



TOWN HALL
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DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
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May 8, 2009

DRB Memorandum #2009-05

Memo to: Bonnie Weeks, Building Commissioner
Jonathan Tucker, Planning Director
From: Christine Brestrup, Senior Planner
Subject: DRB Meeting – April 28, 2009

The Tuesday, April 28, 2009, meeting of the Design Review Board began at 6:38 p.m. in the First Floor Meeting Room of the Town Hall. Members Janet Winston (Chair), Kathryn Grandonico, Jim Wald and Jonathan Salvon were present. Also present were Christine Brestrup, Senior Planner, and Roy Johnson, representing the Amherst Pelham Regional Schools. Later in the meeting the Board was joined by members of the Amherst Historical Commission and Planning Director, Jonathan Tucker.

The Board turned to **Appointments**.

Appointments

DRB #2009-00016, 21 Mattoon Street, Amherst Regional High School – install a scoreboard for soccer, field hockey, lacrosse and track

Recommended approval, without conditions

Roy Johnson presented the application. He explained that a parent booster group had raised money for the scoreboard through “Monte Carlo Night” fundraising activities. Mr. Johnson showed the location of the proposed scoreboard on a plan of the track, at the southwestern corner, adjacent to Triangle Street. The scoreboard will have solar power. The location is ideal because it is visible to spectators and will be able to be seen even when the sun sets.

Mr. Johnson presented the style of sign. It will be a standard scoreboard, Model #3550, as provided by Nevco Scoreboard Company. The colors will be maroon with white lettering (the school colors). The other scoreboards on the school property won’t be able to be seen from this spot, however it should be noted that the colors will be coordinated. The baseball scoreboard to be installed soon will also be maroon with white lettering and the existing football scoreboard is black with white lettering.

The scoreboard will be 16 feet wide by 5 feet high. The bottom of the scoreboard will be 10 feet off the ground. The scoreboard will be mounted on steel support columns (“I” beams).

Ms. Grandonico noted that the lettering is sans-serif and appears to be Arial font.

Ms. Winston left the meeting.

The Board turned to Old Business.

Old Business

Town Common – Preparation for Joint Meeting with Historical Commission

Ms. Grandonico noted (with regard to signs on the town common) that one entity by itself should not be allowed to have a sign on the town common. However, the idea of a sign describing something about the history of the town and the common might be appropriate. Ms. Grandonico stated that a sign for the town common could have general information about the town and the common and also specific information about events.

Mr. Salvon stated that the town common is a public space that serves the public good and it should be equally good for all members of the public.

Jonathan Tucker, Planning Director, joined the meeting. He noted that there are so many things going on in town that everyone would want to have something on the sign. There was discussion about possible vandalism and Mr. Tucker stated that the Unitarians had replaced their sign because of vandalism. Mr. Tucker suggested that the Board might consider informally discussing the new proposal for the Spring Street parking lot.

The Spring Street parking lot is being redesigned by the Department of Public Works staff. The proposed design shows standard sized parking spaces, in a 90° arrangement, with a narrower drive aisle than that which currently exists. The sidewalks are proposed to be wider than the existing sidewalks, with street trees planted in tree grates, embedded in the sidewalks. An enlarged paved area is shown on the plan in the southwest corner of the parking lot, with a proposed structure that could be used as a kiosk and/or bus shelter. This area is also shown to have benches, two trees and a sign with a planting bed. The area has been discussed as a possible location for a stage.

This design arose out of discussions between the town and Amherst College regarding the proposed renovation of the Lord Jeffrey Inn. Mr. Tucker noted that the plans reflected work that was done for the 1987 Master Plan for the common, with regard to the Spring Street parking lot. Mr. Tucker also noted that the firm of Frederick Law Olmsted had prepared a plan for the town common showing a bandstand on the east side of the common, across Boltwood Avenue from Porter House at Amherst College. Olmsted suggested this location because of the slope of the land which forms a gentle amphitheatre.

Ms. Grandonico noted that the farmers would not like the new parking layout because they might have less room for their trucks. However, Mr. Tucker assured her that the new curbing would be mountable and that the farmers would have the same amount of space as they do currently, if they drove their trucks up onto the sidewalk for the Farmers' Market. He further noted that the plan being discussed only shows a portion of the overall work that is being proposed and the plan should be viewed as a whole.

The Board members asked to see the Olmsted Master Plan for the common as well as the 1980's Master Plan.

The Board acknowledged that a location near the southwest corner of the parking lot is traditionally used as an area for a stage during the Town Fair and other events on the common.

Mr. Tucker stated that the Farmers' Market is primarily looking for advance notice for the Saturday market event. They have a banner that is put up on Saturdays, but there is no advance notice that the market is coming each Saturday. He suggested that the Chamber of Commerce might be able to help the Farmers' Market with publicity, rather than having a permanent sign erected on the common.

Mr. Wald stated that the Peace Vigil, rather than the Farmers' Market, is really the oldest ongoing activity that takes place on the common.

Ms. Grandonico suggested that there be a monthly calendar that would announce upcoming events.

Mr. Salvon stated that there is a need to balance all of the interests involved and that there might be a way to use technology to announce upcoming events. He also expressed a desire to know what else is coming to the Board with respect to the common, noting that the Board was now being asked to review several things, including a possible sign, changes in the Spring Street parking lot, and the possible addition of a stage/kiosk/bus shelter.

Mr. Tucker explained the history of the common and added that the green area in front of Amherst College is also part of the town common, although it is maintained by Amherst College, under agreement with the town.

New Business

Joint Meeting with Historical Commission – Review of Town Common Historical Issues

At 7:20 p.m. the Historical Commission joined the Design Review Board for a Joint Meeting. Historical Commission members Jim Wald, Chair, Louis Greenbaum, Betty Sharpe, Gai Carpenter and Lyle Denit were present, along with Planning Director, Jonathan Tucker, and Planning Department staff, Chris Brestrup and Nate Malloy.

Mr. Tucker gave a brief history of the Design Review Board and its origins in the Main Street Program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. He described the jurisdiction of the DRB. He stated that the historical function of the common had been utilitarian and that the aesthetic function had been added later.

Mr. Wald described the common as being part of the public way and as such it was treated like a road. He stated that the DRB had some skepticism about the proposed plans for the common because the members were concerned about clutter and consistency. He noted that the Farmers' Market wants to have its sign up all week and all year and that there is a question of procedure about how these things come to the appropriate boards and commissions for review.

Mr. Tucker stated that the management of the common had shifted over time, but that the "Board of Selectmen" had principle control over the common in the past.

Mr. Wald noted that people had built houses within the common in the past and that land had been sold off for dwellings and for other purposes.

The current plan for the improvements to the Spring Street parking lot grew out of conversations between the Town Manager and Amherst College regarding the Lord Jeffrey Inn and traffic circulation.

Mr. Wald stated that one of the main ideas of the Master Plan was that the town should not do things in a piecemeal fashion. He advised that decisions should not be made about the town common in a piecemeal fashion.

The DRB and HC members discussed the proposed narrowing of the traffic aisle and widening of the sidewalks in the Spring Street parking lot. They noted that it might be possible to have pedestrian access to the Farmers' Market booths from both sides with the new proposed configuration.

Mr. Greenbaum stated that he is a devotee of the Farmers' Market and it is a wonderful place to stop and meet people and socialize. He would like to leave the existing configuration of the Spring Street parking lot the way it is.

Mr. Tucker stated that the actual edge of the pavement will not get narrower, it will just be distributed differently, with more pavement devoted to sidewalk and less to pavement for cars. The outside edge of the sidewalk will remain in the same location.

Ms. Grandonico and Mr. Salvon suggested eliminating the pavement entirely or using another type of pavement.

Mr. Wald stated that the DRB and HC needed to do two things:

- 1) Respond to the Farmers' Market request for a sign
- 2) Respond to the broader issues of the proposed site plans.

Mr. Denit stated that the primary function of a sign should be to educate people about the Common, not to publicize the Farmers' Market. We need to educate people about the historical and unique nature of the space. For one group to have a sign goes against the history of the space. Maybe another type of sign would be appropriate, to support community events. Ms. Carpenter expressed a similar view. She also stated that the whole sign issue in town is problematic. There is no coordinated sign system. She suggested that the Historical

Commission, the Design Review Board and the Department of Public Works embark on developing a unified town marker system.

Mr. Greenbaum noted that the town common in Hadley is exactly as it was laid out 300 years ago. The Deerfield common has also remained essentially the same throughout the centuries.

Mr. Denit noted that the Amherst common is different from the Hadley common in that the Amherst common is used for events and the Hadley common is not.

Ms. Sharp stated that the town common is like the National Mall in Washington, D.C. There is no need for a sign. However a sign interpreting the common might be a good idea if other spaces in town are interpreted by similar signs.

Mr. Tucker described a range of options for the two bodies (the DRB and the HC) to take. He noted that the sign that is proposed is intended to be permanent and that he sensed a consensus that a sign for an event or an organization is not support by the two bodies. He described a range of other opportunities. There is now a banner for the Amherst Farmers' Market. There could be a banner describing events on the common. The Chamber of Commerce could have something in its window that announces what is happening on the common. (He noted that people driving by won't read an interpretive sign.) For pedestrians, a sign could be on the ground, like the sign at the Amherst College War Memorial. He noted that the temporary banner over South Pleasant Street is often reserved a year in advance. Perhaps there is another way of programming that banner sign.

Mr. Wald stated that he sensed that there was no support for the Farmers' Market sign as proposed.

Mr. Tucker stated that, in the case of signs on the common, the Design Review Board advises the Select Board. He also noted that the Historical Commission had been given the charge by the Town Manager to protect and preserve the common.

Ms. Carpenter stated that all parties involved, including the Town Manager, the Select Board and others, need to understand what the procedure should be in approving something for the town common.

The two bodies decided that a joint resolution would be appropriate in this case.

Mr. Wald suggested that both bodies consider putting the town common at the top of the agenda for the coming year and put a coordinated sign system on the agenda as a high priority for next year.

Mr. Denit suggested meeting with the Town Manager and the Select Board to discuss the process for review when something is proposed for the town common.

Ms. Sharpe MOVED: that the Design Review Board and the Historical Commission collectively do not favor any signs on the common that give prominence to any single group.

Mr. Greenbaum seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Wald suggested that the two bodies make a statement that they are opposed to ad hoc measures being taken on the common and that they want a master plan for the common.

Ms. Grandonico suggested that anything proposed for the common should be proposed to a joint meeting of the Historical Commission and the Design Review Board.

Mr. Tucker stated that, for the town common, there should always be review by the Design Review Board and the Historical Commission, and then review by others as needed.

Ms. Carpenter suggested that Guilford Mooring, Superintendent of Public Works, should be part of this discussion.

Mr. Tucker stated that he would like these two bodies to commit themselves to meeting to craft policies related to the common and sign systems on the commons [including the South Amherst Common and the East Amherst Common]. He stated that the DPW has been working on a town-wide system of directional signs. He proposed a series of meetings to address the issues of the commons and signs and structures on the commons.

Mr. Greenbaum MOVED: that the chair of the Historical Commission shall communicate to the Select Board and the Town Manager that signs and other things on the commons should go before the Historical Commission and the Design Review Board early on in the process and that the Historical Commission and the Design Review Board are prepared to meet jointly to discuss these proposals.

Ms. Sharpe seconded and the motion was passed unanimously.

The joint meeting was adjourned at 8:49 p.m.

Cc: Anita Licis, DRB
Janet Winston, DRB
Jim Wald, DRB
Jonathan Salvon, DRB
Kathryn Grandonico, DRB
Aaron Hayden, Select Board Liaison
Jeffrey Bagg, Senior Planner
Nate Malloy, Associate Planner
Larry Shaffer, Town Manager
Guilford Mooring, Superintendent of Public Works
Roy Johnson, Applicant for ARHS