

Pleasant Street properties prompt preservation plea in Hyannis

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One hundred twenty-five years after his death, Captain Allen Crowell paid a visit to Barnstable Town Hall to plead for preservation of his old neighborhood.

But he didn't count on modern protocol, and was unable to make his pitch at a meeting of the Barnstable Historical Commission because there was no public comment period included on the agenda.

The captain had brought a letter to the "good hearted and God fearing neighbors" he had hoped to address, citing concern about Pleasant Street in Hyannis, where he and no less than a dozen sea captains once made their homes, giving it the moniker "Sea Captains Row."

While the Captain Allen Crowell House, c. 1852, is inhabited and well cared for, many of the remaining six homes have deteriorated. "As I visit my home port today, I see dark clouds over my beloved Pleasant Street and the grave danger of losing an important and essential gateway to the sea," the captain wrote.

Beneath his well-worn cap, Capt. Crowell bore a striking resemblance to Barnstable Town Councilor Paul Hebert, who is one of the founders and chairman of the nascent Hyannis Historical Society. The historical society, formed this spring to replace a long defunct village historical society, is focusing on Pleasant Street, as many of the properties on the street are on the

market two years after the death of owner Maurice McEvoy, who used them for parking. The family put the properties, on and around Pleasant Street, on the market last fall.

Hebert later said he is very concerned that the properties will be sold to a developer with no interest in historic preservation and that the homes will be slated for demolition.

“We know that there is a contractor or developer who is very interested in putting housing there,” Hebert said Wednesday.

Jo Anne Miller Bundtich, director of the town’s Growth Management Department, said her department has not received any proposals for properties on Pleasant Street. The street falls within the Hyannis Main Street Waterfront Historic District, she said, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

A new mural on the side of the Bradford’s Hardware building at the corner of Main Street and Pleasant Street highlights some of the history of the area, which was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1987 for its collection of Greek Revival sea captains’ houses.

Hebert would like to see more support in town for preserving the area. “My concern is our Growth Management Department doesn’t seem eager to preserve those buildings,” he said. “I want it known that we will push the demolition delay bylaw” that requires review and a waiting period for any proposed demolition of historic structures.

Hebert feels the area has potential as a historic area redone to attract visitors. “My approach is that it would be economically beneficial to the town,” he said of preserving the old sea captains’ homes. “I see at least one bed and breakfast there, and I see some housing.”

Captain Allen Crowell, who lived from 1821 to 1891, went to sea at age 11 and

by the time he retired in 1886 had been 46 years in command of various ships. In 1847 he and fellow Pleasant Street denizen Capt. Alan Baxter sailed the Cabot and the American Belle to bring grain to a famished Ireland. On his return, Baxter set the record for an Atlantic crossing.

Hebert, who has done some acting for stage and video, said he enjoys historic interpretation. In the letter he penned for his Captain Allen Crowell performance, he wrote, “Captains’ Row is the last remaining example of historic Hyannis,” and urged that it be rescued: “It is your time to make history by preserving what we have.”