

Amherst Historical Commission Meeting, June 5 2007
Town 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. **Guest:** Joseph Larson

The Historical Commission began the session of June 5, 2007 by meeting jointly with the Public Works Committee to review progress on the South Amherst Common study, and to discuss next steps in the process. Mr. Crouner opened the meeting and invited comment from members of his committee. Mr. O'Connor exhorted the Historical Commission repeatedly and at length to do the work outlined in its *South Amherst Common Survey Scope — Elements & Issues* document, prepared by Mr. Tucker in November 2005 and revised in May 2007, and to be sure that some core samples were taken to assess the possible need for archaeological work. Other members of the Public Works Committee commented that they thought the Historical Commission was "on the right track" and indicated that they looked forward to the formal survey of the Common, and briefly discussed the desirability of title searches on the abutting properties as part of the survey phase.

The Historical Commission relocated to the second floor meeting room, where Ms. MacMullen called the meeting to order at 7:50 p.m. The minutes of the meeting of May 1 were presented; Ms. Faye moved their approval, Mr. Denit seconded the motion and the minutes were approved unanimously.

The Historical Commission's guest, Joseph S. Larson, Corresponding Secretary of Preserve UMass, described the history of UMass planning and the extent of institutional interest in historic structures. He opened his remarks with praise for the Amherst Historical Commission for having included UMass structures on its inventory of historic places. Larson and his colleagues have waited for the recent report on facilities to raise questions about the University's plans, and have noted the lack of a professional survey of the campus historic buildings. Members of Preserve UMass also believe that the University needs to pay more attention to potential adaptive reuse of buildings. Mr. Larson suggested that it is a matter of attention to the public trust; the UMass campus comprises a survey of American architecture from the 17th to 20th century. There may be two handles available according to Mr. Larson and the Massachusetts Historical Commission; first, while the Commission and UMass administration say that Preserve UMass does not have standing, he suggests that the Amherst Historical Commission could have some effect with the UMass administration and Massachusetts Historical Commission. Mr. Larson asked the Historical Commission to endorse an independent professional assessment. He also pointed out that the Massachusetts Historical Commission might not know about demolitions that have already occurred.

Ms. MacMullen asked Mr. Denit to summarize their conversation with James Cahill, Director of Facilities and Campus Planning at UMass. Mr. Denit described the conversation, and asked what can we do? The Amherst Historical Commission really does not have any standing, but could we talk with the Massachusetts Historical Commission? Mr. Cahill has been sent a letter by Brona Simon, Executive Director, State Historic Preservation Officer of the Massachusetts Historical Commission warning that demolition of any of the 26 buildings listed in the Massachusetts Historical Commission's *Inventory of Historic and Archaeological Assets of the Commonwealth* could constitute an "adverse effect" under 950 CMR 71.05.

Mr. Denit expressed special concern for the UMass agricultural buildings and summarized the history of the stucco cow barn and its architect. Mr. Tucker offered suggestions about how the Amherst Historical Commission could follow up on the letter to Mr. Cahill. Mr. Larson described a conversation with someone close to Chancellor who, while saying that Mr. Larson and Preserve UMass would not be "at the table", a professional survey would be done; Mr. Larson distributed a list of firms that might do such a survey.

Ms. MacMullen asked Mr. Denit to prepare a written summary of information on the cow barn. Ms. Faye urged that we include a list of all the buildings and Ms. MacMullen asked Ms. Faye to prepare that list. Mr. Larson and Ms. MacMullen agreed to prepare a letter to the UMass Chancellor to make a case for the Amherst Historical Commission's having a role in conversations about UMass buildings.

Ms. Faye noted that UMass now has an architecture department and other resources that could be brought into play for surveys. The Commission had some further conversation about both old and more modern buildings that are part of the continuum of UMass architectural history. Ms. Sharpe questioned whether Ms. Simon's letter to Mr. Cahill has any teeth at all. She noted that the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act review is stringent. Mr. Tucker shared some additional observations on the Historical Commission's role in any project with state or federal funding.

The Commission moved on to discussion of a proposal for replacement of roofing and windows on 575 North East Street. Members of the Commission raised a series of issues about materials, style, and potential alternatives. Members recognized that they would need to have another meeting shortly if they want to get more information and make suggestions. Members want particularly to ask about the treatment of the Palladian window.

The Thayer House at the intersection of Bay Road and Route 116 will be affected by the planned realignment of the intersection. Members of the Commission discussed the possibility of visiting the house, and suggested Monday, June 18 at 2:30 p.m. as a possible time. Mr. Tucker will check on scheduling a visit. In response to a question about the nearby Darling House, Mr. Tucker reported that Hampshire College representatives have said it is likely to be "adaptively reused" and is not going anywhere.

Ms. MacMullen reported on Town Meeting and its stately progress, and focused on CPAC article 25. She expects to do a presentation of background on the Historical Commission's proposals, and will ask other members of the Commission to be present for discussion of this Article.

Reporting on the Cemetery Improvements Committee's work, Ms. Faye noted that boxes and brochures are out and being used, the street and lighting improvements are in process as well as lights for mural along the Carriage Shops wall. Ms. Faye has asked Public Works Director Guilford Mooring to remove the old cemetery project signs.

Mr. Wald reported that the Comprehensive Planning Committee's survey is out but that a lot of people who were sent the questionnaire are students and already gone for the summer.

Mr. Denit reported that the 250th Anniversary Committee might issue a call for papers for publications. There is interest in a publication on street place names, and Ms. Sharpe noted continuing interest in a possible A-Z picture book.

Projects underway in the East Village Common area include the potential expansion of the historic district. Bonnie Parsons of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission is doing a commons study and Ms. Sharpe is working with her.

Mr. Hanke reported again on a neighborhood structure that had been demolished, apparently without benefit of a permit. He had reported the demolition, but Inspection Services seemed not very interested. His report led to a brief conversation about demolition permits and existing or potential penalties for infractions.

The Commission briefly reviewed demolition applications for a barn and shed at 575 North East Street. Under the terms of the agreements with the owner, these demolitions must be allowed to create the space for new construction. Although it was agreed that there will be no demolition

delay public hearing, the Commission agreed to ask for photos of the barn and to express the hope that materials from that structure may be reused.

After reviewing a letter from EarthTech (a MassHighway consultant) regarding the replacement of the Pelham Road Bridge over Fort River, members of the Commission agreed that because of the limited geographic scope of the work, there was no reason to request further historical study for the project and agreed further that the Chair should send a letter to that effect.

Preservation Massachusetts has called for nominations for its Ten Most Endangered Historic Resources Program for 2007. Members considered whether UMass should be nominated for inclusion. Mr. Tucker commented attempts to establish a working relationship between the town and UMass on economic development issues could make a nomination by the Commission problematic. He suggested that Mr. Larson and Preserve UMass were in a better position to make such a nomination, and the Commission could weigh in with a letter of support if it felt that was appropriate. Mr. Denit voiced again his strong feelings on the issue of UMass preservation, and Ms. Faye advocated a multi-pronged approach based on her experience in Worcester. Ms. Macmullen said she would speak to Mr. Larson in the matter.

The Commission agreed that its next meeting would be on the 18th or 19th of June, depending on Town Meeting's progress

Ms. Faye moved to adjourn, Mr. Denit seconded the motion, and the Commission adjourned at 9:59 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Gai Carpenter
Clerk