City of New Bedford
Department of Planning, Housing & Community Development
608 Pleasant St, New Bedford, Massachusetts 02740
Telephone: (508) 979.1488

PATRICK J. SULLIVAN
DIRECTOR

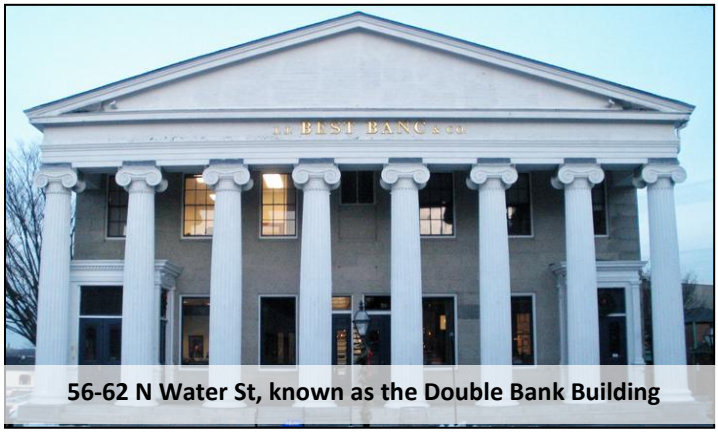
# STAFF REPORT

**NEW BEDFORD HISTORICAL COMMISSION MEETING** **July 11, 2018**

**CASE #2018.20: CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS**
56-62 N Water St (Map 53, Lot 175)

**APPLICANT** John Meldon
**OWNER:** 60 N Water Street
New Bedford, MA 02740

**APPLICANT'S AGENT:** Big Dogs Painting
22 Longview Dr.
Westport, MA 02790



**56-62 N Water St, known as the Double Bank Building**

**OVERVIEW:** The applicant is seeking to make repairs to the building columns and apply a paint finish.

**EXISTING CONDITIONS:** The Double Bank Building is a two-story, Greek Revival commercial building designed by renowned architect Russell Warren and built between 1831 and 1833 to house the Merchants Bank in the south half and the Mechanics Bank in the north. It is considered to be one of the notable examples of its building type within Massachusetts and physically symbolizes the development of New Bedford as a major port city in the first half of the 19th century. It is currently used for professional offices.

The rectangular temple-front building has a commanding presence within the District, as it occupies the entire block between Rodman and Hamilton streets and faces west at the terminus of William Street. The principal architectural feature of the front elevation is the triangular roof pediment supported by eight wood monumental Ionic columns. A classic Ionic-order entablature composed of the molded cornice, a flat board frieze, and a stepped architrave continues along the top of the original three bays on the north and south sides.

The eight Ionic columns are constructed of northern pine and differ from one another. The four columns at the north end of the portico exhibit Roman entasis, while the four columns at the south end of the portico exhibit Green entasis. Each of the columns is 25 feet tall and consists of a 30" capital and 20" column base.

An *Exterior Finishes Investigation* for the Double Bank Building was prepared for the New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park in May 2006 to document the building's exterior paint colors. In addition, the alterations that have occurred to the Double Bank Building in the last two centuries have been documented in the 2009 Historic Structure Report contracted by the New Bedford National Historical Park and written by Architectural Historian, Lauren H. Laham.

**PROPOSAL:** The applicant is seeking to rehabilitate the columns due to water damage by scraping loose paint, caulking open joints, repairing select decayed areas with silicone epoxy and applying new paint. The scope of work is to the portico only. The applicant has submitted product specifications for the epoxy wood repair and paint finish.

**FOR BOARD MEMBER CONSIDERATION:** In 2006, the NBHC formulated and adopted a policy, *The Priority of Historic Structures*, in which all structures within the District were ranked according to their level of historical and architectural significance. The purpose of this ranking is to apply the suitable and consistent standard of review, documentation, and treatment for each individual property.

The Double Bank Building is considered a "Priority 1" structure, as it is individually identified in the National Historic Landmark nomination for the District and is classified as "mission essential" in the New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park's enabling legislation.

Due to the Double Bank Building's level of historical and architectural significance, the National Park Service, within its Historic Structures Report, recommends that the treatment approach for the structure is **preservation** as it is defined in *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.*

**STATEMENT OF APPLICABLE GUIDELINES:** *The Bedford -Landing District Design Guidelines*, adopted by the Commission, are based on *The Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.* The first treatment, **preservation**, places a high premium on the retention of all historic fabric through conservation, maintenance and repair. It reflects a building's continuum over time, through successive occupancies, and the respectful changes and alterations that are made.

The Standards recommend that all work on historic structures follow these four principles:

- Deteriorated architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced wherever possible.
- When replacement of original building material is necessary, new materials should match the material being replaced in composition, design, color, texture and other visual qualities.
- Replacement of missing architectural features should be accurately duplicated based on historical or physical evidence rather than conjecture.
- Repair methods, such as surface cleaning of the building, should be undertaken using the gentlest methods possible.

The National Park Service's *Preservation Brief #45: Preserving Historic Wood Porches* states the following specific to wood repair:

> Patching with Epoxy or Wood Fillers
> There are a variety of commercial wood fillers. Cellulose based fillers consist of wood fiber and a binder and have been available in stores for many years. Only those suitable for exterior applications should be used and they will require a protective finish. Epoxies are a more contemporary product, commonly used by experienced contractors and woodworkers. Epoxies are petroleum based resins created by mixing two components in accurate proportions that result in a chemical reaction. The result is durable, moisture-resistant consolidants and fillers that bonds tenaciously with wood, and can be sawn, nailed or sanded. Epoxies are for use only in areas that will be painted, as they do not take stain and deteriorate under sunlight. Since epoxies are more difficult to work with than other wood fillers, experience working with epoxies is needed for successful repairs.

Specific to painting, *The Bedford -Landing District Design Guidelines* states the following*:*

> PAINTING: The primary purpose of paint is to prevent moisture penetration, and paint is one of the least expensive ways to maintain a building's historic fabric. Paint color also helps give the building its

identity, and a good color scheme accents a building's architectural features. A Certificate of Appropriateness is required to change the color of any structure in the District.

PAINT REMOVAL: Paint weathers by chalking, peeling and alligatoring, and requires regular renewal. Painted elements should be repainted every five to eight years or as needed. Paint removal, with the exception of cleaning, light scraping, and hand sanding as part of routine maintenance, should be avoided unless absolutely essential. Accumulated paint layers may be removed from decorative features prior to repainting, using the gentlest means possible. Hand scraping and hand sanding is the preferred method of paint removal. Chemical removal can produce excellent results, but extreme care must be taken with the products, and the process can be expensive. Rotary sanders that may damage wood and the use of heat guns, which can result in fire, are strongly discouraged.

**CONDITIONS ASSSESSMENT:** Over the years, the columns have been routinely maintained with caulking and paint application. Overall, the columns appear structurally sound and display general paint failure with minimal areas of rot and decay. The column base sits directly on granite, without a wood plinth, thereby wicking water and retaining moisture. Therefore the decayed areas requiring epoxy fill are located primarily along the column bases. The column shafts require scraping, sanding, caulking and paint application only. The column capitals are in good condition, with the most southern capital significantly repaired in 2016.

**Column Capital Conditions**


**General Column Shaft and Base Conditions**

**Detail of Column Base Conditions**

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Regular, effective maintenance is essential to the preservation of wood architectural elements. Wood columns are complex wood structures that require special attention as they susceptible to decay and total replacement would be costly. New technology currently provides far superior repair products than have existed in the past, and the use of wood epoxy will address the current deteriorated portions of the culumns.

The proposed rehabilitation approach for the columns is appropriate and the epoxy product suitable for the conditions; however the applicant's painting contractor, although experienced in wood repair, has not used the proposed epoxy compound product nor received training in the use of this two-part epoxy repair application.

Staff has discussed the lack of product experience with the contractor and has established a mutually agreed upon approach which will allow the contractor to repair one small area of rot with the proposed epoxy to demonstrate the degree of craftsmanship in which the profiles and contours will be replicated with the product. This sample area will be completed prior to the July 9th meeting for member review and consideration.

If the Commission finds the sample epoxy repair to be suitable and to the standards required for the preservation of this significant historic resource, then Staff recommends the approval of the application and the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness with the following conditions:

- Paint removal methods will utilize hand tools only. Power tools are not to be used for paint removal.
- Any rotted or decayed material that is replaced or receives epoxy, must match existing dimensions, contours and profiles.
- All primer and top coat paint to match existing white paint.
- Commission Secretary to have final approval of submittals and samples prior to entire application.