To: Joanne Jackson <cranbury1651@yahoo.com>
Subject: White Barn - Demo delay

To the Norwalk Historical Commission:

I support the preservation of the Lucille Lortel White Barn Theatre from demolition for many reasons, primarily, because it's the right thing to do as Lucille Lortel's will stated that the White Barn Theatre to continue beyond her death.

The White Barn Theatre can be restored to its former glory and with tax credits available, it's a doable project. The theatre can once again become the avant guard artists haven for students locally and nationwide. Great performers have polished their theatrical skills at the White Barn and there is absolutely no reason why a rebirth of the White Barn Theatre cannot happen particularly since Lucille Lortel's great nephew has entered into negotiations to purchase the property to fulfill Lucille's wishes, continue the White Barn Theatre in Norwalk, Connecticut.

The White Barn property is an extraordinary sanctuary for nature, neighbors and an incredible waterway to the sound and the last of its kind. The Cranbury and Westport neighborhoods have supported the preservation of the Lucille Lortel White Barn Theatre and property from day one. We have sought and received \$450,000 in grants from the State of Connecticut and City of Norwalk to protect the pond and surrounding pond acreage now in the care of the Norwalk Land Trust.

Please bring all parties to the negotiating table to preserve the Lucille Lortel White Barn Theatre and continue as the Grand Dame had declared in her will and everyone wins!

Sincerely,
Gail Wall
119 Partrick Avenue
Norwalk, Connecticut 06851

Please accept my unconditional support for the preservation of The White Barn Theatre as specifically intended by its founder Lucille Lortel. Not only would departing from her wishes be unethical, but the fact that she took legal and financial steps to endow it in order to ensure this outcome should be binding on those who have been entrusted to carry out her wishes.

As a professional writer and director, I urge you to think about what tradition and longevity mean to the arts in general and to the performing arts in particular. Anyone who has embarked on such a career will tell you that much of the nuance and richness that emerges in the art of any culture is owed to the intangible matrix of rituals, spaces and specific methodologies in exploring the complexities of the human condition.

In my view, it is not nearly enough to read about the way someone did things, it is often the most enlightening to try to emulate their learning process, in order to arrive on a more intricate and evolved plane within one's discipline.

Such a system was devised by Ms. Lortel with the space of The White Barn at the absolute center of the process; essential and structurally the foundation necessary to the work she deemed valuable enough to support. In fact, it proved to deliver substantial results to endorse its value in helping artists of all kinds grow and contribute to the community at large.

What is at stake here is not just land, it is the potential decimation of an artists' conservatory that has been a source of light and safety for creative minds to flourish.

This was Ms. Lortel's intention and her achievement. Please preserve what she worked her entire life to leave to all of us.

**Respectfully yours,
Paige Cameron**



January 19, 2015

Ms. Elizabeth A.B. Suchy
Carmody Torrance Sandak & Hennessey LLP
707 Summer Street
Stamford, CT 06901

Dear Ms. Suchy:

Former White Barn Theater
Cursory Structural Condition Review
440 Newtown Avenue
Norwalk, Connecticut
AA Project No. 2015-106

As requested, on January 13, 2015 at approximately 2:30 PM, we visited the above-referenced building to perform a cursory structural review of the existing building structural conditions. At the time of our visit it was a sunny day with the temperature in the low twenties. For reference purpose we have assume that the front of the building is the west elevation on Newtown Avenue.

The building consists of the original barn theater constructed in the late forties with a south and east additions which may have been built in the sixties or seventies. The original barn theater is exposed wood, while the additions are wood structures with finishes.

During our walk-through we noticed the following structural issue:

1. The building appears to have been abandoned for years and the weather has taken a toll on many parts of the structure. Signs of water damage with both rot and termites damage is visible in multiple locations. The constant presence of moisture has caused floor tiles to eave and mold growth in the finished walls and ceilings (See photos #1, #2 and #3).

2. There are rusted steel beams and rotted wood throughout the rear platform used to access the stage. The rear stair leading to the platform in addition to being rotted there are noticeable structural deficiencies in the cantilevered deck and stair supports. (See photos #4 and #5).
3. While we did not perform an analysis of the roof framing at the original barn, by inspection, we noticed that the size of the roof members are quite small for the span and there are a very limited number of horizontal ties stabilizing the roof. (See photo #6 and #7).
4. Mold resulting leaks caused by missing or clogged gutters and damaged roof eaves is visible throughout the finishes on the inside of the building and on the outside siding. (See photo #8, #9 and #10).

Based on our observations, it is our opinion that the building has suffered more than 50% damage due to mold, rot and termites mostly in the additions. While the original barn roof framing does not appear to have been severely damaged, the framing appears to be undersized and in some cases inadequate for the building code prescribed snow loads requirements.

In order to restore the building to a normal building code compliant use, in addition to all the architectural compliance issues that must be addressed, which are not part of this report, there are major structural sections of the building that must be replaced and/or reinforced and all the interior and exterior finished including the walls and roof sheathing must be replaced. It is therefore our opinion that the building may be beyond a feasible repair project and should be demolished.

It must be noted that the opinions stated in this report are based on limited visual observations only, and there is no claim, either stated or implied, that all conditions were observed. No physical testing or calculations were performed. This report does not address any compliance of the above-referenced structures to either the building code in effect at the time the structures were constructed or the current building code, nor does it provide any warranty, either expressed or implied, for any portion of the existing structures. Architectural, mechanical, electrical, plumbing and environmental conditions are not included in the scope of this report.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us. We appreciate this opportunity to have been of service to you.

Respectfully submitted,

ASCHETTINO ASSOCIATES LLC



Raffaele Aschettino, PE