

Amherst Historical Commission
MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC MEETING
Tuesday, December 11, 2012
Town Room, Town Hall
7:15 p.m.

Present: Michael Hanke, chair; Lynda Faye, Matthew Cornell, Meg Vickery, Laura Lovett and Judith Moran. Jim Wald of the Select Board. Nathaniel Malloy, staff liaison

Announcements: Staff reminded members of the upcoming Massachusetts Historical Commission Preservation Awards Ceremony. If any member wants to attend, they can get a form from staff.

Minutes: Lynda moved to accept the minutes from October 9th, Matt seconded. They were approved unanimously (4-0-2). Lynda moved to accept the minutes from the October 16th meeting. They were also approved unanimously (4-0-2).

New Business:

- a. **Elizabeth Rairigh, the new Preservation Planner for the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission:** She discussed her approach to the projects. For the Outbuilding Survey, staff requested that she begin with outbuildings in town and Lynda pointed out that as they are the most threatened with demolition, they should be recorded ASAP. Elizabeth said the challenge is getting access to some that are not visible from the street and she will need a letter of introduction, a preliminary list from the Commission and to contact the property owners. She will include photos and maps. Mike recommended she begin with Sunset-Lincoln areas as well as Woodside, Prospect and N. Prospect. Lynda reminded the Commission that many of those outbuildings used to be shops or workshops. Lynda also requested that she see the boundaries for the East Village before it goes to the Massachusetts Historical Commission. Staff reminded the Commission that finances could be an issue in terms of how many properties can be included. Elizabeth will wait until Spring to survey the 2 cemeteries and Lynda reminded Elizabeth of Jim Smith's survey of the graves on the West cemetery.
- b. **CPA Proposals:** The Commission has five requests for CPA funding to consider. Dave Ziomek spoke and told the Commission that Amherst did not receive the PARC grant for this year, but that it is very probable that we will be successful the following year. He requested that the Commission conduct a couple of public forums to gather ideas and opinions from the townspeople about how they would like to see the North Common restored. The Commission agreed to set these forums up.
- c. **Five CPA proposals:** Each was discussed individually. They include:
 - a. Amherst Historical Society which is requesting \$1,000.00 for the conservation of Emily Dickinson's dress as well as money for storage.
 - b. North Common Design and Improvements. A long discussion was held about this project and it was agreed that the Commission should have a significant role in its planning and present historical precedents where possible.
 - c. Tiffany window in the Unitarian Universalist Sanctuary: Lynda voiced a common concern that the congregations seems unsure about their future plans for the façade and thus could run into conflict with the permanent deed restriction placed on the window if funds are allocated. They are requesting a large amount of money and the Commission

has reservations about granting the funds given the current ambivalence.

- d. Amherst Media: is requesting \$53,994.00 to preserve and archive their old recordings of Town events and meetings. The Commission questioned whether it was necessary for Amherst Media to purchase the equipment or perhaps borrow it from Amherst College or Mt. Holyoke. If this were possible Amherst Media would need less money. Staff will research this issue.
- e. Jones Library: is requesting funds for the repair of the roof and copper guttering. There was much discussion about whether such projects fall into the category of deferred maintenance and are not really preservation issues. The cost seemed high (\$100 per slate) and Mike suggested getting a second bid. Lynda recommended that we put a deed restriction on the slate and copper work which is more in line with preservation.

d. **North Common Restoration:** Dave Ziomek spoke at length about the North Common project. Apparently the State liked the Town’s proposal but wanted more public input. Ziomek requested that the Commission hold a couple of public charettes to garner input from residents and businesses and work with the LSSE Commission to put those ideas together and then the Town will re-submit the grant proposal in July. Ziomek emphasized that at this stage the design is not as important as getting public input. The Commission agreed to hold two charrettes this winter.

e. **CPA Proposal Ratings:**

Request	Organization	Amount	Priority
Conservation of Emily Dickinson Dress and Storage equipment	Amherst Historical Society	\$21,401	1
Archive Town’s Historic Recordings	Amherst Media	\$43,316	2
Restoration of the North Common	Town of Amherst	\$159,000	3
Restoration of Tiffany Window	Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst	\$125,000	4
Jones Library Roof Repairs	Jones Library	\$14,000	5

The Commission provided the following in support of their priorities:

1. Historical Society—Restoration of Emily Dickinson’s dress and purchase of appropriate storage equipment are necessary steps to preserve Amherst’s history. These steps are the implementation phase of a multi-year effort by the Society to catalogue artifacts and determine priorities for preservation. This phase of implementation also makes it feasible for the Society to remain in the historic Simeon Strong House, a landmark in the downtown that still retains much of its original character. The Commission is fully aware that even after preservation, some of the artifacts will have limited availability for public viewing, but this is standard practice to prevent further deterioration of material.
2. Amherst Media—The Commission agreed that it is important to properly archive and preserve the recordings of public meetings, events, and Town Meetings, and then make them available to the public for free via the internet. Amherst Media has been working with a professional consultant to develop assessments and priorities, and it is clear that many of the recordings are deteriorating. The Commission reduced the funding request because it did not recommend purchase of the hardware as this is a relatively short-lived project and it is likely the equipment will not always be used for digitization and archiving of Town recordings. The Commission also questioned if the consultant, who works at Mt. Holyoke College, could collaborate with the College to use their archiving equipment to further reduce costs. It is also possible that the other area institutions would have the equipment and low-cost labor available for the digitization.

3. Town of Amherst—The Commission believes that this is a very important project to revitalize a section of the Town Common that is an eyesore in the downtown. The state could fund 70% of the project cost, significantly reducing the Town's share. The Commission acknowledged that this is a complicated site to design for a variety of uses and still respect its historic identity. The Commission asked who has the ultimate decision to approve the designs and plans for the project.
 4. Unitarian Universalist Society—The Commission supports the preservation of the Tiffany Window, noting that it is a treasure and an exquisite work of craftsmanship. The Commission did not rank this project as a higher priority because at two meetings the Society has expressed concern with accepting a preservation restriction on the property, and because there wasn't a plan for the protection and public access of the window after its restoration. The Society has said that future plans may call for expanding the sanctuary, which could involve demolition of the existing church structure or moving the western façade closer to North Pleasant Street. The Commission believes that the church building itself is a significant structure and that the window's placement and context within the existing building helps make the window significant; this is how the public sees the window.
 5. Jones Library—The Commission thought the proposal was expensive at \$100 per slate and questioned whether this is preservation or maintenance. The Commission would like to know if the Jones Library includes an annual budget in their capital plan and/or facilities plan for such a project, especially because a slate roof does require frequent maintenance. The roof is a decorative element that helps define the Jones Library, but this proposal does not appear to preserve the roof and does not make the most efficient use of resources.
- f. **Demolition Request:** Donald A. LaVerdiere requested permission to demolish a small ranch house at 463 West Street. The Commission granted approval (6-0).
 - g. **Campus Pond at the University of Massachusetts:** The Commission agreed to write a letter to Preserve UMass in support of retaining the original shape of the pond and re-planting what has been removed. Meg agreed to write the letter.

Old Business:

- a. It was agreed that the Commission will discuss and decide upon changes to the Demolition Delay at the next meeting, with the possibility of extending it to 18 months.
- b. West Cemetery Lighting: Paul diBenedetto, a local electrician, is ready to go ahead with the motion sensor lights. Staff will send him a contract. Lynda wants a deadline established.
- c. Cemetery Signs: are in process. The Commission is researching qualified sign fabricators while staff is researching the most appropriate procurement method.
- d. Town Tomb is moving along—the engineer is finishing the specifications and the project can be bid in the spring.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:32