

Amherst Historical Commission
MINUTES OF PUBLIC MEETING
Tuesday, March 12, 2013
Room 101, Bangs Community Center
7:00 p.m.

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

Guests: Jerry Guidera, Louis Greenbaum, John Kuhn, George Hicks, Sharon Sharry

Announcements: Staff informed the Commission that the Town had submitted a full application to the Massachusetts Historical Commission for the planning and survey grant to inventory outbuildings in the NHR Districts in and around the town center.

Minutes

Lynda motioned that we accept the minutes from February 5, 2013 and February 19, 2013 with minor corrections, the motion was seconded and the minutes were accepted, with one abstention. (vote 4-0-1)

There was a brief discussion of the Decision on Remand from the ZBA that summarized the proceedings and findings for the barn located at 290 Lincoln Ave. The Commission approved the decision, which will be recorded with the Town Clerk and will be submitted to the Zoning Board of Appeals for their next meeting.

New Business:

a. Zoning Change for Hills Lots

Property owner, Jerry Guidera was introduced. He presented the Commission with plans for a new building to be sited on the corner of Main and Gray Streets and said that if rezoned, they could be 20 percent larger with more parking. The goal is to house Amherst Media's headquarters. Guidera is seeking changes to the zoning on these two corner lots, to business/neighborhood zoning, to increase the size of structures and parking and lot coverage. He pointed out that this will increase density and will likely be the first major project reviewed by the Dickinson Local Historic District. The elevations he showed to the Commission are stylistically in keeping with the houses recently moved to Gray Street; however, if Amherst Media buys the lots as planned, they are not required to follow these plans. Guidera argued that this achieves greater density while maintaining the view from the two Hills mansions. He is seeking support from the Historical Commission.

After he spoke, Louis Greenbaum took the floor and gave the Commission a background into the building of the Hills Mansions, pointing out that their view used to encompass the factories and railroad that brought the Hills family the wealth to build their mansions. Greenbaum cited the exquisite interiors of the houses and the importance of the Hills family to the history of the Town of Amherst. He expressed dismay over the division of the property that has already taken place and urged the Commission not to support further development of the site.

The Historical Commission also had questions about how the new zoning may impact the Hills Mansions if the building size and height are allowed to increase. The Commission agreed to discuss this issue at the next meeting.

b. Railing for Jones Library

John Kuhn came on behalf of the Jones Library and presented drawings of new railings to go before the front door of the library for easier access for patrons. The railings would go on the left side of the entrance and would be steel tubing (similar to entrance near driveway) attached to two steel 4x4 posts, with everything painted white. The Commission was concerned in particular with the tubular steel railings and how such a look is out of keeping with this important historical façade. Matt asked if the rails could be cast iron and said that this is one of the flagship doors in Amherst—it is highly recognizable and would be on a ‘postcard of door’s if one was developed for Amherst. Meg suggested that perhaps the railings didn’t need to curve around continuously but could end at the post, eliminating the lower railing and reducing the industrial look. Mike recommended that the railing have a different profile than just round steel and that wrought iron or other material could be used. John Kuhn said he would look into changes and more decorative elements, but the Architectural Access Board (AAB) accessibility regulations are very strict and did not allow for much deviation. Laura moved to accept the proposal, Lynda seconded, and there was a discussion that if the one railing option (the top one) and a decorative return on the railing were possible, then the Commission approves the railings. (vote: 4-1)

c. Review of Schiff Architectural Detail Proposal to restore the Dickinson Fence in West Cemetery

Staff reported that this was the only response the Town received and the Commission needs to determine if the consultant is qualified. Staff checked the references which were all very good; they relayed the Jeff Schiff is very knowledgeable and ‘lives and breathes’ metalwork. Martha Lyon, a consultant hired by the Town to draft the specifications recommended that the Town verify the qualifications of the subcontractors before accepting Schiff’s proposal. The Commission is hopeful that the price will be within the budget of \$70,000. Lynda stressed the urgency of getting this job begun and finished. Staff will verify things and move it along. Meg moved that if all the qualifications and costs are met, then the Commission and Town move ahead with Schiff Architectural Detail. The motion was approval was unanimously. (vote: 5-0)

d. North Common CPA and Public Process

Staff reported that the CPA Committee had taken a preliminary vote of 4 to 4 at their February 28, 2013 meeting not to recommend funding for the North Common project to Town Meeting. The CPA Committee will take a final vote later this week. The committee feels as though this is a large sum of money (given the tight budget and many proposals) and they are skeptical of the historical accuracy of the plans put forward. They would like to see more of a public process and more community support that could lead to a new concept plan for the North Common. The CPA Committee asked if the Commission would take the lead on this (even without funding) and have another public forum. Lynda made the point that the impetus for this did not come from the Commission, but from the Town. Mike argued that this is a high profile project and it desperately needs to be restored, and it is a central piece of the downtown that is highly visible. Restoration of the common is also supported by many residents. He said it would be a great opportunity for the Commission to take the lead on this project. There was some discussion if the Commission would sponsor a public design competition to generate concept plans, which was an idea mentioned at the January public forum. The Commission agreed to discuss this at the next meeting.

e. West Cemetery Projects

Town Tomb: The specifications and plans are complete for the restoration of the Town Tomb. Staff asked if the commission would want to accept the lowest bid or base this on qualifications. The Commission would like to review both criteria when awarding a contract. Lynda said she

would ask Martha Lyon for 3-5 qualified firms to restore the tomb. She also stressed the urgency of getting this done.

Lighting of the West Cemetery Mural: Staff emailed Paul DiBenedetto to get the contract executed and to set up a time to get the lights installed. Again, urgency was stressed and staff said the electrician will be under contract by the next meeting.

West Cemetery Signs: Mike started this process in 2008 and showed the Commission the designs for the signs. The commission was very pleased with his work. Mike will email the updated designs and specifications to staff that can incorporate them into a Request for Quotes. There is some question whether there will be enough CPA funds to complete the project.

f. Preservation Awards and New Commission Logo

Mike has been working on the design for the preservation award and Commission log, and presented these at the meeting. It was suggested that if the logo was approved, it could be placed on signs and information material that is then distributed or posted at bus stops, etc.

It was determined that for the next meeting members should come with ideas about what projects and properties to prioritize for a preservation award.

g. CPAC

Lynda can no longer represent the Historical Commission at the CPA meetings. Another commission member will need to step up to the post.

h. Demolition Delay

Staff recommends that the Commission consider moving the Demolition Delay Bylaw out of the Zoning Bylaw and into the General Bylaws. Also at this time the Commission could make amendments to the bylaw such as an expiration, clear administrative process and term of delay. With the Demolition Delay Bylaw in the Zoning Bylaw, it creates an awkward appeals process and it serves to pit two boards against each other. Lynda would like to include some incentives for the owners not to demolish. Meg said she'd like to fill out a Form B for the house at 290 Lincoln Ave. Laura said she would help.

Next Meeting

April 9, 2013