

Town of Wallingford
Historic Properties Commission
45 S. Main Street
Wallingford, CT 06492

Minutes

Meeting 1/26/09

Present: (reg mem) Candice Brashears, Chair; Robert Beaumont, Vice-Chair; Barbara Sibley; Peter Fresina. (alt mem) Tara Knapp.

Absent: (reg mem) Cheryl Christie Collet, Clerk. (alt mem) Linka Lewis; Rosemary Rascati.

- Meeting called to order at 7:05 pm
- Motion by Beaumont (2nd by Knapp) to approve minutes of 10/8/09 public hearing as submitted. Motion passed unanimously.
- Motion by Knapp (2nd by Beaumont) to approve minutes of 10/8/08 meeting as submitted. Motion passed unanimously.
- Discussion and review of status of certificate of appropriateness (C.O.A.) regarding disassembly of Blakeslee House, 1211 Barnes Rd. Owner: Wallingford Historic Preservation Trust, Inc.

In a 1-10-09 letter, the commission invited the Wallingford Historic Preservation Trust to this meeting. Requested were submission of documents per conditions of the approved C.O.A. and a written statement by the owner explaining how the collapse of the Blakeslee house, and subsequent demolition, effected their ability of comply with C.O.A. conditions regarding adherence to "Procedures for dismantling the Blakeslee House."

John LeTourneau, project manager for the Blakeslee project, was present on behalf of the owner, Wallingford Historic Preservation Trust, Inc. (WHPT).

LeTourneau said:

They filed for a dismantle permit with building department.

Contractors opened four corners of house – found that intact portion of (8') corner post was only top 1 – ½ feet; the lower section had some rot but mostly "gone" due to powder post beetle damage.

Found that, by estimation, in late 1940s or early 1950s, repairs were attempted by sistering 2x4 lumber to the posts and in other support areas. Also in front of house, at the bottom, was found a long bolted tie system holding the structure together and all sill plates were rotted and "dust." The exterior, under clapboard installed at about the same time, was clad in what appears to be a soft board. Fresina said it was probably Celotex insulation board.

As the contractors were removing interior elements, the house was "creaking." One fireplace wall could not be removed because the floor joists were sitting directly on the fireplace as the beam they had been notched into had rotted away. Bracing the ceiling was not feasible due to rotted joists above (mostly bug damage). LeTourneau has a sample of the insect damaged timber at his place of business, which available for inspection.

The contractors were able to salvage a fireplace wall from another room. The buttery components, which LeTourneau and the owner thought was original to the house, were disappointed to find all "new" lumber

from possibly the 1940s / 1950s remodeling. Although the outside had several coats of paint and wear, the backside of the boards was new, had circular saw marks, and marked with modern pencil.

At this point the contractors had opened the corners, removed some interior material, took some siding off and starting removing the old plastic tarp from the front of the house. LeTourneau explained this was a weekend of heavy wind gusts. The wind picked up the southeast corner of the house and dropped it down [collapsed.] Luckily no one was injured. The contractors notified LeTourneau who told them to bring in equipment whereby they might be able to gently pick through the material. They and LeTourneau found the material too fragile - disintegrating upon picking it up. Those moved were also decayed beyond salvagability. The northwest corner of the house was too far-gone with insect damage and rot to salvage as well. No flooring was salvageable.

LeTourneau submitted copies of field notes and photographs of the house.

Photos: (5) exterior – before disassembly
(15) exterior/interior – details of structural deterioration
(5) details of components after collapse of structure
(1) landscape – structure removed, foundation filled and graded.

He explained each of the photos submitted, its location and indicating the damage found. Commissioners asked questions as each was passed around.

Measured drawings (not to scale):
(4) Exterior - South, North, West, East sides.
(1) tenon and rafter detail

LeTourneau explained these were refined from field notations and showed measurements of the exterior of the house with window and door locations, as well as a detail of a tenon and rafter section.

Due to the collapse of the house, they did not photograph nor number the framing. Detailed architectural drawings will not be done until a later date, due to cost.

LeTourneau explained that the grounds were not disturbed except where necessary for the contractors and their equipment. The intact foundation and an adjacent well, were in-filled with brick from the existing chimney and topped with sandy soil to distinguish it from native soil in consideration for identifiably and potential for future archaeological testing in spite of any overgrowth of weeds etc. that will occur. The property was graded and all debris, Blakeslee architectural salvage, equipment and containers were removed.

He said that no mapping or survey of the land and features were done, as the cost was too high. Brashears noted that an existing survey done in the early 1990s by the CT D.O.T. is available to serve as a substitute to locate the foundation and other features on the property in the future.

LeTourneau said that ultimately the site would be turned back to the town. Beaumont said, presumably the property would then go to the state. LeTourneau, however, hoped it would remain with the town and left as open space. Sibley said that the deed restrictions said it would go to the state.

Brashears asked if LeTourneau came with a letter from the owner stating this (events leading to collapse, etc.) John said “no” and had no indication on his part about a letter from WHPT. Brashears explained that the C.O.A. file should include a statement from the actual owner of the property regarding what transpired and affected C.O.A. compliance. LeTourneau said he would mention it to them. He suggested that as agent of the Wallingford Historic Preservation Trust, submission of his discussion tonight and a Record Journal article “Beetles take over Blakeslee House”, Nov. 23, 2008 (reporter Dave Moran interview with John LeTourneau) be used in lieu of the owner’s written statement.

- No public comments.
- New business:

John LeTourneau said that the Wallingford Historic Preservation Trust should be contacting the commission soon, possibly between spring to fall of 2009, as they anticipate restoration of the Royce House. They are waiting for architectural drawings to be completed.

Beaumont encouraged LeTourneau to tell the Wallingford Historic Preservation Trust, Inc. to apply for a certificate of appropriateness early in the process to provide necessary time before construction start times loom. Brashears said the commission could also look at materials lists or unfinished plans before an application if there were any questions beforehand.

Sibley asked about the Johnson barn. She noted the door has been open this winter and even though, as she understands it, one side of the barn is exposed to the weather, the open door is an invitation to enter. LeTourneau said he doesn't know what WHPT plans to do with the barn.

Brashears recommended WHPT look into barn grants available at the CT Trust for Historic Preservation. She believes money is available for evaluations as well as restoration purposes. LeTourneau said he would notify WHPT.

Beaumont thanked LeTourneau for attending, his explanation of the procedures, decay found, events leading to the collapse and for bringing the field notes.

The commissioners discussed the request for an owner's statement regarding compliance with the C.O.A. Another request will be sent to them.

- Beaumont made a motion to adjourn (2nd by Sibley). Motion approved unanimously.
- Meeting Adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Respectfully,

Candice C. Brashears, Chair
1/30/09