

Amherst Historical Commission
PUBLIC MEETING
November 15, 2011
First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall
7:24 p.m.

Historical Commission Attendance: Mike Hanke (Chair), Lynda Faye, Elizabeth Sharpe, Robert Brainin,

Others in Attendance: Nathaniel Malloy, Staff Liaison; Terry Rooney, Public Arts Commission, Jane Wald, Executive Director of the Dickinson Museum

Announcements

None

Minutes

Minutes from 9-08-2011 were approved by a vote of 4-0.

New Business

Amherst College Projects

Discussion postponed until early 2012

Public Art Display—Gates Lot and Dickinson Museum

Terry Rooney from the Public Arts Commission explained that a student at Deerfield Academy was making the White House Project as a part of a public arts display with shows locally and in other parts of the country. The white houses are 6'x8' and made with stock materials that are donated to Habitat for Humanity or a similar non-profit organization. The houses are also inscribed with words from the poems of Emily Dickinson.

The Public Arts Commission would like to install 40 or so of these houses on the Gates Lot (across Lessey Street to the east of Sweetser Park) and the Homestead property for 2-3 weeks in the May 2012. Installation would take a few days as the structures' locations are site-specific based on topography and how the writing relates to each other. The show would bring attention to the newly restored landscape at the museum and it would generate more foot traffic in the downtown. It was also suggested that few house be placed in Greenfield and neighboring communities directing visitors to the display here in town.

Jane Wald from the Dickinson Museum said that this is great outdoor art as it aligns with the interpretive plans of the museum: it is a new way of displaying the creative work inspired by Emily Dickinson. She even suggested that the display extend westward along Main Street to increase its visibility from the Town Center.

The Commission thought this sounded like a great idea as it would engage residents and visitors, encouraging them to walk around the museum. Commission member suggested that extensive public outreach and advertising could be critical to the success of the show. The idea of extending the white houses along Main Street was also agreed to be favorable since it create visual continuity and help draw people into the site.

The Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to support the project and write a letter of

recommendation to the Town Manager and Select Board, as they have jurisdiction over town property and the road right-of-way, respectively.

FY2013 CPA Proposals

Little Red Schoolhouse

Carol Gray, representing concerned parents, faculty and alumni from the Little Red Schoolhouse on the Amherst College campus came to speak about the threat of demolition for this building and possible use of CPA funds to move and protect the structure. Amherst College is planning and preconstruction phase of the new science center, and has notified the schoolhouse that its program will need to find an alternate location (during construction). There is a shared concern that this very well-built structure donated to the college in 1936 with a bequest to continue its use as a preschool will be neglected or demolished.

The proposal would be to try and generate a groundswell of community support to move the building off campus to continue its use a preschool. The structure was original built for this purpose with diminutive features and built-ins. With regard to CPA funding, Ms. Gray believed \$130,000 was a preliminary estimate to move the structure. She suggested that CDBG funds could also be used, that the Town or Amherst College could donate land for its future site, and that slots would be reserved for Amherst residents based on the funding source.

The Commission asked a number of questions about this project's feasibility, support from Amherst College (owner of the structure) and if this group has seriously considered the additional cost of moving a structure, which would include utility connections, a new foundation, site preparation, etc. It was emphasized that moving a masonry structure is complicated and expensive. The Commission recommended that the citizens try to speak with Amherst College to learn what exactly the plans are for the building, and to explain to the College that the building has both historical and cultural value that would be preserved if the building was not demolished. It was also asked if the College would be willing to relocate the structure on campus. The Commission also asked if the structure itself or if the saving the pre-school program was the objective of this project.

Ms. Gray responded that the program had tentatively secured another location near the Town Center, but that the quality and design of the building augmented the services of the preschool. The concern is that Amherst College has been relatively silent on the future of the building.

The Commission agreed that it is their role to advocate for the preservation of historically significant features of the Town, but without knowing (with some certainty) Amherst College's plans, it could not take a formal position at this time.

Demolition Delay Applications

89 Northeast Street—Amethyst Farms LLC

The owners of 89 Northeast Street, Mr. and Mrs. Brenan attended the meeting to discuss their plans for renovating the farmhouse demolition of rear section of house to replace it with an energy efficient space with new kitchen and living space. They would like to maintain continuity with existing main house but built it for the 21st century with regard to materials, construction technique, windows and roofing. John Thompson, the builder and general contractor explained that during the discovery portion of the project—tearing into the walls and the examining the foundation, it was determined that the addition was in poor structural shape and very difficult (and costly) to rehabilitate; there was also a step or two difference between floor elevations on the two sides of the

house.

The Commission asked a number of questions about how the new exterior would relate to the existing house with regard to the rhythm and cadence of windows, how a standing seam metal roof corresponds with the patterned tin roof of the existing house, and detailed elements such as reveal of the siding and size of the frieze board. The Commission also acknowledged that historically farmhouses were changed and altered by the owners as resources allowed; the homes became an organic element of the landscape.

The Commission voted unanimously (5-0) to not hold a public hearing and allow the demolition of the rear addition to proceed with the following recommendations:

- Windows on the new addition should match (or at least relate to) the scale and directionality of the windows of the main house
- The color of the roofing should try to match the tin of main house, and be a subtle color (not a bright red or blue)
- The exposure of the siding should match the main house—6” and not 4”
- The project be documented with photographs

Community Preservation Act (CPA)

North Amherst Community Farm (NACF)

NACF’s CPA proposal includes two separate tasks: feasibility study to examine adaptive reuse of the barn and funding for emergency stabilization to help the structure survive the winter. Town staff report that the feasibility study can be conducted without a preservation restriction on the property while the physical work would require a restriction.

The Commission expressed some uneasiness that CPA dollars would be spent to stabilize the barn before the study concludes that it is feasible to reuse or rehabilitate the structure. It was agreed that the Commission should develop a clear policy regarding the use of CPA funds that could be consistently applied to all projects. This topic was continued to future meetings.

NHR Nominations

The Commission mentioned that the brick farmhouse on South East Street may be an eligible property and that the owner should be contacted.

Material Distributed at Meeting

Agenda

Meeting minutes of 9-08-2011

Narrative Description of Little White House Art Project

Call for Proposals from CPAC for FY2013

Demolition Application for 89 North East Street

Little Red School House Narrative Description