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Barney S. Heath
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PUBLIC HEARING MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 5, 2021

TO: Councilor Crossley, Chair
Members of the Zoning and Planning Committee

FROM: Barney Heath, Director of Planning and Development
Jennifer Caira, Deputy Director of Planning and Development
Katy Hax Holmes, Chief Preservation Planner

RE: #29-20 Review and possible amendment of Demolition Delay and Landmark Ordinances
COUNCILORS KELLEY, ALBRIGHT, AUCHINCLOSS, CROSSLEY, GREENBERG, KALIS, KRINTZMAN, LEARY, LIPOF, MARKIEWICZ, BOWMAN, HUMPHREY, RYAN AND NORTON requesting a review and, if appropriate, an update of Chapter 22, Sections 22-50 to 22-76 that relate to demolition delays, historic designation, and landmarking.

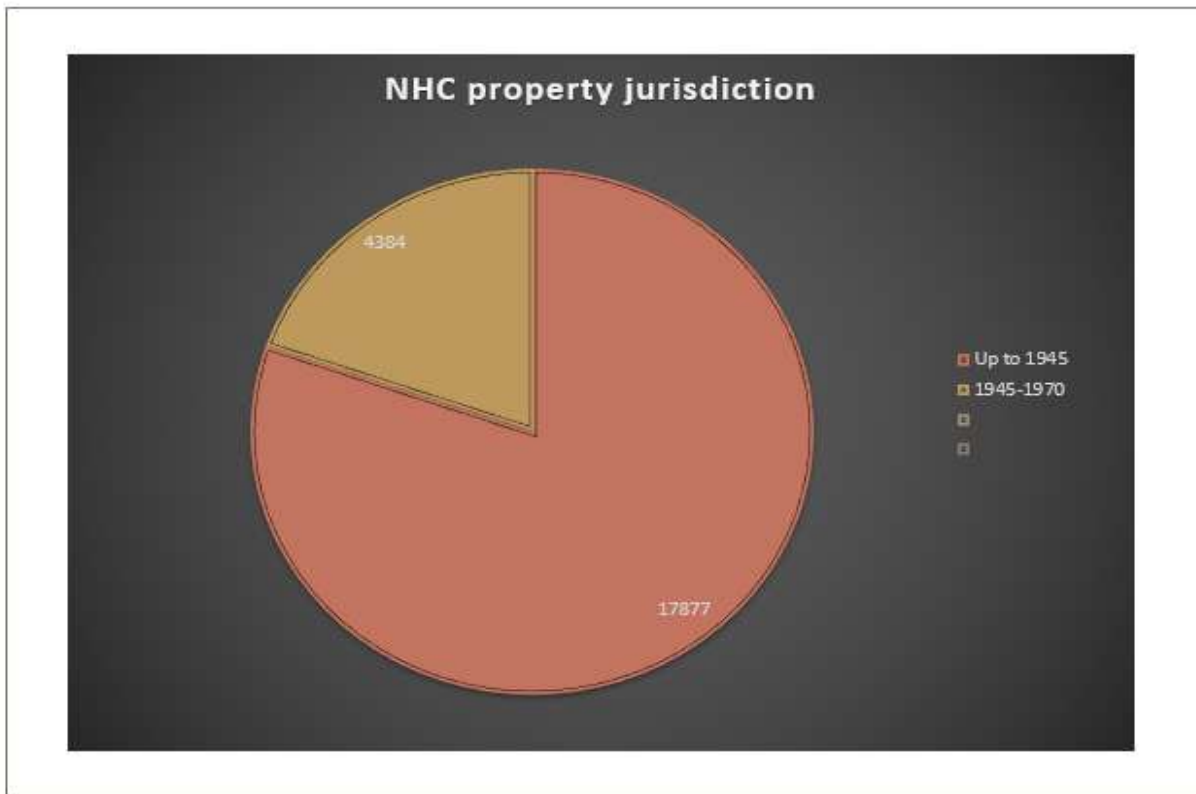
MEETING DATE: March 8, 2021

CC: City Council
Planning and Development Board
Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer
Alissa O. Giuliani
John Lojek, Commissioner of ISD

This memo summarizes demolition review activity by the Newton Historical Commission during 2018 and 2019 for properties constructed in Newton from 1946-1970. There are approximately 4,400 properties which were constructed between 1946 and 1970. The findings for this two-year period show:

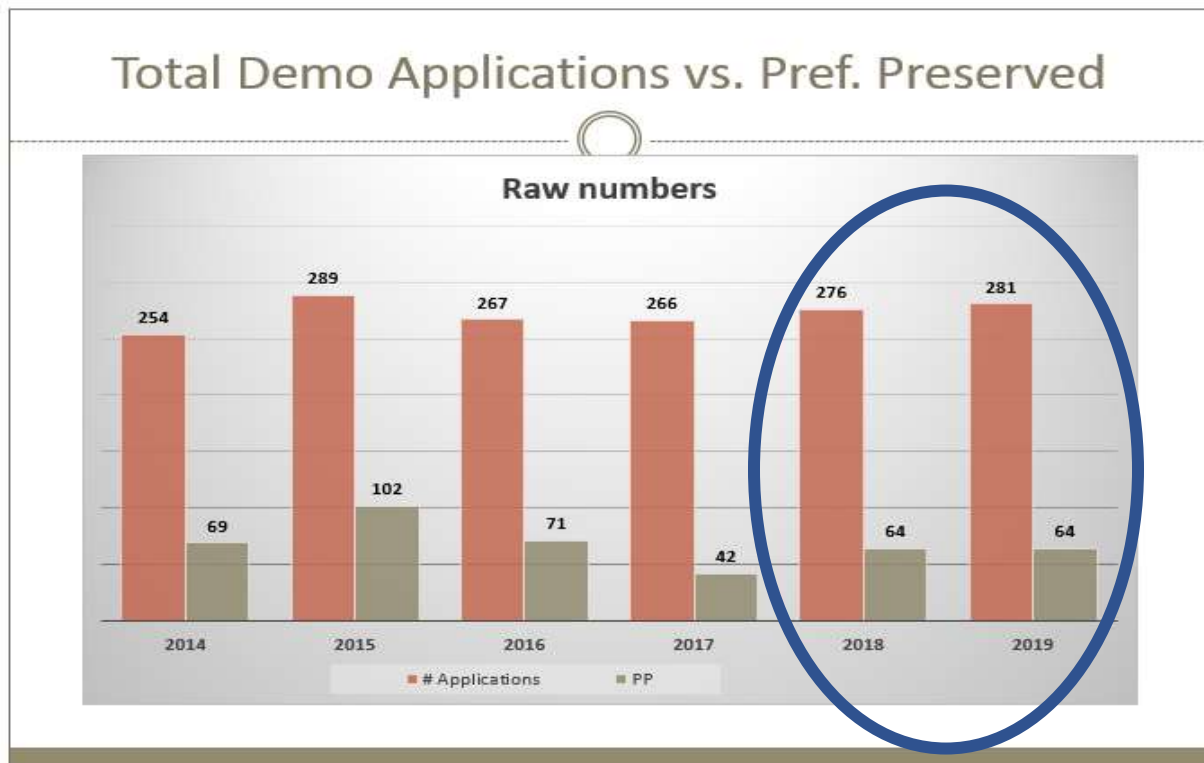
- Over this two-year study period, the number of post-1945 buildings preferably preserved by the NHC totaled an average of 15 each year;
- The majority of proposed demolitions for post-1945 properties were administratively approved by staff and the NHC Chair, and of those properties that did proceed to an NHC hearing, approximately half were “preferably preserved”.

The pie chart below shows the proportion of buildings in Newton that were built from 1946-1970 (brown) as compared to buildings constructed prior to 1946 (red):



The two years chosen for this analysis were 2018 and 2019. They were chosen because: they represent relatively normal demolition activity with respect to NHC review over time; were largely consistent with application data from prior years, as the chart below demonstrates; and were pre-COVID. To demonstrate the first two premises, these two years are circled in the chart below.

Of the total number of full and partial-demo applications shown below for properties older than 50 years in 2018 and 2019, 54% of them were reviewed by the NHC at a hearing (the rest were administratively approved). In 2018, there were 144 full demos: 18 were garages administratively approved, and 57 were full demos of houses/buildings that were administratively approved. In 2019, 156 full demo applications were received: 23 of them were garages administratively approved, and 46 were full demos of houses/buildings that were administratively approved. As shown below, about 25% of total demolition applications submitted to the city resulted in a preferably preserved finding from the NHC in 2018 and 2019.



In these two years, 34% of properties reviewed at an NHC hearing were post-1945 properties, and fifty percent of those were preferably preserved vs. 75% of pre-1945 properties.

In total, 255 applications for full and partial demolition were administratively approved during this two-year period. Of these, 152 were administratively approved for partial demolition projects and 103 were full-demolition applications that were administratively approved by the Chair and staff. Of these 103, a total of 90 applications were for post-1945 properties. This means that 87% of full-demo applications that were administratively approved were for post-war buildings constructed between 1946-1970 because they did not meet one of the five criteria for historical significance (the remaining 13% of applications that were administratively approved were for pre-1945 full demolitions for properties that no longer met the significance criteria).

Of the approximately 4,400 buildings built between 1946 -1970, 1,200 are on an existing historic survey (and therefore would remain subject to review), leaving around 3,200 buildings which have not been surveyed. The property types that make-up this group include: Ranches, Capes, Split-levels, Contemporaries, Modern Traditional, Post-war Traditional, and International Style. Only one other period in Newton saw nearly as much construction activity as that from 1946 to 1970: the 1920s. In the current draft of the demo delay ordinance, buildings constructed in the 1920s would continue to be reviewed by the NHC, as they were constructed prior to 1945.

The current ordinance contains criteria that allows the NHC to identify examples of post-1945 architecture that has historical significance. Conversely, the current ordinance also allows the NHC staff

and Chair to weed out many post-war buildings that do not meet the criteria for historical significance or that lack important historical context.

As shown in the charts provided below, the NHC reviewed post-1945 buildings using the existing significance criteria outlined in the demo delay ordinance. Though the number of properties from the post-1945 period that were administratively approved exceeded the percentage of pre-war properties that were, the 50% of post-war buildings that were preferably preserved by the NHC in the two years of this analysis show that some buildings from this era can and do meet the criteria for historical significance.

The 1946-1970 vintage of buildings that were preferably preserved by the NHC represented a relatively small number (15) and a small percentage (25%) of the total that were preferably preserved. As it happens, most of the properties from this period that were preferably preserved were not previously surveyed for historical significance.

City-wide surveys have been conducted for many years in Newton but largely focused on pre-war architecture. A Mid-Century Modern survey conducted in Newton in the 1980s and 1990s missed several properties that have since come before the NHC for demolition review and were preferably preserved. This makes sense, because when these surveys were conducted, many of the buildings the NHC is now reviewing for significance were only 20 years old at the time. Recent examples of post-war historically significant buildings that were preferably preserved by the NHC include designs by Stanley Myers, Compton & Pierce, Samuel Glaser, and other mid-century architects who only recently became noted for their architectural contributions in New England. Recognition of this architectural period has reached the national level.



176 Highland Avenue (Compton & Pierce)



180 Allen Avenue (Stanley Myers)

It may be possible to survey additional properties built between 1946-1970. However, a continuous survey would either need annual funding to hire a consultant or a trained group of organized volunteers. Both scenarios would be constrained by the number of properties that could be assessed during a given time period.