

Amherst Historical Commission
MEETING
Monday, November 3, 2008
Planning Dept. Office, Town Hall
7:15 p.m.

Present: Gai Carpenter, Lyle Denit, Louis Greenbaum, Michael Hanke, James Wald. **Staff:** Jonathan Tucker, Director of Planning, Nathaniel Malloy, Associate Planner. **Absent:** Lynda Faye, Elizabeth Sharpe; **Guests:** Jane Wald, Emily Dickinson Museum; Ron Whitaker, W.S. Signs; Greg Kendall, Grist Mill

Mr. Wald convened the meeting at 7:19 p.m. and invited announcements. Hearing none, he invited approval of the minutes of October 20; Mr. Tucker offered modest amendments whereupon Mr. Hanke moved approval with a second from Mr. Greenbaum; the vote was four yes with Mr. Denit abstaining.

Mr. Wald recused himself for the discussion of the Emily Dickinson Museum. Jane Wald, Executive Director of the Emily Dickinson Museum, presented landscape restoration plans, particularly addressing the overgrown hemlock hedge and plans to replace it. She noted that plans for the Museum, created by the combination of The Homestead and Evergreens five years ago, resulted from the Museum's Board's long-range planning for restoration and site development.

A master plan was completed in January 2006, and included landscape assessment. \$15,000 of CPA funds had been received for that part of the work. The plan looked at seven categories of landscape features including spatial organization, topography, runoff, current landscape, and manmade features and ranked elements of restoration as urgent, critical, or desirable for all elements of museum plan(s). Initial capital funds are now exhausted. Restoration of the fence and hedge are key elements of the plan and would have a profound impact on the profile of museum and impacts on surrounding areas up to the center of town. Ms. Wald presented a brief slide show of the plans and old photos of The Homestead and Evergreens contrasted with current views.

The original hedge was kept at six to eight feet, but got out of control in the 20th century. The original fences were of three types: picket, spindle, and picket. She noted that some trees have been lost in the last three winters and that many are "unwell." Mr. Hanke asked about specimen trees on the property. Ms. Wald said the plan calls for taking down overgrown hemlocks and replacing with new ones or some other species and for reconstruction of the fences as well as the iron fences and gates, and a granite coping wall. Ms. Wald said they want to save mature specimen trees although a few may crowd the hedge and will need to be treated on a case-by-case basis. Mr. Hanke asked about the path between the houses. Ms. Wald commented on the modest path, the Evergreens lawn, and the Museum's hopes to restore both eventually.

Mr. Tucker commented on the purpose of Ms. Wald's visit—to inform the Historical Commission—and asked what next steps might be planned. Ms. Carpenter asked whether there might be a CPA request to support the restoration. Ms. Wald replied that she thought the Historical Commission was not funding capital projects, but was told that CPA preservation funds are, in fact, being earmarked for capital projects with increasing frequency. Mr. Tucker asked whether, in doing the landscape study, there was any attempt to do outreach for additional period photographs. Mr. Denit asked about the location of the Sweetser Park/Evergreens property line, and Mr. Tucker replied that the line is well in the trees. The Tree Warden has examined site, and the hemlocks are all on private property. Ms. Carpenter asked whether a statement of support from the Historical Commission would be appropriate, and noted that comments have already appeared in the press from the Public Shade Tree Committee. Mr. Malloy asked about the planned sequence of activity for tree removal, coping restoration, fences, etc. Ms. Wald responded that some of the work would best be done during slow season at Museum, but they would want funding in hand before initiating the project. Mr. Denit moved and Mr. Hanke seconded a motion of support for the Emily Dickinson Museum's landscape restoration plans; the vote was four in favor.

Mr. Wald rejoined the meeting for a presentation on historic markers by Ron Whitaker of W.S. Signs in West Springfield. Mr. Whitaker has done signs in Northampton for historic sites. He provided some background on his business, which started in traffic signs, and gave a company profile, summary of experience, and shared samples of programs and styles of signs he has developed with various municipalities. The examples from Northampton included panels with illustrations and narrative to be installed on kiosks in several locations. Members of the Commission reviewed the materials and asked Mr. Whitaker a variety of questions about materials, design, and pricing.

Greg Kendall, owner of the Grist Mill on Route 116, appeared to present information on proposed further modification to the structure. His proposal will go to the ZBA as well, and any comment or action of the Historical Commission is advisory to the ZBA. The Commission heard his presentation, asked some questions, and took no action.

In old business, Mr. Wald and Mr. Tucker noted that there was no news on the Hills lots since the announcement that there would be no grant from the Commonwealth

The West Cemetery headstone restoration continues, and another invoice for 31 more stones was presented. Mr. Denit moved and Mr. Greenbaum seconded approval of the invoice, the vote was unanimous. Mr. Tucker reported that he and Mr. Wald met with Guilford Mooring to discuss DPW progress on projects related to the cemetery. They learned that issues had arisen about building code and electrical service installation; the code requires placing the electrical service on a structure, and surface mounted wiring. When those requirements are met, the DPW will install LED lighting for a section or two of the mural as a test, and members of the Commission will be asked to comment on the

installation. Mr. Hanke reported he is working on a headstone logo for the cemetery signs and has some ideas he will present at the next meeting.

Historic Landscape improvements Mr. Tucker and Mr. Wald also discussed the recommendations for the cemetery landscape restoration with Mr. Mooring, reviewing the several defined areas and priorities. Mr. Tucker and Mr. Wald also talked about the town tombs and noted that Mr. Mooring was keen to include the North and South cemetery projects with West. The also noted that family plot fence repairs and rebuilds could be winter projects. Mr. Wald said that Mr. Mooring was very supportive of all the projects.

The Amherst Woman's Club decided to decline the funds approved for painting the carriage house. Although state law requires a preservation restriction when CPA funds are allocated, the Club members were concerned by the implications. The Commission spent more time on the issues about grants and restrictions discussed at length at the previous meeting.

Mr. Denit reviewed the suggestion from the 250th Anniversary Committee of a series of short articles (ca. 600 words) that might be published in the local press. Mr. Denit invited volunteers, and suggested tying articles to the monthly themes of 250th.

Mr. Wald updated the Commission on the Local Historic District Process, noting that the Select Board hasn't invited participation in the planning committee yet. Members of the Commission suggested some individuals who might possibly be invited.

Mr. Tucker reported that the Massachusetts Historical Commission has requested additional Aaron Warner House photos in conjunction with the NHR Nominations; Mr. Denit will get some interior shots of the house.

The Commission briefly reviewed the most recent Massachusetts Historical Commission letter to UMass.

Mr. Tucker drew members' attention to information about the Clark statue included in their meeting packets.

Next Meeting - Nov. 18, 2008, 7:15 p.m.

Mr. Wald detected movement toward adjournment at 9:57 p.m., and did nothing to inhibit it.

Respectfully submitted,

Gai Carpenter
Clerk