

Historic District Commission, Bedford, MA

Statement for Town Meeting on March 28, 2022 Regarding the Proposed Site for a New Fire Station

The Historic District Commission agrees that a new, improved fire station is a very important priority for Bedford. We also understand the challenges in finding an available site that meets the criteria needed for the functions of a fire station. However, the site proposed in this evening's articles is in the Bedford Center Historic District, and construction of a new station at 139 The Great Road would likely require demolition of the existing structure on that parcel. The Historic District Commission is making this statement to clarify the purpose, role, responsibility, and authority of the HDC.

The Bedford Historic District Commission was established in 1964 by a Town Meeting vote and ratified by the Massachusetts Legislature via the Acts of 1964, as amended, as the guardian of the Bedford Center Historic District. It is the intent of the Commission, as reinforced by popular opinion in a recent (2009?) survey of Town residents, to work with residents of the Historic District to retain, as much as possible, the look of a small Colonial town center.

Excerpts from the Act Establishing a Historic District Commission, 1964:

[Note that we have included here only those sections relevant to the issue of demolition of a structure in the Historic District. The entire document is available on the HDC's page on the Bedford town website.]

Section 1. Purpose –

The purpose of this act is to promote the educational, cultural, economic and general welfare of the public through the preservation and protection of buildings, places and districts of architectural and historic significance through the development and maintenance of appropriate settings for said buildings, places and districts as sites and landmarks compatible with the historic traditions and architecture of the town of Bedford.

Section 5. Limitations –

(c) No building or structure within the historic district ... shall be demolished or removed unless and until an application for a permit to demolish or remove the same shall have been filed with the commission, and such permit shall have been issued by the commission.

Section 7. Application to be filed with Commission. –

...any person who desires to erect, build, construct, reconstruct, restore, alter, move, demolish, remove, or change the exterior color features of any building or structure now or hereafter within the historic district ... shall file with the commission an application for a certificate of appropriateness or a permit for demolition or removal, as the case may be, together with such plans, elevations, specifications, material and other information drawn to scale, as shall be deemed necessary by the commission to enable it to make a determination on the application.

Section 9. Powers, Functions and Duties of Commission –

(a) It shall pass upon:

- (3) The demolition or removal of any building or structure within the historic district. The commission may refuse a permit (certificate of appropriateness) for the demolition or removal of any building or structure of architectural or historic interest, the removal of which in the opinion of the commission would be detrimental to the public interest.

In passing upon appropriateness the commission shall consider, among other things, the historic value and significance of the site, building or structure, the general design, arrangement, texture, material and color of the features, sign or billboard involved, and the relation of such factors to similar factors of sites, buildings and structures in the immediate surroundings. The commission shall consider the appropriateness of the size and shape of the building or structure in relation to (a) the land area upon which the building or structure is situated, (b) the landscaping and planting features proposed by the applicant and (c) the neighboring sites, buildings or structures within the district.

Excerpts from Historic District Guidelines, Bedford Historic District Commission, May 7, 2009:

[Again, we include here only the section from our Guidelines on demolition. The entire (30-page) document is available on the HDC page on the Town's web page.]

Demolition, Removal, and Vacant Lots

In general, structures, including additions and outbuildings, should not be demolished. The Commission will consider allowing demolition only if a building or structure has **no** historic/architectural merit or relationship with the Historic District. The Commission may put a permanent hold on demolition of a building of historic merit.

An application for demolition based upon structural instability, deterioration, or safety issues must be supported by the Town Code Enforcement Officer and by a technical report prepared by a qualified structural engineer detailing the nature and extent of the building's deterioration.

Removal, preservation and relocation to an appropriate site will be considered only as an alternative to demolition.

If a new building or structure will replace one proposed for demolition or removal, plans and specifications for the new building or structure and a timetable for completion must be submitted as a condition for consideration of the demolition proposal.

Please note that, since the Town does not yet own the property at 139 The Great Road, the HDC has not been presented with a request to demolish the existing structure or with a design for a fire station on that parcel. However, as detailed in the above sections of our enabling Acts, the HDC is responsible for safeguarding the historic character of the Historic District, and no building in the Historic District may be demolished or constructed without HDC approval.