

Historical Commission
Public Meeting
25 March 2021

Attendees: Chair—Jane Wald

Members—Pat Auth, Robin Fordham, Janet Marquardt, Hetty Startup

JW: Preamble. Instructions to public attendees.

Items on Agenda:

1. North Amherst Library—demolition of fireplace and chimney on north wall.
2. 37 N. Pleasant St., Barry Roberts development.

Public hearing opened at 6:39 p.m. for item #1 (North Amherst Library)

Explanation and partial reading of demolition delay by-law.

Overview of public hearing process and possible outcomes.

Chris Farley explained design of addition and need for connection through to the current building on north wall.

New addition will provide accessible bathrooms, entry, and upgrade mechanical systems, fire alarm, LED lighting, etc.

15' x 15' is area to be cut out of existing north wall. Remove the minimal part of historic fabric for purpose. Will include removal of the chimney all the way down to basement and fireplace on main floor. Replacement slates will patch hole where chimney removed. All primary windows preserved, corners of building all unencumbered. New space will allow wheelchair lift, new stairs up and down from addition, which will be at ground level in the back (north) side. No need to then disturb the front appearance with ramp or lift. Rosswell Field Putnam was original architect, built 1893.

Ben Breger—First free library in Amherst. Contributing structure to North Amherst Center National District.

Historical Commission member questions:

RF—When did interior standards come into being? JW: 1990s? RW: Does it need review by state? CF—In process of submitting to Mass Historic.

HS—Significance of the fireplace. How is that being handled in relation to wall removal.

CF—850 square feet, small, currently a few materials displayed in front of it. Some woodwork above mantel that matches rest of room. Plan to remove masonry but will salvage that interior woodwork to finish off new opening into addition.

JM: As DRB rep, saw entire proposal and thinks this fits the needs of library well with addition; design corresponds nicely with older building. Supports, in this case, the minor disruption to a Victorian structure.

Public comments:

Meg Gage—208 Montague Rd. Thrilled with plan, compromises always happen but so necessary here, everyone she knows in area also happy, DONA enthusiastic. Key part of village center and this will continue its functionality.

JW asked for motion to close hearing.

JM moved to close the public hearing, RF seconded.

Votes taken by roll call. Unanimous to approve closing the meeting.

On to Standards for Designation as a Significant Structure.

1. Is it listed on National Register or a contributing structure. Vote: YES.
Unanimous
2. Does it meet one or more criteria of
 - a. Historical Importance
 - i. Character, interest, or value as part of development, heritage, or cultural characteristics? Vote: Yes. Unanimous
 - ii. Site of Historic Event? Vote: No. Unanimous
 - iii. Identified with person/s who had influence on society? Vote: No. Unanimous
 - iv. Exemplifies cultural, political, economic, social or historic heritage of the community? Vote: Yes. Unanimous
 - b. Architectural Importance
 - i. Portrays environment of a group of people in an era history characterized by a distinctive architectural style? Vote: Yes. Unanimous
 - ii. Embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type? Vote: Yes. Unanimous
 - iii. Is work of architect, master builder, or craftsman whose individual work had influenced the development of the Town? Vote: 2 Yes, 3 No
 - iv. Elements of architectural design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represents a significant innovation? Vote: Yes. Unanimous
 - c. Geographic Importance
 - i. Part of or related to square, park or other distinctive area? Vote: Yes. Unanimous
 - ii. Structure's unique location or physical characteristics represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, village center, or community? Vote: Yes. Unanimous

Thus it is established as a significant structure.

Deliberation whether suggested demolition would be detrimental.

Everyone agreed that it will allow an improvement.

JM moved that demolition application be approved to demolish fireplace and chimney on north wall of No. Amherst Library building to allow penetration to addition to be built to north of current building. Seconded by PA.

Vote: Yes. Unanimous

Motion is thus approved—building is significant but Commission finds demolition requested will not be detrimental to the current structure. Thus application for demolition is approved.

BB explained further process by town to Chris Farley.

Public hearing opened at 7:21 for item #2 (37 No. Pleasant Street)

Barry Roberts and Tom Reidy (attorney with Bacon, Wilson) invited to present information.

BR turned over to TR.

Explained site—tenants and former tenants of buildings, date of structures, claimed not significant. Referred to Tucker's history of how buildings used. Individually not really important and not in great shape so have reached end of their lives. Looking to get complete demolition approved. (Building behind from 2007 not considered as not in our purview)

BB: Filled in gaps with PowerPoint sent to Commission, explained the three parts and tenants, historical imagery back to 1887. Photos, Sanborn maps. BB went through all historical documentation at library, tax records, etc.

Explained the scope of Amherst Central Business District does not include these structures as Antonio's building is current furthest north.

Historical Commission member questions:

JW—asked about 39 (now Judy's annex) being north of typewriter store yet 41 is that store. Odd change in numbers. BB—No explanation other than renumbering when Judy's built. Also asked whether oven still exists? BR--No evidence of it now.

Public Comment:

Meg Gage—Not opposed to demolition. Confidence in Barry's judgment. One of very few businesses in town owned by an African American and hope we will provide more such opportunities.

Back to presenters:

Tom and Barry thanked Ben and Jonathon.

Final comments HC: PA—comments about condition of building by BR, how does it affect the stability of building. BR: Sign of foundation problems (it's a mishmash, cobbled together over years) that allow entire building to sag and will eventually cause collapse.

Motion to close public hearing by JM, seconded by PA. Vote on motion: Yes. Unanimous

On to Standards for Designation as a Significant Structure.

1. Is it listed on National Register or a contributing structure. Vote: YES. Unanimous
2. Does it meet one or more criteria of
 - a. Historical Importance
 - i. Character, interest, or value as part of development, heritage, or cultural characteristics? Vote: NO/4 Yes/1
 - ii. Site of historic event? Vote: No. Unanimous
 - iii. Identified with person/s who had influence on society? Vote: No. Unanimous
 - iv. Exemplifies cultural, political, economic, social or historic heritage of the community? Vote: Yes/2, No
 - b. Architectural Importance
 - i. Portrays environment of a group of people in an era history characterized by a distinctive architectural style? Vote: No. Unanimous
 - ii. Embodies distinguishing characteristics of architectural type? Vote: No. Unanimous
 - iii. Is work of architect, master builder, or craftsman whose individual work had influenced the development of the Town? Vote: No. Unanimous
 - iv. Elements of architectural design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represents a significant innovation? Vote: No. Unanimous
 - c. Geographic Importance
 - i. Part of or related to square park or other distinctive area? Vote: No. Unanimous
 - ii. Structure's unique location or physical characteristics represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, village center, or community? Vote: Yes/2, No/3 [Everyone explained the reason for their vote in detail].

Thus it is *not* established as a significant structure.

Motion made by PA to close deliberation, seconded by RF. Vote: Yes. Unanimous

JM reminded members of public that we cannot stop, only delay demolition.

BB explained process from here by town to BR and TR.

Return to agenda for public meeting:

1. Mill River project

JW explained our previous contact with this project as CPAC application. RF gave background on CPA response to application areas of request. Tried to determine what is eligible under categories. RF found Dept of Revenue act on what is eligible for funding. DR guidance sees plans and survey as administrative costs. Trying to apply to preservation project w/o being archeological or interpretive. BB added that town council approved CPA funding last week and whether DONA is going to apply for this next year? RF says not approved by CPA so did not go before town council. Reviewing.

Meg Gage invited to present regarding recent developments/strategy. She said she is eager to do this, has reduced to just survey of sites now, waiting to hear what's possible. Appreciative of RF, JW, BB's help at getting this to fit. Happy that people like the project. In 1775, there were already six mills along Mill River. Saw mills, paper mills, etc. so quite important part of town history. RF: CPAC and HC both interested in project, helping us all get clarity on what can be funded. MG: Interested how regular residents can propose to the town for funding. RF: Could this be a national register district nomination project? MG: Already that status in area around Pine and No. Pleasant streets. JW: Might be worth exploring. Question for RF—since there is time for CPAC to work through this project with us, is this something the town attorney (town council) should look at? RF: Before that CPAC just wants documents about how money must be allocated. Perhaps once it goes to town council, might be good for clarity. RF will send materials they've gathered to BB and Nate and Anthony. JW: Regarding national district register nomination—must be named significant by HC or already part of a national district.

RF departed meeting at 8:12.

2. Dakin state tabled until next meeting.

3. Civil War tablets

BB: finally moved to Bangs Center for storage pending public mounting somewhere. Granite Creations moved with specialized stone moving equipment, 600-800 pounds each. Current vaccine clinics in Bangs so limiting all access to room and to control gatherings. Irving Slavid, who did 2010 restoration, reviewed and satisfied with condition now. Took some marks from storage materials off. Will assessment report. Will be incorporated into Juneteenth celebration since significant names of black regiment included. Hope to have room opened with exhibit status, interpretive material, event. Need expert to help on decision on how/where they can be displayed long term. Hope this time finally can get to a resolution. HS: Thanked BB; she's impressed by size and thinks it's fantastic that these will be open to public view. PA: agreed. BB: Some of the best preserved in nation because they were carefully conserved. JW: Could architect and landscape preservation architect as well as engineer might be involved? BB: Yes, structural engineer determined town hall not strong enough walls, but need someone who knows fate of exposed marble, etc. Wildwood Cemetery has same kind of names throughout. HS: Makes her think about Vietnam Vet memorial by Maya Lin. Viewers should be able to see them at their level. Have been hidden from history. JM: suggested a book with relevant names

and their relationship to history of town as a project of the HC. BB: There's a book (*Historical Amherst*) with much of this info already briefly included. Perhaps we could match names with West and Wildwood Cemetery headstones. BB showed photos of move and tablets. Showed us how the tablets are currently set up on metal A-frames. Working group continues to develop their place in town. JW: Role of HC in that? BB: Room for us to meet with the working group members to create exhibits, etc. Town staff would do much of the work and would appreciate guidance. PA: How long at Bangs? BB: Paul Bockleman and Dave Ziomek talked about that. Short term fine. Medium term? Don't want to move too many more times. Probably okay to leave there and move so that senior center could still have small gathering in that room. Room can be locked. Long term- want to find permanent solution. PA: Legends on wall would be start for historical context. JW: Put on agenda for next meeting about how HC can be involved. Morehouse [?] book is out of copyright so could use it freely. BB asked to send pdfs of or links to those pages.

4. Preservation By-Law

BB: Hoped to get planning department staff feedback by now but so many zoning by-law issues tasked from town council that no time to consider. BB started to rework the text to include certificate/preservation order. Sent to and awaiting feedback from other staff. Hopes to get it finished soon. JW: Does town council just take each up when ready or are they doing by-law rewrites in batches? BB: Their subcommittee has priority of zoning so we're fourth down on their list. First three have been formally presented so that review process has begun. We should be in next batch if ready. Not sure if there's a timeline limit on how long they can take when a town committee proposes versus private citizen.

Previous meeting minutes: We need to revised minutes sent out with agenda by date for approval. After vote, they become official records and can be uploaded to town website.

Information from JW: Jane Sheffler is having too many conflicts so she is planning to withdraw. Should we search for replacement/suggestions? BB: Now we're down two members so yes, time to move along names to town manager's office. Local historic district also needs one member.

Announcements:

JM: Writers Walk update-signs have been fabricated and are awaiting DPW installation. Website is nearly amended, corrected, and edited. Will be ready by tour launch.

Public Comment Period:

No one volunteered to speak.

Unanticipated items:

JW: ED museum restoration at Homestead. Not sure whether it will need a formal demolition permit since only restoration on front door visible outside. It does go to local historic district. If it comes she'd like share the project with us. Put on next agenda for us to see anyway? Everyone enthusiastically agreed.

Next meeting dates are April 21 and May 19.

Motion to adjourn made by HS and seconded by PA.

Respectfully submitted,
Janet Marquardt