



Meeting Minutes
Amherst Historical Commission
Tuesday, July 13, 2021
6:30 PM

Present

Members: Jane Wald (Chair), Jan Marquardt, Robin Fordham, Hetty Startup, Pat Auth

Staff: Ben Breger

Guests: Bruce Coldham, Dave Tepfer, Barbara Partee, Jackie Fiocchi, Larry Zacharias, Jennifer Taub

1. North Amherst Community Farm historic barn – presentation and discussion

Coldham, Chair of the North Amherst Community Farm (NACF) board, presented about the historic barn on the property of NACF. Coldham discussed previous studies which showed that there is significant cost to rehabilitation, restoration, or reconstruction of the barn – ranging from around \$300,000 to a million dollars. NACF has mostly been focused on restoring the farmhouse which has been very successful. They are now trying to figure out what to do with the barn. The barn is in poor condition, with broken beams, and there is no real functional use that the barn can serve. NACF is looking to deconstruct the barn and reuse the timbers elsewhere on the farm. Rather than submitting a demolition permit right away, they are coming to the Historical Commission today to discuss the project to see if there are any alternative ideas. Coldham added that NACF does not have funds for any of these options and could look for CPA funds to make this happen.

Marquardt asked Coldham what NACF envisioned a reconstruction would entail and whether it would be just the exterior that looked the same. Coldham replied that the exterior could be restored but they don't have a use for the barn at this point. If it were to be housing, they'd need to pour a new foundation and build new interior walls.

Tepfer added that almost all the structural beams are broken and/or rotted such that some pieces could be salvaged but they are not long pieces and you couldn't necessarily build something new with the old beams.

Coldham added the siding material could be repurposed, the roof is metal and may not have a use, the inner beams could be reused. Some people have approached NACF about purchasing the barn for the salvage value of the wood. However, these people have not been willing to buy it as the salvage value was deemed not high enough.

Tepfer added that they have sufficient housing for the farm workers now and don't envision needing more.

Coldham added they'd like to make a decision on the barn in the near future while they have momentum and before it deteriorates further and becomes a hazard. The Board is likely to submit a demolition permit application in the upcoming months – though they really see this as a methodical deconstruction and salvage.



Wald asked whether NACF could build a smaller version of the barn using the salvageable material. Coldham said this could be possible and would entertain this idea. Tepfer added that he saves everything he can throughout his 40 years of farming. Tepfer added that they do have a festival and regular events on the farm and they could build a post and beam gazebo-like structure on the hill of the farm.

Wald concluded that the Commission is very interested in what NACF is doing and hopes that some of these ideas could be useful. The Commission is sensitive to the fact the extraordinary price of restoration for a building that does not serve any immediate needs would be tough.

2. Writers Walk updates and planning next steps

Breger described that the 9 of the Writers Walk signs have been installed and showed pictures of the new installations. He added that there have also been pamphlets made for the Writers Walk and have been delivered to the Visitor Center, Library, bookstores, and Town Hall.

The Commission discussed the idea of having a launch event for the Writers Walk signs. The Dickinson Museum is having a poetry festival at the end of September. The BID Block Party is September 17th. The Commission discussed whether they could have a WW event in conjunction with one of these other events. Auth suggested that Amherst Media could put together a program about the Writers.

Wald expressed concern over the Amherst College policy on public access to facilities due to COVID and whether this would be an issue with holding an event at the Homestead.

Breger suggested that an event could be held on the Common or Homestead. A few people could discuss the signs and then a group could take a walk around to a few of the signs in the immediate vicinity of downtown. Wald was unsure whether the museum grounds would be available for the public.

Commission members felt Thursday, September 23rd at 5:30pm could work and would fit in with the Poetry Festival schedule.

3. Update on the Jones Library Preservation Restriction

Breger described that he has updated the Preservation Restriction – fixing tense issues and correcting the spelling of members' names. The Planning Director presented the PR to the Library Trustees and they did have some questions about the document. Staff will work with the Trustees to update the document and answer their questions. The Historical Commission has already voted to approve the final version of the PR and Breger will bring this to them after further refinement by staff.

4. Update on Bylaw for the Preservation of Historically Significant Structures

Breger provided updates that the Historical Commission can present to the Planning Board on August 4th and could then present to Town Council on August 23rd.

5. Update on efforts to preserve historic buildings along North Pleasant St.

Breger described that the LHDC did vote to support the effort to study the enlargement of the Lincoln-Sunset district. According to MGL Ch. 40C, the LHDC shall act as the study committee for the enlargement of the district, so there is no ad hoc study committee required. Breger suggested that Startup and Auth can attend the LHDC meetings and contribute to the process but can't vote or be recognized as official members.



Jennifer Taub, Chair of the LHDC, expressed enthusiasm for the continued study of the enlargement of the Lincoln-Sunset district and that they welcomed any input and involvement from Historical Commission members.

6. Mill River Recreation Project

Breger explained that the Planning Department is seeking a legal opinion as to whether this project is eligible for CPA funds. Fordham and Startup walked around the trail area and took pictures of some of the historic sites.

7. Discussion of Dakin property and the potential use of single-building historic district/demolition by neglect bylaw to prevent loss

Fordham thought this could be an example of how to proactively preserve a historic building. The building is owned by Amherst College and is slowly deteriorating. The Historical Commission could look to create a historic district around this property. Commission members discussed visiting the site to better understand the condition of the house.

8. Next Meeting Date

Nest meeting scheduled for Thursday, August 12 at 5:30pm

Marquardt moved to adjourn. Auth seconded. Vote passes 5-0 at 8:52pm.