

Amherst Historical Commission Meeting, February 12, 2007
Second Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall
7:15 p.m.

Present: Gai Carpenter, Lyle Denit, Lynda Faye, Michael Hanke, Edith MacMullen, Elizabeth Sharpe, James Wald; **Staff:** Jonathan Tucker, Director of Planning; **Guests:** Conservation Commission members: Nikki Robb, Liv Baker; Conservation Commission Staff: David Ziomek, Conservation Director

Ms. MacMullen called meeting to order at 7:15 p.m. She welcomed Conservation Commission members, and members of both commissions introduced themselves. Minutes of the January 22 meeting were presented, Ms. Faye moved their approval, Mr. Hanke seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

The Commission engaged in a conversation with the Conservation Commission representatives. Ms. MacMullen emphasized the Historical Commission's commitment to cooperation with other town organizations, governmental or otherwise. Ms. Robb noted that she was not part of the earlier conversation between members of the two commissions, and said she and Ms. Baker also values cooperation and hopes Conservation Commission can revisit its discussion of 575 North East Street. Ms. MacMullen asked Ms. Carpenter to speak about the planned Bay Road projects as an area of potential overlapping interest; issues on North East Street are also about history but raise a question of agricultural value of that property. Ms. MacMullen mentioned the North Amherst Community Farm as another site that is of shared interest. Mr. Denit talked about the relationship between agricultural buildings, agriculture and Amherst itself. He mentioned the shed at the NACF which says volumes about science of farming, effective and advanced farming of the period and asserted that living agriculture is embodied in buildings.

Ms. MacMullen mentioned Mr. Denit's his initial appearance before the Historical Commission to speak about the North East Street property. Ms. Robb said all this background is helpful. Ms. MacMullen reiterated some points on agricultural history and on the house in its setting. Mr. Wald asked what the Conservation Commission objects to so strongly. Ms. Baker said Conservation Commission got involved because its approval was necessary for project to move forward, but they didn't assume that they should accept any fiscal responsibility. She added that they were also afraid of setting a precedent. Release of APR land could affect other towns, too. Ms. Baker asserted that other towns were shocked that Amherst would take this action; the Conservation Commission has felt pressure from others outside of Amherst. Mr. Wald continued to emphasize that the Conservation Commission should assume some fiscal responsibility.

Ms. Carpenter reiterated the separate compensation and mitigation components of the agreement with the state. Ms. MacMullen spoke on the same theme of funding compensation through Commission budget requests; Mr. Tucker noted that the mitigation portion doesn't have to be paid for five years. Mr. Tucker pointed out that the FY 08 Historical Commission budget request includes a line for historic landscape acquisition, which could be a set-aside for mitigation, and questioned whether the Conservation Commission might also be willing to participate in this mitigation. Mr. Tucker inquired whether we might find a way of blending the interests of the two commissions. Mr. Wald commented on commissions' interests in preserving their territories and resources. Mr. Wald spoke about Ms. Faye's education of Commission on sheds and barns as part of the historic landscape, and how we try to find compromises between demolition and adamant preservation demands. Mr. Wald reiterated his observations on the North East Street property: there are lots of nice houses and lots of nice land but not a lot of those together. Mr. Tucker noted that the North East Street farm now looks as though it may get a resident manager to run it as a farm again.

Ms. MacMullen posed a question to Mr. Ziomek on the issue of precedent. He was clear that other and wealthier communities are looking at this situation, and might want to do something similar. Mr. Ziomek commented on the shared interests of the Historical Commission and Conservation Commission. But he noted that the action on the North East Street property went too fast and we

made mistakes; the Conservation Commission took its vote before having any idea of associated costs. Ms. MacMullen urged that we admit mistakes and move on. Ms. Robb said she was not sure that mistakes were made, but the situation has evolved and changed. Mr. Ziomek said that the Conservation Commission is not all that interested in issues of house in its setting; the real issue is about the mitigation agreement, with its five year frontier, and the possibility of adding new APR land to meet the mitigation requirement. Ms. MacMullen asked what sort of land could be used, and suggested probably not a hayfield. Mr. Ziomek replied that the land could be in hay so long as it's land of high quality. He noted the Wentworth farm land as an example.

Ms. MacMullen recapitulated some of the options for funding options and Ms. Robb indicated she is prepared to take the ideas back to Conservation Commission. Mr. Tucker noted that mitigation funds, even if they have to be paid, could only be used for APR acquisitions in Amherst. Mr. Tucker also elaborated on precedent and issues of the obligation we've incurred. Ms. MacMullen asked if there were any other questions or issues. Ms. Robb and Ms. Baker indicated they had enough to take back to Conservation Commission.

Town Manager Larry Shaffer had planned to meet with the Commission, but was tied up with the Select Board.

Mr. Tucker reported some progress on the West Cemetery projects. Boxes for brochures are in; electrical work will be done this spring; Mr. Hanke and Mr. Tucker are working on signs; and Bonnie Parsons working on restoration plans.

Mr. Tucker also reported on the outlying residential Register nominations: Bonnie Parsons has reviewed Aaron Warner nomination and found it excellent.

Mr. Tucker provided an update on CPA appropriations and expenses for Historical Commission projects. The Commission reviewed the CPA project status of individual line items, paying particular attention to the document preservation initiatives. Tevis Kimball had provided a status report on the Jones Library part of the project, and Mr. Wald provided the citation from the original proposal on the project scope. The Town Records part of project has been delayed because of personnel changes, but is expected to pick up speed.

Members of the Commission agreed that the revised CPA proposal was acceptable; the CPAC meets Tuesday, February 27th.

Mr. Denit reported that the 250th anniversary committee is really heating up. He's particularly interest in getting people involved and in finding out what specific groups would like to do, organize, present, etc. The Anniversary Committee is still keen on a quilt as a commemorative object. They are also thinking about a series of themes that could be organizing rubrics for activities throughout the year. Mr. Tucker has been approached by arts and literature committee; they could be interested in the Civil War plaques. Mr. Denit mentioned publications which could be more general interest than highly specialized. Ms. Sharpe offered some additional ideas about books, e.g., an Amherst A – Z. Mr. Denit asked about funding publications; the Commission budget has both new funding and some income from sales of the Dickinson District brochure.

Mr. Tucker distributed a paper from Jan Greenfield about her house at 351 Main Street. Mr. Denit shared some ideas about postcards, other historic materials that might be used in publications. Ms. MacMullen wondered whether we might want to reprint Perry Thompson's earlier book. Ms. Sharpe suggested getting some local illustrators or authors to work on children's stories.

Mr. Wald reported on the Comprehensive Planning Committee. The consultants do monthly reports and there have been some process delays; community forums were planned for early spring but may be behind schedule. It is still likely that a general public presentation could come by late spring. Ms. MacMullen commented on the Economic Development Subcommittee which is raising critical questions designed to highlight potential conflicts in interests and to focus on hard choices. Mr. Wald

and Mr. Tucker described the overall process both noting that ultimately participants need to follow the process guidelines and get to decisions.

Commission members reviewed the South Amherst Common meeting and agreed it was useful. Mr. Tucker pointed out the need to summarize public reaction and members of the Commission agreed there wasn't a lot of reaction. There have been earlier meetings about re-routing traffic and Mr. Tucker said that the proposals on traffic had gotten some folks riled up. He reviewed PWC, Town Meeting and other actions about "surveying" commons to preserve them. Mr. Tucker also noted that the Public Works director and others are concerned about what initiatives the Historical Commission might take, and are especially concerned about preserving roadways as needed. The two basic positions are to see the common as the road and the common as a park. Ms. MacMullen asked whether we should meet with the Public Works Commission as part of our next meeting. It was suggested that it is more important to meet with the Town Clerk and Jones Library first before CPAC meeting.

The East Village project is moving along with Ms. Sharpe's help, and Bonnie Parsons' work.

Following the visit to Tobias Baskin's residence, Ms. MacMullen inquired whether that house should be considered for an outlying residential National Historic Register nomination. Mr. Denit urged that it move to the head of the Commission's list. Mr. Wald agreed to contact Mr. Baskin about gathering any information he may have.

Mr. Hanke commented on the Amherst College project to develop the Lord Jeffrey Inn. He observed that the house that in the way of the project seems in fairly decent shape; he sees the house as a building of some merit. Mr. Tucker provided an update on Masons plans for their Spring Street property and a temporary parking lot.

Mr. Denit and Ms. MacMullen met with Jim Cahill in Physical Plant at UMass to discuss historic structures on the campus. They talked about all the buildings Mr. Denit had listed after earlier conversations—barns, experiment stations, old chapel, etc. Mr. Denit says that Cahill seems genuinely interested in the buildings, but there are many constraints on UMass in its effort to meet expansion and upgrade goals. Ms. MacMullen wanted to advocate for use of buildings and recognition of their value, but Mr. Denit was clear that some of the structures would be too expensive to repair to meet code requirements.

Ms. MacMullen presented a letter from the Executive Director of the Emily Dickinson Museum asking for a letter of support for grant applications; Ms. MacMullen will provide the requested documents.

The Commission agreed to hold a public hearing at its March 12 meeting regarding the request to demolish two structures at 243 Amity Street.

Next meetings: March 12
 April 9

Ms. Sharpe commented on the marble memorial tablets. She spoke with Suzanne Flynt of Historic Deerfield who suggested they would need a conservator if they've been outside. Deerfield had wooden frames built for marbles and essentially hung the frames. Mr. Tucker noted that Larry Shaffer's interest in meeting with the tonight Commission was not to talk about the marbles but about clock repair.

Ms. Faye moved adjournment and Mr. Hanke seconded her motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Gai Carpenter
Clerk