

Amherst Historical Commission Meeting, March 12, 2007
First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall
7:15 pm

Present: Lyle Denit, Linda Faye, Michael Hanke, Edith MacMullen, Elizabeth Sharpe, James Wald; **Staff:** Jonathan Tucker, Director of Planning; **Guests:** Sandra Burgess, Town Clerk

Ms. MacMullen called the meeting to order at 7:15.

She announced that Ms. Sharpe would be presenting the next History for Lunch talk, on the Williamsburg Dam break.

Mr. Tucker noted a grammatical change to the Minutes of March 12, 2007. Ms. Faye moved to approve them as slightly amended. Mr. Hanke seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

In Committee Reports, Mr. Denit reported that the last 250th Anniversary Committee meeting was cancelled due to inclement weather. Ms. Sharpe expressed interest in the status of publications for the 250th. She will consider volunteering in that regard.

Mr. Wald reported that the Comprehensive Planning Committee had heard from a Shade Tree Committee representative regarding hopes of planting 250 trees throughout town to reverse a decline. Questions were raised as to who would fund this, where the trees would be planted, etc. It was acknowledged that more information is needed on this. Mr. Wald reported on the effort to balance the consultants' need to press ahead with the plan versus new committee members' need to get up to speed on progress thus far.

Mr. Tucker reported that the West Cemetery N. Pleasant St. entrance lighting improvements will have to be postponed, as the DPW has shifted priority to work on Amity St. Ms. MacMullen said that some things can proceed, such as removing the "Painters Needed" sign and mounting new brochure boxes. Mr. Tucker and Mr. Hanke are continuing work on historic district signs. Ms. MacMullen noted that the two-year anniversary of the Mural dedication is approaching and that she feels a pressing need to finish some of these projects, especially with the tourist season warming up.

At 7:32pm, Ms. MacMullen opened the Public Hearing DDA2007-00009, an application to demolish a 20th century porch and an 1840's vernacular barn at 243 Amity St. Demolition Delay

Rachel Vallitt, owner, said she is an Amherst native, has lived in old homes her whole life, and is privileged to live in the Solomon Boltwood house. She said they want to remove the porch in order to restore the lines of the house. She said the garage is a danger to their cars and children, and is awkward and impractical for their needs. She said it may have once held a horse, but is certainly not a barn. She said it was built 100 years after the house and is unremarkable with little historical value, and that many sheds in Amherst are more significant. She said they plan to build a gambrel-roofed addition off the back of the house, extending into a shed roof garage.

Mr. Denit reported on his findings on the garage based on two site visits. He said it is a timber frame structure, probably from about 1840. He said the frame, siding and interior show some changes, and some parts are difficult to see now. The frame above ground seems largely intact, though it is leans and has some broken joints. He said the bottom plates were rotten. Evidence of a horse stall is clearly seen. He said the structure is a good example of a village carriage barn of that era.

Mr. Tucker asked what would replace the barn. Andrew Vallitt, owner, explained their addition plans and hopes to use the old barn beams as much as possible. Mr. Hanke said he thought it was

great to remove the porch. Ms. Faye said outbuildings are disappearing from town at a brisk clip, and that over time their loss becomes noticed. She asked if it couldn't be used where it is? The Vallitts said that the addition would require the barn demolition.

Louis Greenbaum, 298 Montague Rd., previous owner of the Boltwood House, and Ms. Vallitt's father, spoke about his experience restoring historic buildings. He said the barn cannot be restored or rebuilt, and that there is no frame left on the first floor. He said it is right on the property lines, complicating any repair and that it would be prohibitively expensive. Hilda Greenbaum said that the structure had been good enough for her and her husband, but was not good enough for her children.

Mickey Rathbun, 15 Sunset Ave., an abutter, said she had never received notice about the demolition or the public hearing, nor had any other abutters, and was upset at this. Mr. Tucker said the Planning Dept. practice is to mail notice to owners within 300ft. of the property in question. He apologized for this not happening. Ms. Rathbun said that the barn, which is their property line, is a significant example of a carriage house in a historic district, and that it would be missed. She expressed concern for the trees on the property line, if the building was disturbed.

Mr. Hanke asked if they had considered moving the driveway. Mr. Vallitt said they had but that it would not change the basic problem with the barn. Ms. MacMullen and Mr. Denit said it would be sad to see this chapter of Amherst history closed. Mr. Hanke moved that the Public Hearing be closed, and Ms. Faye seconded. At 8:40pm, the vote to close was unanimous.

The criteria of historical significance under Section 13.54 were reviewed, and it was found that the porch did not meet any of the criteria. Ms. Faye moved and Mr. Hanke seconded a motion that it was not a significant structure. The vote was 6-0 in favor, that the porch could be demolished.

Ms. Sharpe noted that there are many sheds in poor condition all over Amherst, and asked if we would set a precedent by voting to allow demolition of the barn. Ms. MacMullen and Mr. Wald said we would not and that we take each case on its own merits.

Regarding the carriage barn, the Commission found that it met the criteria of significance under Sections 13.40, 13.4100, 13.4103, and 13.4111. Ms. Faye moved, seconded by Mr. Wald, the following:

Having found that the carriage shed is a significant structure but that its demolition would not be detrimental to the historical resources of the Town, the Historical Commission hereby votes to authorize demolition of this 1840s outbuilding at 243 Amity Street, with the following recommendations:

1. That prior to demolition, a good faith effort will be made by the applicant to solicit interest by others in relocating the building off-site for reuse.
2. That prior to and during demolition the building will be documented *in situ* with on-site interior and exterior photographs, measured drawings, and streetscape photographs taken from Amity Street and Sunset Avenue showing the building in its context.
3. That, as feasible following demolition, archeological surveying will be conducted within the footprint and the immediate surroundings of the building using the services of history and/or archeology students from the University of Massachusetts or elsewhere.
4. That the results of 2) and 3) above be appropriately documented and copies provided to the Amherst Historical Commission and Special Collections (Jones Library) for inclusion in the Historic Resource Inventory file for this property.

The motion passed 6-0.

The Commission also advised that the services of a qualified arborist might be useful in determining the likely impact of demolition and removal of the building on a large hemlock tree whose root system has grown against and underneath the eastern foundation of the building.

At the request of the Commission, Sandra Burgess, Town Clerk, made a presentation detailing the use of CPA money already spent from FY 2005 and 2006, and that still requested for 2007 for continued preservation of Town records. They are working with Brown's River Bindery. Mr. Wald commended Ms. Burgess for her thorough attention to detail on this project.

Mr. Wald expressed more concern with the Jones Library Special Collections' use of CPA funds for storage boxes and certain document restoration, saying that it seemed random. Ms. MacMullen said that she would convey to Tevis Kimball, who had been unable to attend this evening to address this, our desire for more information, planning and limits on using CPA funds.

Mr. Wald reported on the CPA Committee. He will present, on Wednesday, our budget requests and a status summary of CPA money already received by the Commission. The Dickinson Museum landscape study is complete, and awaiting determination from Town Counsel on whether a further preservation restriction is needed.

Discussion moved to what should be our priority projects. Ms. Faye said we should push to get West Cemetery done. Mr. Tucker spoke about the time limits the Planning and Public Works Departments face regarding work on it. Ms. Faye wondered if we could have a work party on Mar. 24 to take down old sign and put up brochure boxes. Mr. Tucker said we could do that. Ms. MacMullen agreed our first priority should be West Cemetery.

A schedule for completion of the East Common study was discussed. It was agreed that the PVPC Historical Study should be finished by June 30, 2007. Review and Assessment should take place from July 1 – Sept. 15, with a public meeting in September. Survey Development should be from Sept. 15 – Oct. 15, in discussions between the DPW and us. The survey would go to bid just after this, and hopefully be completed before snow.

Mr. Baskin of 439 E. Pleasant St. wants to proceed with an NHR nomination for the property. Mr. Wald will get forms to him and ask him to fill them out.

Members reviewed the demolition application of a shed at 33 Flat Hills Rd., and voted 6-0 not to schedule a public hearing.

Mr. Tucker gave a brief overview of Special Municipal Employee status. We determined that we want to have that status. The deadline for applying is Mar. 31. Ms. MacMullen as Chair was authorized to write a letter requesting it.

In New Business, notice was given of an upcoming public meeting on the proposed changes to the intersection of Bay Rd. and Rt. 116.

Ms Sharpe moved that we adjourn, Mr. Hanke seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Ms. MacMullen closed the meeting at 10:13pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Lyle Denit.