

Amherst Historical Commission
MINUTES OF PUBLIC MEETING
Tuesday, January 8, 2013
Town Room, Town Hall
7:00 p.m.

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

Announcements: Staff reminded the Commission that the Preservation Projects Fund grant program from the Massachusetts Historical Commission is open. This is a bricks and mortar grant that Amherst Cinema received several years ago.

Minutes: Matt moved to accept the minutes as written and Judith Moran seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

New Business:

Potential changes to the demolition delay by-law: Jonathan Tucker, Planning Director, has put forth the idea of extending the delay period. Lynda communicated to Staff prior to the meeting that 18 months is long if there are no new plans in place to help owners find alternatives and give the owners some reason to save the building. Mike says he doesn't think owners have been inconvenienced and is in favor of the 18 month delay; it is important to have time to research options to preserve historically significant structures. Lynda had made the point of financial difficulties imposed by the delay. Mike said the Historical Commission has occasionally imposed conditions when allowing a delay and has found success with this route. The Commission asked whether extending the delay to 18 months is warranted, and if there is a clear advantage to this extra time. Would 18 months provide more time to learn about the structure and work with an owner? The Commission did not make a decision and agreed to continue the discussion at future meeting.

Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst-Renovations: Jonathan Salvon from Kuhn Riddle Architects and Peter Wells from the Berkshire Design Group attended the meeting and presented plans for the expansion of the existing building for the Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst. The landscape ideas were first presented and include a new entrance plaza on the south side of building, accessible paving, new plantings and planters as well as five parking places behind the building. They will use pre-cast pavers and granite curbs. Four mature trees will have to come down, including two oak trees along Kellogg Ave. These trees will be replaced. A discussion about the loss of these trees and the concrete sidewalks ensued, with the Commission suggesting that the sidewalk on the south side of Kellogg Ave along the church may not be necessary with an improved walkway south of the church and because there is a sidewalk on the other side of Kellogg Ave.

Jonathan Salvon then presented plans for the new building, including floorplans and elevation renderings. The addition will almost double the space of the Church but will not increase the sanctuary—it will provide programmable space for classes and activities, and a kitchen. The Architects and Society will also ask for a number of variances from the State's Architectural

Access Board (AAB), including one to not build a ramp on the front (western façade) because there will be a new ramp on the south side of the building. There will also be an elevator within the building accessed from the new main entrance and from an at-grade accessible entrance at the rear of the building. The new siding will not be an exact replica of the existing material, but will blend with the siding (and match color), and it will be cement board. The overall architectural character and design will blend with the existing church. Peter Lacey from the Society spoke about removing both the Tiffany and LaFarge windows. The intention is to return the Tiffany to the western façade after restoration work. The congregation is considering selling the LaFarge as the funds are not there to repair it. There will be few alterations to the sanctuary space.

Mike believes the south side alley between the church and Bart's ice cream will be improved by the changes and make the Tiffany window much more visible from North Pleasant Street. The Commission agreed that the new work blends quite seamlessly with the existing church without replicating the exact style and material; it was clearly a modern addition that related to and complemented the existing church. The Commission was pleased that the architectural details and exterior elements, from the rooflines, window treatment, material and color of the siding, and lighting was designed to match the existing structure. The Commission also supported changes to the southwest corner of the property including the plaza on North Pleasant Street as they appeared to increase visibility of the building and will highlight the restored Tiffany Window. The Commission voted unanimously (5-0) to support the variance request not to install a ramp on the western façade along North Pleasant Street, including changes to the doors and entry. The Commission reasoned that the improvements to the entrance on the south side, including the new accessible entrance near the parking lot (east side), would accommodate users and minimize the impact of the addition on the existing church building. Installing a ramp in this location would compromise the historic integrity of the building.

West Cemetery Projects:

Dickinson Fence: RFP will go out in the next 2 weeks. The fence is still in terrible condition and the first bids were very high.

Town Tomb: this is going out to bid. The engineer finalized the specs last week and CPA funding exists to restore the Tomb for \$30,000. Work will begin in the Spring.

Lighting: this is waiting until the Spring and better weather. Staff will research the easement on the mural as permission from the owner may be required.

Signs: Mike wants to make a couple of changes and will get these to Staff tomorrow. He is pleased with the list of consultants on the list and believes any of them will do good work.

Review of CPA proposals: the CPA Committee had a few questions about our evaluations and also asked questions of the organizations that submitted proposals. The CPA Committee would like the Commission to respond by the January 31st public hearing, Mike said he will attend. The CPA Committee inquired about the preservation restriction on the Tiffany Window.

MHC planning and survey grant applications: Applications are due in mid-February. Staff asked what areas in town the Commission would like to have surveyed, specifically outbuildings. There has been a proposal to survey the agricultural buildings in the north and south of town. Laura suggested we consult with 'Grow Food Amherst'. The Historical Commission, however agreed by consensus that these working landscapes are less then threatened than outbuildings in the Town Center where non-owner occupied properties and change of use are leading to the demolition of garages, barns, etc. The Commission agreed that the outbuildings in the Town Center should be a priority, beginning with the NHR Districts.

Preservation of the UMass Campus Pond: The Historical Commission approved of the letter written by Meg Vickery in support of preservation efforts.

Demolition Delay Application: 290 Lincoln Ave. At the Zoning Board of Appeals the neighbors argued that the Commission had not fully considered the information presented about the barn. The ZBA has questions about whether the Commission had been adequately thorough in its consideration. Staff indicated that Town counsel is of the opinion that the Commission has two choices: write a supplementary decision (without taking new evidence) or holding a new public hearing. It was discussed whether just the 3 members who were at the first meeting should attend a new public hearing or whether new members should also participate? It was discussed that the ZBA was not necessarily intent on a new public hearing, they are just asking if the Historical Commission had considered everything and was the information supplied at the initial hearing in September enough? In a supplemental decision, the commission would review existing material—minutes, application, and documents submitted by the public, and write another set of minutes supplementing those from September and send this back to the ZBA to take under advisement. A new hearing would allow new evidence to be presented and for the applicant to add new information.

The ZBA said there were 3 criteria in particular that concerned them, including connection to place/person/and the style of the building. Mike and Matt staunchly defended the Commission's first decision saying that at the initial hearing the commission understood all the evidence and understood what was at stake. Mike took issue with the claim that the Commission did not understand the issues and significance. He also said there was nothing compelling enough to issue a delay; the barn had been significantly altered on the interior and it was not a unique design. Tom Reidy, legal councilor for the owner of the property spoke briefly about letting the public speak and he said that Ms. Lovett, who is now on the commission, should not participate in a new hearing. Maurianne Adams who lives nearby on Beston Street, said she attended the ZBA hearing and heard them raise questions. She also wanted Ms. Lovett to address the Commission at a new hearing. There were questions if the supplemental decision was a minimum standard during a remand process. The neighbors said they expected a new hearing based on the discussions at the ZBA hearing.

Ms. Patricia Stacey argued that since she was not at the first hearing she would like to have a chance to present her information to the Commission. Her sense from the ZBA was that they wanted the Commission to hear from her and get her information about the barn. She believed that the ZBA wants the commission to have a second hearing to hear her case. Laura Lovett said the basic question is whether Warren Brown was significant and how he was connected to the

barn. The ZBA, she said, would like to know about his significance, and his significance in relation to the barn.

The commission discussed the merits of holding a new hearing and allowing all those interested a chance to speak. Mike said that the Commission's duty is to protect historic resources and based on the public interest, it would be best for the Commission to hear new information. The Commission voted unanimously (3-0) (only those who attend the first hearing voted) to hold a new hearing, tentatively scheduled for January 29, 2013 at 7:15 p.m. in a location to be determined.

Old Business:

Preservation Awards: Commission is asked to think about a recent restoration that might be worthy of recognition. There is a desire to make the event more ceremonial and make the presentation of award at a Select Board meeting.

Demolition request: Owners of 179 Northampton Road submitted a demolition application. The Commission commented favorably on the new design and said that they prefer materials other than vinyl on the exterior.

Demolition request: The Commission agreed that the demolition of 417 West Street could proceed.

North Common Public Process: A January 24th public meeting is scheduled to elicit comment from the public about plans for revitalizing the North Common. The Commission will take the lead collecting ideas. It will be held in the Woodbury Room in the Jones Library at 7 pm.

Lincoln Sunset LHD Study Committee: The Commission said the Select Board has not heard the case yet but when they do, the statute requires that the Dickinson Historic District Commission act as the Study Committee unless they waive that responsibility.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:35

The next meeting will be on February 12, 2013.