

Amherst Historical Commission
MEETING
Thursday, January 14, 2010
Town Room, Town Hall
7:15 p.m.

Present: James Wald, Chair; Gai Carpenter, Clerk; Lyle Denit, Louis Greenbaum, Elizabeth Sharpe. Staff: Jonathan Tucker, Director of Planning. Absent: Michael Hanke, Vice-Chair. Guests: Peter Root, Amherst College; Sandra Burgess, Town Clerk; Tevis Kimball, Bonnie Isman, Jones Library; Patricia Holland, Sarah McKee, Jones Library Trustees; Joseph Larson, PUMA.

Mr. Wald called the meeting to order at 7:20 p.m. There were no announcements. Mr. Denit moved approval of the minutes of December 8, 2009. Mr. Greenbaum questioned the amount endorsed for the Emily Dickinson Museum and requested that the minutes be amended to include \$42,900 for the Strong House and \$50,000 for the Emily Dickinson Museum. After some discussion the amendment was withdrawn. Ms. Sharpe seconded the motion, approved.

Peter Root, Amherst College project manager for the Lord Jeffery Inn renovations, presented the revised plans for that project. Amherst (The Amherst Inn Company) hopes to launch the project this spring and to reopen the Inn next year. The revised project involves remodeling the existing structure and adding a ballroom to the current patio area at behind the structure. Façades will remain largely the same, but additional windows and other glass will open the structure visually. Amherst hopes to use an historic restoration tax credit to support the project.

As the project moves forward, the Planning Board would like a statement from the Historical Commission, and The Amherst Inn Company would like a new vote from the Historical Commission supporting a NHR nomination for the Inn. Ms. Sharpe moved support for an NHR nomination, seconded Ms. Carpenter, and passed. Mr. Denit moved support for the project and the overall plans for restoration of the Inn, Ms. Carpenter second, approved.

The Historical Commission had scheduled a series of appearances to discuss FY11 CPA Projects. Sandra Burgess, Town Clerk, described the ongoing archival conservation project for town records, and provided a detailed description of the work completed to date, targeted documents for the remainder of FY2010 and for 2011, and described the physical conservation and microfilming processes. In response to a question about digitizing the documents, Tevis Kimball, Special Collections Librarian at the Jones Library, noted that converting microfilm to digital files is a relatively inexpensive process, and that the Library has had some microfilm digitized.

Ms. Kimball presented a description of the archival conservation work being done at the Jones Library, which includes not only conservation and microfilming of documents, but also efforts to preserve photographic and media materials. Some of the media are in outdated formats, and need to be converted. Some of the materials that have been digitized are featured on the award-winning *DigitalAmherst* web site.

Bonnie Isman, Jones Library Director, reviewed capital improvements needed to maintain the library. Roof repairs are the top priority, followed by painting the exterior of the North Amherst Library. She noted that the library has decided against pursuing the HVAC project this year because of widely divergent estimates, and the need to answer the question of whether to go for a complete system replacement or an upgrade of the existing one. Mr. Wald noted that while the Commission is sympathetic to the library's maintenance needs, he and other members of the Commission have consistently expressed concerns about use of CPA funds for deferred maintenance of public buildings.

Following the appearances, the Historical Commission reviewed its initial FY2011 CPA proposals, attempting to limit the request while addressing the most important projects. Although members of the Commission remain strongly committed to continuing restoration work in the West Cemetery, they agreed that completion of the projects already funded was the first priority, and that additional funding for headstone repairs could be delayed. They also agreed to omit the Town Common historical research and survey. With the Jones Library decision to remove the HVAC repairs from their request, the total request came to \$117,000, plus the previously obligated \$66,900 for the 575 North East Street compensation, and the Town Hall masonry project.

In addition to revising the request for FY2011, the Commission reviewed unexpended balances on previously approved projects, and projects which were mooted by other actions. The Massachusetts DOT completed the archaeological survey for the Bay Road intersection, and provided a full report to the Town. The West Cemetery entrance design and historical research on the East Common were completed well under budget. These three projects yielded \$17,679.58 in available rescissions. In addition, the Commission noted that the \$81,000 approved for acquisition of the Main Street Hills House lots would not be spent because of the owner's decision on the acceptable price for the properties.

Joe Larson, having waited patiently through the Commission's deliberations, presented an update on UMass buildings and work that PUMA is doing to pursue preservation and conservation of structures and spaces on the campus. He discussed the proposed Marching Band Building and Prexy's Ridge. Commission members have not received the final report on the survey of historical buildings. Mr. Larson reported that the Massachusetts Historical Commission is pushing back on the University recommendations for NHR nominations, suggesting UM should broaden its list.

UMass may be proposing construction or other activities that could threaten a site known as Prexy's Ridge, the high slope above dorms, which has probably been a forested site since the first settlement of Amherst. Mr. Larson has prepared a Form H for historical landscapes for submission to the Massachusetts Historical Commission and indicated that he would appreciate the support of the Historical Commission for the nomination

He also described the Marching Band building, proposed as an addition to Grinnell Arena. UMass has presented plans to the Massachusetts Historical Commission, and the MHC has responded that they think plans are acceptable, but they want to hear from Town of Amherst. Mr. Tucker said he has not yet received anything from UMass. Mr. Larson and PUMA have essentially agreed with the MHC that proposal looks okay. PUMA has some questions but probably not of sufficient magnitude to halt project, only to forward some suggestions to MHC. Mr. Wald noted that he will be following up on these issues with Mr. Larson later this month. The Commission expressed its support for the NHR nomination of Prexy's Ridge, and urged the Chair to write to UMass expressing concern about the Marching Band building/Grinnell Arena plans.

Next Meetings will be scheduled by email.

The meeting adjourned at 10:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Gai Carpenter, Clerk