

Amherst Historical Commission
MEETING
Tuesday, May 6, 2008
First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall
7:15 p.m.

Present: Gai Carpenter, Lyle Denit, Louis Greenbaum, Michael Hanke, Elizabeth Sharpe, James Wald. **Absent:** Linda Faye. **Staff:** Jonathan Tucker, Director of Planning. **Visitors:** Tom Davies, Jim Brassord, Missy Ehrgood.

Mr. Wald called the meeting to order at 7:21 p.m. The minutes of April 7 were presented; Ms. Sharpe moved approval, Mr. Hanke seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously. Minutes of the April 7 Executive Session were also presented, Mr. Hanke moved approval, Ms. Sharpe seconded, and the vote was unanimous.

At 7:25 p.m. the Historical Commission began its public hearing on DDA2008-00010, 297 So. Pleasant St. (Scott House), Amherst College Demolition of additions and outbuildings associated with a 1790 Federal wood frame house.

Mr. Brassord described the work proposed to add Scott House to a planned new complex for the college's development department. The complex also includes the adjacent Morgan and Smith houses.

Mr. Tucker commented on previous questions about preservation of original stairs, and Mr. Brassord pushed back on the possibility of getting some sort of variance to allow the stair to be kept, objecting that preserving the stair and also adding a code compliant stair would shave critical space off the building program. Mr. Greenbaum commented that someone, perhaps the Historical Commission, needs to speak for the house and said he feels keenly for the interior of the house while being less concerned about its exterior. He said he is uneasy about re-use of interior materials and suggested/asked whether the Historical Commission could request a visit to the house before making any decision.

Mr. Wald reframed the question about reuse of materials, asking whether the plan was to keep them in place. Mr. Brassord initially said yes, but then noted that he is talking about removing and reinstalling architectural elements. Mr. Davies commented on changes to the interior required to accommodate the college's program. Mr. Brassord stated it is clear that this will not be a colonial residence when they are done. Amherst College will preserve the building only by converting it and making adaptive reuse of it, and has no intention of rehabilitating the property for any other purpose. The college representatives and members of the commission talked briefly about Amherst's original and revised plans.

Mr. Tucker asked how the stair might be used in redesign, and Mr. Brassord said he was willing to think about moving the stair to the back of room, as Mr. Tucker suggested, so it would still be viewable as bygone element. Mr. Wald asked Mr. Brassord about the possibility of a visit. Mr. Brassord and Mr. Davies were reluctant to agree to a visit, citing the condition of the building. Mr. Brassord asked the purpose of this meeting: is it about the exterior or interior? He restated the position that

preservation of the stair would so compromise the project that it would make it impossible to achieve the college's program. Mr. Brassord said that preservation of the stair as a visual element is an attractive idea and Ms. Sharpe asked what happens in the space now occupied by the stair. Mr. Davies said that part of that space becomes workspace. Ms. Sharpe posed a further question about documentation of the building photographically or in drawings. Mr. Brassord replied that such material would usually go to the college archives, but could also go to the Jones Library.

Mr. Greenbaum moved that further consideration of the Amherst College application and possible approval by the Historical Commission be contingent on a site visit and that the Historical Commission hearing be continued until May 13; Ms. Sharpe seconded his motion. Mr. Denit stated that he was not sure what else the Commission could learn by visiting the house. Mr. Greenbaum responded that the plans would be a lot clearer and more lucid if the property were viewed on site. Mr. Hanke asked what specific departments were going into this house. Mr. Brassord and Mr. Davies responded that they would include development department prospect research and communications. Mr. Hanke observed that he was not sure that there was much to say, since this is private property and once the college's work is done, the building is still lost to the town. Mr. Hanke would feel differently if it were public space and if he could expect to visit it in the future. Mr. Greenbaum argued that the Commission is trying to save the Hills Mansion, and that the proposed removal and/or relocation of original interior woodwork of the Scott House be called vandalism.

Mr. Tucker commented on the "original" fabric of the building and noted that most of it surrounds the chimney; he asked whether some of it would be used more widely in building. Mr. Tucker and Mr. Wald offered further comments on the value of interior elements and other Commission members made additional comments on whether the Commission's influence extends to the interior. Mr. Greenbaum and Mr. Denit offered more comments on historic properties in Amherst, and the perpetual question of what the Commission can do. The vote was called on Mr. Greenbaum's motion: two yes, three no; motion defeated.

Mr. Wald invited a motion to close the public hearing; Ms. Sharpe moved cloture, Mr. Denit seconded, and the motion was passed unanimously. Mr. Wald opened the second DD hearing, originally scheduled for 7:40 p.m.: DDA2008-00011, 30 Boltwood Ave. (Lord Jeffery Inn), Amherst College Demolition of the east wing of a 1926 inn.

Mr. Brassord commented on design review for the Lord Jeff plans, and modifications to the earlier design for the renovation and expansion. The earlier design idea of two-storey units was a non-starter, and banquet facilities really need to be central. By replacing the east wing, they can get floor-to-floor continuity, and put banquet facilities in the east wing. Mr. Denit posed some questions about design and the new east wing. Mr. Wald asked if there were need for further discussion. Ms. Carpenter moved to close the public hearing, Mr. Hanke seconded the motion, and the Commission voted unanimously in favor.

The Commission then began its formal review of the Chapter 13.4 Standards for designation as a significant structure for the Lord Jeffrey Inn.

	Y	N	
13.410	Historical Importance		The structure meets the criteria of historical importance if it:
13.4100	3		Has character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the town of Amherst, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts or the nation, or;
13.4101		n/a	Is the site of an historic event, or;
13.4102		n/a	Is identified with a person or group of persons who had some influence on society, or;
13.4103	3		Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historic heritage of the community.
13.411	Architectural Importance		The structure meets the criteria of architectural importance if it:
13.4110		n/a	Portrays the environment of a group of people in an era of history characterized by a distinctive architectural style, or;
13.4111	4		Embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type, or;
13.4112		n/a	Is the work of an architect, master builder or craftsman whose individual work has influenced the development of the Town, or;
13.4113		n/a	Contains elements of architectural design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represents a significant innovation.
13.412	Geographic Importance		The structure meets the criteria of geographic importance if:
13.4120	4		The site is part of, or related to, a square, park, or other distinctive area, or;
13.4121	4		The structure, as to its unique location or its physical characteristics, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, village center, or the community as a whole.

Mr. Denit moved, with a second from Mr. Hanke, that the Historical Commission find that the structure is significant, the vote five yes, with Mr. Greenbaum abstaining. Mr. Denit further moved that in spite of that finding demolition would not be detrimental, and was seconded by Ms. Sharpe; the vote was five yes, with Mr. Greenbaum abstaining.

Returning to consideration of the Scott House, the Commission again reviewed the Chapter 13.4 criteria of significance, noting that the part of the structure under consideration was the series of additions to the original house.

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Mr. Denit moved, and Mr. Hanke seconded the motion, that the Historical Commission not find the structure historically significant; the vote was five yes, with Mr. Greenbaum abstaining. In conclusion, Mr. Tucker reviewed Amherst College's commitments regarding the interior and efforts to preserve the staircase as a visible design element.

The Commission moved to an Appearance originally scheduled for 8:00 p.m., 94 Lessey Street, Missy Vineyard Ehrgood; Site alterations (parking) for educational use; requesting a ZBA advisement.

Mr. Tucker provided some background information on the structure, which has been used as school for a number of years, and mentioned its Lessey and Stockbridge connections. Ms. Ehrgood described her post-secondary training program, and the permit and certification processes, both state and local. The issue comes down to the need for a special permit for the educational use; Mr. Tucker noted the difference between office or studio use versus a home occupation. Ms. Ehrgood currently has eight students in her Alexander technique course. The "home occupation" designation has some parking requirements according to local bylaw and the town has said that square footage of house used for business would allow or require 7.4 parking spaces, plus two for the owners. The owners are currently working on designing eight spaces for the school and have hired Martha Lyon to work on the design. They sought support from the Historical Commission for a zoning variance. Mr. Tucker commented on the availability of nearby public parking spaces. Mr. Wald inquired about whether they were looking for a letter similar to one previously sent by Murray and Peggy Schwartz. Mr. Greenbaum moved, with a second from Mr. Denit, that chair write to the ZBA in support of granting an exception to the parking regulations; the vote was unanimously in favor.

The Commission moved to discussion of FY09 CPA projects and Article 20 of the Annual Town Meeting warrant. Mr. Tucker reviewed plans to more on plan to apply for a grant, and a long discussion ensued about what might be said at Town Meeting in support of Article 20, motion B.

Mr. Wald spoke to the issue of raising the CPA surcharge to 3% and stated that he favors it. He noted disagreement in the Select Board and Finance Committee but enumerated the positive aspects of the CPA program: it exempts the first \$100,000 of property value, provides a senior exemption, and is a nicely progressive levy. Ms. Sharpe move that the Historical Commission support Article 24, to put the CPA

surcharge increase on the ballot, Ms. Carpenter seconded the motion, the vote was five in favor with Mr. Greenbaum abstaining.

Mr. Denit reported briefly on the 250th Anniversary Committee Town Meeting article requesting \$25,000 from the town for the celebration to support the planned parade, banners, etc. Mr. Denit distributed his notes/report and asked members of the Commission to review them.

Next Meetings – May 27 at 7:15 p.m., June 10 with Chris Skelly for a workshop on Local Historic Districts.

Ms. Sharpe moved adjournment, and Mr. Hanke seconded. The meeting adjourned at 10:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Gai Carpenter
Clerk