

[Narrative for PowerPoint Presentation for Lincoln LHD 5.1.17.doc]

SLIDE 1 – THE MOTION BEFORE TOWN MEETING

Hi, I'm Steve Bloom, chair of the North Prospect-Lincoln-Sunset Local Historic District Study Committee.

“I move in terms of the Article...”

**SLIDE 2 - MAP OF GENERAL AREA WITH NATIONAL
REGISTRY DISTRICTS IN PURPLE**

The proposed Local Historic District is situated in one of the oldest areas in town. Much of the neighborhood under consideration is already listed on the National Register of Historic Places, as it comprises major portions of the existing Lincoln-Sunset and Prospect-Gaylord National Districts. However, these national designations are really just honorary in nature.

SLIDE 3 – PHOTOGRAPHS OF HOUSES

Encompassing 194 properties, the proposed district is a significant local historic resource, graced with dozens of architectural gems that span the late 1700s to the early 1900s in a striking and remarkably intact blend of original examples of Greek Revival, Italianate, Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, to name just a few styles represented.

(PAUSE)

All of the properties are zoned RG – Residential General – with one exception, the Creamery.

SLIDE 4 - FAMOUS RESIDENTS

But beyond its architectural merits, perhaps more than any other neighborhood in town, the proposed LHD reflects and encapsulates Amherst's intellectual, cultural, and economic development between the Civil War and the Second World War. The poet Robert Frost, Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer Ray Stannard Baker, early feminist Mary Heaton Vorse, children's author Norton Juster, Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court Harlan Fiske Stone, the poet Eugene Field, Doris Abramson, trailblazer in African-American theater, and Lucy Benson, first woman Under Secretary of State are but a few of the luminaries who made their homes in the proposed LHD as well as many of Amherst's oldest names – Cowles (Coals), Boltwood, Hastings, Jones, Pickering, Fearing and Dickinson.

SLIDE 5 – MITTIE HALL, MOSES GOODWIN, IRISH LABORERS

However, the neighborhood was never simply an enclave for the rich or socially prominent. Generations of African-Americans and Irish were a continual presence, many employees of their more affluent neighbors. Paige, McClellan, and Beston Streets were among the first racially mixed streets in New England. Moses Goodwin, Pastor and Mrs. Dee DaCosta and Mittie Hall Anderson, among the founders of the AME Zion Church in Amherst, were residents. Most of their homes, modest and stately alike, remain very much the way they once were, interwoven in a colorful, inextricable tapestry.

SLIDE 6 – COMPLETED FORM B

Since its first meeting in December 2014, **aided by town staff**, our seven member Committee has worked hundreds of hours researching, documenting and digitizing over two hundred historic properties to prepare its Study Report, **the final version of which is now posted online.**

The Committee has created an enormous and invaluable database for the entire Town.

SLIDE 7 – COVER OF STUDY REPORT

In November 2016, the Committee submitted its 500 plus page Preliminary Study Report to the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC), which issued a letter of endorsement less than a month later.

SLIDE 8 - LETTER FROM MASS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Significantly, the MHC doesn't believe the proposed LHD is too large or is overreaching. In fact, it encourages future efforts to increase the LHD, whether by adding properties or by creating new adjoining districts.

SLIDE 9 – BULLET POINTS OF FOUR GUIDELINES

During its deliberations, the Study Committee was guided by the following four criteria, as delineated by the MHC guidelines.

(PAUSE)

First, that the area under study possess architectural, historic or social significance. Second, that potentially affected residents want the protections that an LHD designation provides. Third, that the proposed district be contiguous, defined by readily identifiable geographical features. Fourth, that the integrity and fabric of the neighborhood be maintained.

Here's what we came up with.

SLIDE 10 – MAP OF PROPOSED BOUNDARIES

The Committee decided on a contiguous area defined by major thoroughfares – Fearing Street to the north, Amity Street to the south, Sunset Avenue to the west, the back of the properties facing North Pleasant Street to the east. It was judged that this area, besides being unified by history and architectural styles, had functioned and continues to function as a single organic neighborhood.

SLIDE 11 – MASTER PLAN LANGUAGE

Throughout its proceedings the Committee was guided always by the Master Plan which explicitly provides for and recommends LHDs.

SLIDE 12 – MAP OF LHDS ACROSS THE STATE

There are over 220 LHDS in over 100 cities and towns across Massachusetts, including our neighbors Belchertown, Granby and Northampton.

These things work.

The Provincetown LHD contains almost 1,000 properties. The entire island of Nantucket is an LHD. Many towns smaller than Amherst have multiple LHDS.

Amherst currently has one – the Dickinson LHD which has been functioning successfully since 2013.

SLIDE 13 – BULLET POINTS

In an LHD, changes to exterior architectural features visible from a public way that would require a building permit are subject to review. However, there is no review of interior features. Also, a variety of exterior features are usually exempt, such as paint color and storm doors and windows. Solar panels are encouraged. An LHD doesn't mandate maintenance of properties. And it DOESN'T prevent new construction, development or rental conversions.

I repeat.

SLIDE 14 – FIREWORKS

(That's all we had in the special effects budget.)

So what does an LHD do?

SLIDE 15 – BULLET POINTS

An LHD prevents demolition of noteworthy structures without adequate review. It ensures that renovations and new structures are in keeping with overall character of the neighborhood while encouraging creative new design that is consistent in size or dimensions with surrounding buildings.

Studies indicate that property values in LHDs stay the same or increase at a faster rate than those in similar, non-LHD designated areas.

SLIDE 16 – MONTAGE OF HOUSES AND PAST RESIDENTS

In conclusion, this is a neighborhood which wants and deserves to be an LHD. It's not being imposed on the neighborhood because it was in fact generated by it. There has been little, if any, opposition to the LHD. And, if there's one thing in Amherst we can all agree on, it's that people in Amherst aren't shy about voicing their opinions.

This LHD is good for the whole town. It protects a significant part of Amherst's unique past and identity, of what makes our town unlike anywhere else.

On a practical level, the area protected by an LHD will continue to serve as a much needed buffer and filter between UMass and downtown and the cultural zone that has recently been established there.

In the course of the past few years, I've made it a point to visit other university towns. In places like Newark, Delaware and even Ithaca, New York where protections don't exist or happened too late, the downtowns and surrounding neighborhoods have deteriorated into unending, undifferentiated blight. Most, if not all traces, of the past erased.

This isn't an effort to freeze a neighborhood in amber. What an LHD does is create a mechanism for the town and its year round residents to have a voice in determining our collective destiny.

Because once Amherst's one-of-a-kind heritage and character are gone, they are gone for good. And this very precious, fragile place we all care about so much becomes generic -- just like anywhere else.

On behalf of the Study Committee, thank you for your time and consideration.