

Minutes of the Amherst Historical Commission
Public Hearing and Meeting
Tuesday, June 1, 2010
First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall

Present: James Wald, chair; Michael Hanke, vice-chair; Elizabeth Sharpe, Louis Greenbaum, Lyle Denit.
Staff: Nathaniel Malloy, Associate Planner. **Absent:** Gai Carpenter

Meeting called to order by Mr. Wald at 7:25pm.

Announcements:

- A public information session will be held on June 15, 2010 at the Amherst Woman's Club to discuss the possible Local Historic District.
- The Public Works Committee is holding a public hearing tonight to discuss various projects.

Demolition Delay Public Hearing DDA2010-00010 30 Cows Road: At 7:30 p.m. the Historical Commission Chair opened the Demolition Delay Public Hearing DDA2010-00010 30 Cows Road, a request to demolish a c.1850 vernacular timber frame storage barn. Ms. Cinda Jones, of W.D. Cows, Inc. appeared as the applicant. She pointed out that the barn is tipping due to a failed foundation, that the roof trusses are tipping toward the road, and that she is concerned about the safety of pedestrians and drivers should the barn collapse and send debris towards the road. She presented materials from former Town engineer James A. Smith that the barn was built in 1891; and from Kate Boyle of the Jones Library Special Collections that the original trolley barn blew down earlier than the current barn, which may have been built in 1901.

Ms. Jones pointed out that while Amherst trolley cars were stored at this site, this barn may not be the one they were stored in. She spoke of her family's commitment to preserving the village concept in North Amherst, and that with limited resources, two other barns on the Cows properties are more of a priority for preservation.

Mr. Malloy noted that the Building Commissioner inspected the barn, and reported that although it is not in danger of imminent collapse, it could be stabilized with maintenance and possibly structural modifications.

Mr. Greenbaum said it was an excellent example of a car barn, showing a great deal of finish. He noted that the structural elements appeared to be doing their job, and wondered why the building was left to deteriorate while serving as storage, and suddenly now, for safety reasons, needs to come down. He asked if this would be the first of several barn demolitions on the Cows properties in North Amherst.

Ms. Sharpe asked about the logistics of the trolley tracks route and operation.

Ms. Jones pointed out discrepancies on the older Sanborn maps concerning Cows Road and Cows Lane, and that the plan and footprint of this barn is different on the series of maps dating from the late 19th century to the mid 20th century.

Discussion continued on whether other wooden trolley barns currently exist in western Massachusetts. It was noted that this one is built like a tobacco/ agricultural barn, and is an adaptation of vernacular building techniques—which is what the locals were familiar with having never before constructed a trolley barn. Mr. Denit noted the significance of the trolley lines to the development of Amherst and the Pioneer Valley, how they knit small villages together and promoted civic sense. Mr. Hanke lamented the previous loss of the stone crusher at the Notch, and that this commercial building is “quieter.” He would

like more opportunity to study it. Mr. Denit said that buildings don't usually collapse suddenly. Mr. Greenbaum wanted to look into adaptive reuse of the barn.

Ms. Jones said they would love to reuse it, but that funds and resources are not available to save all the barns on their property. She thought that James Smith's written comment that it had been built "on the cheap" referred to using smaller, simpler members, not the quality of the design or work. She said the barn housed Peter Pan busses and lumber in recent decades. She pointed out that the Shelburne Falls Trolley Museum was not interested in moving their location to Amherst and reusing the barn.

Mr. Malloy said he spoken about the barn with timber frame authority Jack Sobon, who would need more details in order to assess its significance. There was further discussion about the need to know more about the barn's condition and suitability or re-use before reaching a decision regarding its demolition.

Ms. Jones asked for the opinion of town counsel on Cowls' liability should the Commission delay demolition. Mr. Malloy said that we would follow up on this question, but that he thought the Town incurred no liability because the barn is private property. Mr. Malloy reiterated that the Building Commissioner did not think that the barn warranted an emergency demolition.

Mr. Jim Perat, of 15 Summer Street, asked if nothing was done, what would be the outcome? Mr. Wald explained the one year demo delay process. Mr. Wald then took a motion to continue the Public Hearing and arrange a site visit for Commission members to view the barn. Ms. Jones said she would also be happy to have the Commission visit the larger Cowls site.

At 9:00 p.m. the applicant and Commission agreed to continue the Public Hearing to July 6, 2010 at 7:30 p.m.

Civil War Tablets: Mr. Wald reported that the tablets were being restored on-site at Ruxton, and that the cleaning should be complete. He also noted that the tablets were substantially cleaner than before this project. The Commission agreed by consensus that Monument Conservation Collaborative (MCC) is doing a great job restoring the tablets and that the invoice for \$12,300 can be paid. General discussion turned to where the tablets can be permanently displayed in Town Hall, noting that their strength and weight should be seriously considered when selecting a display location.

Signs: Mr. Hanke said that RFP specs were almost ready.

West Cemetery: Mr. Wald and Mr. Malloy reported that all the pieces of the Cutler plot iron fence pictured in the 1999 West Cemetery Preservation Plan were found on site in the ground. There was a brief discussion on the Dickinson plot fence, which is in relatively good shape. Pete Mongeon of the Department of Public Works has offered to help with the installation of safety lighting in the cemetery. There was some interest in this, but discussion was tabled until the next meeting.

NHR Nominations: The new property owner on West Pomeroy Lane is interested in the NHR designation.

North Church: Church members are discussing the congregation's future with community representatives, including possibilities for the buildings on the property.

Meeting adjourned at 10:10pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Lyle Denit