



City of New Bedford

Department of Planning, Housing & Community Development

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STAFF REPORT

NEW BEDFORD HISTORICAL COMMISSION MEETING

July 11, 2016

LOCATION: 18 Johnny Cake Hill (Map 53 Lot 161)

APPLICANT: Old Dartmouth Historical Society, also known as the New Bedford Whaling Museum (NBWM)

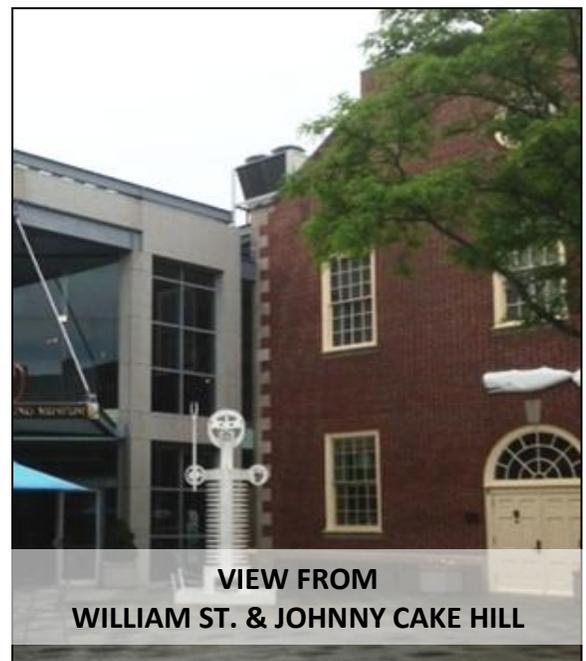
OVERVIEW: The NBWM has been in the process of replacing a failing HVAC system which maintains the temperature and humidity controls for one-third of the Museum's complex (67,000 sq. feet), specifically the 250-seat theater, entrance gallery, five public galleries and a large climate-controlled collections storage area.

The applicant originally applied for a Certificate of Appropriateness for a rooftop condensing unit at the February 1, 2016 meeting, and at staff's suggestion, withdrew the application without prejudice, as it was determined that the proposed unit would not be visible from the public way.

The condensing unit was recently installed, and due to unforeseen circumstances, is visible from the public way. The applicant is currently seeking a Certificate of Appropriateness for a screening structure to block the view of the condenser unit.

EXISTING CONDITIONS: The newly installed rooftop condenser unit is located in the "well" between the Jacob's Gallery and the Wood Building. It is installed on steel structural supports and was not able to meet the planned six foot set back from the building edge.

PROPOSAL: The applicant is seeking the approval of a structural screen to block the view of the condenser unit from the public way. The applicant has submitted two proposals for consideration: a screen constructed of brick and a screen constructed a lead coated copper.



**VIEW FROM
WILLIAM ST. & JOHNNY CAKE HILL**

STATEMENT OF APPLICABLE GUIDELINES: The Bedford Landing District Design Guidelines state the following:

- **MODERN EQUIPMENT:** Must be located in places which reduce visibility from a public way to the greatest extent possible, and be attached to historic buildings in a manner which does not harm or obscure architectural character-defining features.
- **ADDITIONS TO HISTORIC BUILDINGS:** Materials and textures should be compatible with the historic structure. If the addition is to appear part of the original structure, original design elements should be replicated as closely as possible. If the addition is to be contemporary, the materials and textures may be contemporary, but should be complementary and harmonious with the original.

A clear visual break between the original building and the addition should be provided, for example by setting the addition back from the primary façade. The design and location of any new site feature should be in keeping with the overall development pattern of the neighborhood and not detract from its historic character.

FOR BOARD MEMBER CONSIDERATION: The structural screening for the condenser unit will be adjacent to, and within, the visual sightlines of the 1934 Colonial Revival Wood Building and the 1999 modern Jacob’s Gallery, also part of the theatre’s west façade. The north façade of the Wood building consists of a red brick parapet with copper coping. The west façade of the Jacob’s Gallery consists of smooth granite, glass and metal. The theatre façade is red brick.

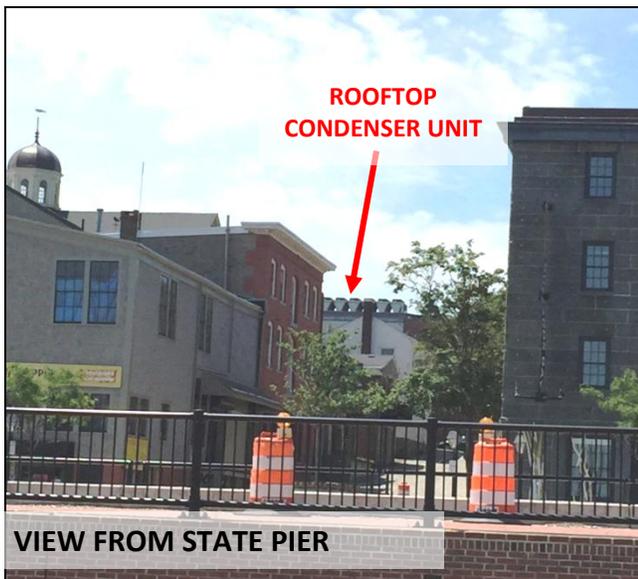


STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The proposed use of lead coated copper for the proposed screening appears to be related to the previous use of that material on the Whaling Museum theatre’s east and north façades. Although introduction of a lead coated copper screen has been incorporated into the roofing at the north/north east face of the Jacob’s Gallery theater, it is not within the visual sightlines of the condenser unit. As such, lead coated copper screening for the condenser units in this case may not be the most appropriate material for screening.



Instead, the use of brick for screening appears to be a better choice of material, due to its existence on the Wood Building, the Bourne Building and the theatre, and in light of both its compatibility and consistency with materials within the immediate sightlines of the condenser unit.

In light of this, staff recommends the use of brick for the screening material to address the sightlines from William Street/Johnny Cake Hill, but urges the Commission to solicit information from the applicant concerning more detailed specifications related to the color and type of brick, height of screen, distance of setback, coping material and the extent to which the screening material will be used (whether it is intended to encompass the entire condenser unit or just the portion which is visible from William Street).



In addition, because of its distant visibility from State Pier, staff further recommends that the Commission consider working with the applicant in considering the possibility of painting the condenser unit a dark gray or black in order for it to blend-in with the roof.