

Amherst Historical Commission Meeting, August 13, 2007
First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall
7:15 p.m.

Present: Gai Carpenter, Lyle Denit, Lynda Faye, Louis Greenbaum, Michael Hanke, Elizabeth Sharpe, James Wald. Staff: Jonathan Tucker, Director of Planning.

Mr. Wald called the meeting to order at 7:19 p.m. and asked for announcements. Minutes of the meeting of July 16 were presented; Ms. Sharpe moved their approval as corrected and amended, Mr. Hanke seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Mr. Wald and Mr. Tucker reported on the Zoning Subcommittee's meeting. The Subcommittee is making another attempt at rezoning the intersection of College and East Streets and hoping to create additional commercial zoning including village center business and village center residence areas. Bonnie Parsons of the PVPC has investigated the area and finds no evidence that the common use extended into the southern part of the intersection.

The Commission still needs to set a time to visit the Thayer House; the visit will be scheduled for Monday, August 20 at 8:30 a.m.

Mr. Tucker reported on progress on the Lane rock-crushing mill. Mr. Stryker and his colleagues are ready to visit and Mr. Tucker will arrange the visit with Jonathan Lane. Ms. Sharpe commented on the Historic America Engineering Resources guidelines for documenting structures like the mill. Mr. Denit questioned how Mr. Stryker had become involved in the documentation of the mill. He had originally contacted Mr. Tucker because he was doing some research on Amherst.

Ms. Sharpe received a letter from Sheila Rainford expressing interest in researching information on the mill. Ms. Sharpe also commented on artifacts that the Amherst History Museum might want and urged Mr. Tucker and Mr. Stryker to keep the possibility of recovering artifacts in mind. Mr. Greenbaum questioned Mr. Tucker about the Lane company's cooperation in providing business records; Mr. Tucker replied that was mentioned in his letter to Lane but we have nothing yet.

Mr. Tucker reported that the old DPW sign has finally been taken down on the North Pleasant Street side of West Cemetery and that both brochure boxes are up.

Mr. Wald reported that the Comprehensive Planning Committee is energetically back in business and awaiting survey results. The CPC expects to meet with the consultants and expects their report on or about the 21st; they will then move into public presentation in September and eventually to Town Meeting. Ms. Faye raised a question about subcommittees and their continuing role. Mr. Wald replied that the results will be distributed to them and they may choose to react either as committees or as individuals. Mr. Greenbaum and Mr. Wald had a brief conversation about the place of Historical Commission and preservation in comprehensive plan.

The 250th Anniversary Committee is quiet right now; Mr. Denit says no meetings have been held since the last Historical Commission meeting. The History Subcommittee will meet next week, and probably will talk again about publications.

Ms. Carpenter reported that she expects a publication on the Central Business District will include Perry Thompson's older work, material from Paul Norton's book, and new material from Perry Thompson. She will ask permissions to use those documents.

Mr. Wald recapitulated the history of Amherst Historical Commission requests for CPA funding and a general overview of CPA funding guidelines. He noted the Strong House emergency request for chimney repair and the fact that in the following year the Dickinson Museum's request

led to the Commission's articulating the position that it would support research but not capital projects. Mr. Wald indicated that his summary was leading up to a discussion of the Select Board's initiative to ask the Historical Commission to support a CPA request for debt financing of the Town Hall repair project. Mr. Tucker observed that Mr. Wald had covered capital expenses and the question of whether the town should be allowed to shift costs of deferred maintenance to CPA, but that the Historical Commission should also consider the effect of long-term obligations on its recurring budgets. Mr. Tucker referred to previously distributed documents on longer term projected budgets, based on the Amherst Historic Preservation Plan, and the projected impact of standing obligations.

Mr. Greenbaum spoke at length on the Historical Commission's responsibility to preserve historic structures, especially the Town Hall. He said he assumes that CPAC would allocate more to the Historical Commission if the Commission had undertaken standing obligations. Mr. Tucker cited earlier Historical Commission principles (e.g., emergency situations), and suggested that the Historical Commission may have some space to negotiate. Could town administration be persuaded to support a larger share of CPA funding for Historical Commission for next few years? Members of the Commission observed that we know that the Select Board cannot bind the future, but must request funds year by year. Ms. Carpenter questioned Mr. Greenbaum's assumptions about funding and precedent. Ms. Faye responded to Mr. Greenbaum on uses of CPA funding and indicated that legally Historical Commission funds are not for capital projects. Ms. Faye pointed to the long-term preservation plan and the funding needs that go with it. Mr. Wald, Mr. Tucker, Ms. Faye, Ms. Carpenter, Ms. Sharpe, Mr. Denit and Mr. Hanke shared their perspectives on CPAC funding distribution. Mr. Greenbaum reiterated his views on the importance of Town Hall and argued that CPA funding should be made available because of the stringencies of town budgets. Mr. Hanke said he views the use of CPA funds for Town Hall or similar projects as reprehensible, but that the Commission has to find a viable way to deal with the politics of the situation. Mr. Hanke thinks the Select Board and others are perhaps ignorant of long term preservation priorities as articulated in the Preservation Plan. Mr. Tucker suggested that the Historical Commission might offer some sum as part of the obligation incurred for Town Hall repointing.

Mr. Wald and Mr. Greenbaum engaged in a further exchange on priorities and Mr. Wald offered the suggestion that the Historical Commission support Town Hall debt financing so long as it does not interfere with the long range historic preservation plan. Mr. Hanke suggested that there might be compromise positions.

The Commission discussed possible dates to meet with Select Board and agreed to September 17 with the Select Board and a regular meeting on September 24. Ms. Faye urged that the Commission members not make strong personal statements about our positions, or in opposition to the Select Board's initiative. Other members of the Commission articulated varying positions on how the Historical Commission should express its positions.

Mr. Wald commented on the preservation plan and the need to review, prioritize, and define actions needed to move forward on short and medium term projects.

In addition to discussion of the plan, the agenda for September 24 will include a review of the Commission's conversation with the Select Board and election of officers.

The Commission discussed the need for a demolition delay hearing on the Chapin-Ward house. Mr. Tucker explained the bid for removal of the structure that the Town has received, and that a demolition permit is a necessary antecedent to relocation. The conversation refocused on the proposed destination of the structure, and the issues that might be raised about the use of the Hills House lot for further development. Mr. Greenbaum expressed his concerns about the Hills House, and indicated his misgivings about the developer's use of the property. The public hearing was scheduled for Thursday, September 6.

Mr. Tucker shared a letter from the Massachusetts Historical Commission about land in Cushman that had been proposed for development, and the MHC's suggestion that there might be Native American artifacts in the area.

Mr. Tucker noted that the local historic districts workshop originally proposed for August will probably now be scheduled in October.

The Commission agreed to cancel the meeting previously scheduled for August 27.

Mr. Denit reported on email he received from Joseph Larson about Preserve UMass, and suggested that the Commission now write a letter of support. Ms. Faye moved to send a letter of strong support, and to mention the role of the Amherst Historical Commission in identifying historic buildings on the UMass campus; Mr. Denit seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Mr. Hanke moved adjournment, Ms. Faye seconded the motion, and the meeting adjourned at 9:45 p.m.

Next Meetings: September 6: Demolition Delay public hearing on Chapin-Ward house; September 17 with Select Board; September 24.

Respectfully submitted,

Gai Carpenter, Clerk