

**Amherst Historical Commission
Public Hearing and Public Meeting
September 21, 2010
First Floor Meeting Room & Town Room
7:15 pm**

Present: James Wald, chair; Michael Hanke, vice chair; Lyle Denit; Lynda Faye, Anurag Sharma, Elizabeth Sharpe. Staff: Nathaniel Malloy, associate planner. Absent: Gai Carpenter

Mr. Wald called the meeting to order at 7:30 in the First Floor Meeting Room.

Announcements: Mr. Wald announced that the trustees of the Jones Library are hosting the inaugural Mary Minot Jones Legacy tea on Sunday October 3 from 3-5 pm in the Trustees Room during which Annaliese Bischoff will offer an informal talk on early landscape architect Frank Waugh. UMass will sponsor a lecture series titled “Priceless: New Approaches to Historic Preservation in the 21st Century” Fridays at 4:00 in Herter Hall beginning September 24. As part of the series, Mr. Wald will lead a walking tour highlighting Amherst historic preservation on October 1.

Minutes: None to be approved.

Demolition Delay Public Hearing: After reconvening in the Town Room to accommodate members of the public, Mr. Wald opened Demolition Delay Public Hearing DDA2011-0004, -0005, -0006 at 235 East Pleasant Street (Request to demolish one farmhouse, one barn and one stable) at 7:40 p.m.. Commissioner Lynda Faye, an abutter to the property, recused herself and left the room. She returned during Old Business.

David Ziomek, Director of Conservation and Development for the town, reported that \$500,000 was allocated from CPA funds during the spring 2010 town meeting to purchase the Hawthorne property for open space, affordable housing, and recreation. He stressed that the town is using the demolition delay hearing as a method of gathering the Historical Commission’s input on the site’s historical significance as well as historical considerations that should be kept in mind in the site’s development. Mr. Ziomek said that he has been working with LSSE to develop the site as a recreation area on the east side and affordable housing on the west side. A large wetland, approximately 30 percent of the seven-acre site (which cannot be altered), bisects the property running from north to south. Ideas included a small community garden on the site, a garden that the students and staff at adjacent Wildwood School might tend, trails linking the properties of the adjoining schools, and a playing field. The town gathered input from Habitat for Humanity about the use of the house as affordable housing. The town envisions a multi-month process to decide on what will take place on the site.

Mr. Malloy expanded by stating that Habitat for Humanity estimated that the cost of adapting the farmhouse for low-cost housing with all the proper codes would make it cost-prohibitive. The Parsons report said that the 18th century timber framing has been cloaked with 20th century improvements. Ms. Parsons suggested that the timbers themselves might be of value; she could not put a value on deconstructing the house and constructing it elsewhere. According to the Teagno report, the small paddock barn is in good shape.

Mr. Hanke noted the downhill slope of the land and asked about the construction of the playing fields. Mr. Ziomek responded that the establishment of playing fields would require a significant amount of grading. While the property was at one time hayed and pasture, it is no longer considered agricultural land and hasn't been farmed for years. The upland soils are poor quality and would not qualify as prime soils. Given proximity to schools and no link to other farmlands, it would not be suitable for agriculture.

Mr. Sharma asked about how firm the plans were that Mr. Ziomek described, and he responded that they were very conceptual at this point. There are some sketches about where playing fields might be, but the plans have gone no further. To Mr. Sharma's question about whether all of the three purposes can be accommodated, Mr. Ziomek responded that it is a recreation project first and an affordable housing project second. He believes that the eastern portion of the site could accommodate a trail, a small community garden, and one regulation-sized field. The remaining part of the site that is not wetlands is occupied by the house and barns. As he sees it, the choice is to either reuse the farmhouse for affordable housing or demolish it and reconfigure a new building on the site.

Mr. Denit asked how the demolition application fits with his comments about purposes for the area. Mr. Ziomek responded that the town is the owner of a property with a house that is in poor condition. There are two possibilities: 1) take the building down to the bones which would be costly; or 2) see if the building could be moved off-site. The town filed the demolition request to start the conversation about use of the property. Mr. Malloy said that if the building were stripped down, it would probably be revealed that the original sill was rotted because of the moist site. If this were the case, the foundation would have to be reconstructed with the house lifted off its foundation. Technically speaking, lifting the house off its foundation is considered demolishing the house. In a reuse scenario, it is not clear whether new structures on the barn sites would be allowed because the property is zoned for only one single family home or one duplex.

Public Comment

Vincent O'Connor, 175 Summer Street, #12, said that affordable housing is a requirement of this project and that the town put up the money for three purposes: affordable housing; recreation; and open space. Mr. O'Connor hoped that the reconstruction will be subject to the public process so that interested parties can offer input and evaluation of the proposed restoration or construction costs offered by the town. He cited his long work with Habitat for Humanity and experience with cost-effective construction. He hoped that the commission would negotiate with the town staff for the withdrawal of the demolition application until after the public process takes place. At the least, the Commission should encourage a demolition delay. There ought to be a plan in place for affordable housing prior to demolition. He encouraged the Commission to have all the information necessary before closing the hearing, including a wetland map.

Mr. Ziomek said there was a requirement to allocate money to open space as the first priority and to affordable housing as a secondary consideration. There were no experts engaged in budgeting for this project as affordable housing, and the wetlands maps have been out for some time. Mr. Malloy said there is plenty of room on the property for a single family or duplex home.

Judith Moran of 238 E. Pleasant Street spoke about how, since her first arrival in town in 1965, she has valued the agricultural character of the land and loved that farmland was all around her. Amherst's character rested in its agricultural identity. She doesn't want to live in an amorphous suburb.

Judith Strayer, 226 East Pleasant Street, Ms. Strayer lives across the street from the farm and appreciates that it is the only remaining farm in downtown Amherst. While new structures have value, newness is not the only value the townspeople hold. She believes that this farm qualifies for historic standing and demolition of the house would be premature.

Ellen Kosmer, 15 S. Orchard Drive., expressed her strong feeling that it is important for Amherst to retain some sense of the value of its agricultural background and the quality of the streetscape embodied in the historic value of the house itself. It's an important example of vernacular architecture in our valley. The town should rehab the house to return it to the sense of what it was. She quoted the Parsons report which stated that the farmhouse could be standing for another 200 years. She concluded by saying that it is vital that the Commission ensure that this house is preserved. It has value for the town as a whole.

Mary Streeter, 66 Larkspur Drive, reminded the committee that several years ago the town preserved the Kimball house. She urged the Commission to think of the value the house would have to townspeople if it could be preserved for another 200 years. She would like to see children learn how to work the garden and farm. She did not feel that there should be a regulation size ball field but more family recreation. She doesn't want to change the character of the area. She was hoping for a public process and discussion about the Hawthorne property throughout the summer. She cautioned the Commission and town government to keep in mind what the people of the town want, not what the town staff wants. The house is a wonderful example of an in-town farm and should be maintained as such.

Kerry Strayer, 226 East Pleasant Street. The Parsons report sums up the historical importance of the farmhouse, and he urged the Commission to use these standards when evaluating the structure's significance. The elevation of the liability issue by the town demonstrates that the town is placing insurance concerns over preservation.

Denise Barberet, 67 N. Whitney Street, # 1, questioned how realistic the figures for restoration supplied by the town are and maintained that, at this point, no one really knows how much it would cost to restore the house. She asserted that all you get for the \$84,000 demolition cost is an empty lot and nothing toward renovation and reuse. For her, this is an important and significant house, not for flashy reasons, but because of the context of the street and neighborhood.

Brian McColgan 232 East Pleasant Street, reiterated the importance of the farm to preserving the character of the neighborhood.

Joan Burgess, 36 Mount Pleasant Street, asked if our first charge was to determine whether it is historically significant. Mr. Wald said yes and explained that if the house is found historically significant then the Commission still has to decide whether to impose a demolition delay.

Mr. O'Connor returned: When viewed from Strong Street looking south, he said, there is a context in which this house fits. Since much of the value of the house has to do with the context, to replace this house with something modern would have an unfortunate impact on the entire area. He encouraged the Commission to use its powers to find a way to preserve the building.

Ms. Sharpe asked the public if they would like to see the house remain where it was or, to save it, move it elsewhere. The sense of the members of the public was to keep it where it is because it serves as a reminder of what Amherst used to be. The context of the building is very important.

Mr. Sharma moved to close the hearing, and Mr. Hanke seconded. A discussion followed, and it was determined that if the hearing was closed then no more information could be gathered about the project to be used in the Commission's deliberation. Ms. Sharpe stated that there was a difference of opinion between the Parsons and Teagno reports about whether the farmhouse could be renovated for a reasonable cost and asked Mr. Ziomek if he would be gathering any more information about the cost and design for possible renovation of the farmhouse. Mr. Ziomek repeated that according to the reports and cost of hazard material mitigation, a renovation would cost about \$400-600,000 and didn't plan to gather any more information about restoration costs. Vote was 4-1 (Ms. Sharpe opposed) to close the public hearing at 9:25 pm.

Mr. Sharma moved to table the Commission's determination of historical significance. It was seconded by Mr. Hanke and passed unanimously.

Old Business:

Mr. Malloy mentioned that Hope Community Church may be submitting a CPA funding proposal.

Mr. Malloy stated that contractor Martha Lyons will be coming on October 5 to discuss the restoration of the Dickinson and Cutler families' iron fences in West Cemetery.

Preserve UMass has requested the support of AHC because the New Academic Classroom Building on the UMass campus is going forward without the proper review procedure set out by agreement with the Massachusetts Historical Commission. Preserve UMass has asked for a letter of support from AHC and it was agreed that the chair should write the letter on behalf of the Commission.

New Business:

Regarding the application for permit to demolish a barn at 1394 Southeast Street, no action was taken.

Regarding the application for permit to demolish a barn at 138 Sunderland Road (the site of the former "Rooster's" restaurant), Mr. Hanke moved, and Mr. Denit seconded, a motion to hold a public hearing on October 19. It passed unanimously. There will be a site visit by the Commission on September 29, 2010 at 8:30 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Elizabeth Sharpe

Materials Distributed

Agenda for September 21, 2010

Application for Permit to Demolish small barn used with paddock, 235 East Pleasant St. (6645)

Application for Permit to Demolish single-family farmhouse at 235 East Pleasant St. (6646)

Application for Permit to Demolish barn at 235 East Pleasant St. (6644)

Report on the Hawthorne House and barns by Bonnie Parsons, PVPC

Application for Permit to Demolish barn at 1394 South East St. (#6792)

Application for Permit to Demolish barn at 138 Sunderland Road (#7021)

Section 13.4 Standards for Designation as a Significant Structure