

## **Amherst Historical Commission**

### **MINUTES OF PUBLIC HEARING AND PUBLIC MEETING**

**Tuesday, October 1, 2013, Town Room, Town Hall 7:15 p.m.**

Attended by Laura Lovett, Lynda Faye, Mike Hanke, Matt Cornell, Meg Vickery, and Nathaniel Malloy. Minutes taken by Matt Cornell.

#### **PUBLIC HEARING**

Request to demolish a c. 1916 tobacco barn. 332 West Street (20A-167):

Mike read the notice of public hearing and then opened testimony. Co-owners (Mary Steigner and Ann Lowell) gave testimony. They said their main concern was safety and the ability to continue to receive property insurance. There was no historic activity to their knowledge. Staff described history of property, including the abutting conservation area and the town's refusal to buy the barn. Mike reviewed his site visit and analysis, including the novel conversion from tobacco barn to dairy barn, and the makeshift conversion of the hayloft. He found it to not be robust, unlike a dedicated cow barn. He noted that the frame is in good condition. Lynda said the barn speaks to both the streetscape and as a reminder of our agricultural origins, including tobacco, of which few if any Amherst barns remain. She expressed understanding of its poor condition and the lack of finances, but regrets the loss to the community. Mike asked the owners if they were interested in receiving funding to help stabilize it, to which they expressed enthusiasm. He noted that it would be a good candidate for CPAC private funding, which would not be available until next July. Lynda echoed that the Commission might be able to help, with approximately \$400K CPAC total for next year. She also reviewed the idea of possibly creating a housing trust to do loans for situations like this. Mike said first we'd need a rough estimate of possible required repairs, e.g., what's compromised. Lynda asked the owners if the insurance company's concern had a timeline. The owners said no. Laura wondered whether this is the last tobacco barn in Amherst. Staff and Meg said no, there are a few others, but it's the most prominent one, with the rare silo making it more so. Meg asked if the owners are open to grazing goats or sheep while waiting for funding, which they said they are amenable to. Lynda verified this by asking again. Mike closed the public testimony period, and the Historical Commission started evaluating the criteria.

Voting findings and tally:

13.40: No (no vote necessary)

13.4100: Yes: 5, No: 0, Abstain: 1

Meg thought it was import to Amherst, but not that of the Commonwealth. Lynda said it had value as part of the Town's heritage. Mike suggested it qualifies because there used to be considerable tobacco farming in Amherst.

13.4101: Yes: 0, No: 6

13.4102: Yes: 1, No: 5

Lynda noted that farmers, as a group, had influence in the town, but clarified that 'groups' is general.

13.4103: Yes: 6, No: 0

Lynda said it exemplifies economic and historic heritage. Laura said the barn qualifies for all characteristics.

13.4110: Yes: 0, No: 6

Laura said tobacco barns are an architectural style, but Mike said that would be better considered in section 13.4111.

13.4111: Yes: 5, No: 1

13.4112: Yes: 0, No: 6

13.4113: Yes: 0, No: 6

Laura thought transitioning from tobacco to livestock was an innovation. Mike agreed that it is a significant innovation, but not unique to this structure.

13.4120: Yes: 0, No: 6

13.4121: Yes: 6, No: 0

After the voting, Mike verified that it DOES meet the criteria for a significant structure.

Next the Commission debated whether to impose a demolition delay. Mike asked Staff if there is money to hire a consultant to give a scope of work, to which Staff answered that there is approximately \$8,200 available. Lynda asked the owners what their ultimate goal for the structure would be if they had adequate funding. They answered that they had not thought about it, but were concerned about the insurance impact. Mike and Staff suggested that the goal could be to stabilize and secure the structure, and to remove junk, and that the insurance company would probably be OK with that. Staff said that if the Commission issued a demolition delay then he could start research and begin working with the owners to prepare for requesting CPA funds, but this would need to start soon to be ready in time.

Mike suggested that this would be a perfect project to put forth to CPAC to preserve. Lynda agreed that there are many resources giving evidence of the barn's

significance. Mike said the next steps for the meeting would be to impose a one-year demolition delay. One issue is that if it fails CPAC then the delay would need to run its course for the entire year. He emphasized to the owners that, if it were to pass, then they would have to accept a preservation restriction in perpetuity (say 99 years). Staff pointed out that according to the bylaw, if the applicant exhausts all resources then they could return to request the delay be shortened. He went on to describe to the owners the steps involved in the CPA process, and told the Commission that they'd need to first impose a delay and then vote on CPA funds. Lynda suggested they start the application process soon. Mike called for a vote on imposing a delay, with the result of Yes: 6, No: 0, and verified the TWELVE MONTH DEMOLITION DELAY.

Next the Commission discussed whether the project was worthy of CPAC funding. Lynda asked Staff if any other projects are coming up. He replied the Historical Society may have something, the civil war tablets will probably need \$50K-60K, and possibly the Jones Library would need some funding. Mike called for a vote in favor of a CPAC recommendation for the barn, with the result of Yes: 6, No: 0. Staff said he would follow up with helping them with the application.

## **PUBLIC MEETING**

### Announcements

Staff passed around the Dickinson Museum's 10-year anniversary booklet. Meg asked if Senator Rosenberg was still interested in the civil war tablets, to which Mike and Staff said no. Staff talked to Alan Snow about livestock grazing in the cemetery, who said he would look into it.

### Minutes

Mike moved that they be approved, which passed unanimously.

### New Business

MHC Grant-Neighborhoods for consultant to inventory outbuildings:

Staff was not sure we have 100 out-buildings (excluding barns) ready for inventorying, and if Historical Commission members have streets or specific properties in mind they should write to Staff so he can redirect them to the consultant. Lynda said the goal was to target the center of town, including coops or sheds that have been converted to secondary uses or demolished. These are remnants of the town's agricultural history that's being lost - even chicken coops - and are all that remain of the twentieth century when chickens and horses were common. She wants specific relics to be pinpointed, Lincoln chicken coops for example. Staff said a drive-by methodology misses these kinds of structures. He said the first GIS canvas would be when all the leaves are down. He also said the consultant did not see 100 buildings, and that the timeframe for consultant is tight (approximately three days to complete the survey). Lynda asked what MHC's

criteria are, to which Staff said there were none that he knew of. The Commission discussed what is currently allowed to be taken down, the building permit process, and its interactions with the demolition delay procedure. Mike asked the Commission to send recommendations of properties to Staff.

#### CPA Representative:

Staff said Lynda did a good job, as did Louis and Gay previously. However, without a representative, CPAC would look less favorably on Historical Commission CPA recommendations. He wondered if someone who would commit to be the representative could fill the current Historical Commission vacancy. Staff said CPAC met last week and would be meeting again in a few weeks for spring Town Meeting. Lynda said the person must be an advocate for the Commission and be able to stand up for it due to the work's importance. Staff wondered if hostility could be managed by somehow working with Dave and Jonathan. Meg said she'd email Max Page about ideas for a member.

#### North Common Public Process:

North Common public process: Staff said the Town Manager will push for a PARC grant, and the Historical Commission can stay involved or not. One option is for the Commission to lead a public process. Alternatively, the Historical Commission could write a memo stating they do not want to use Commission CPA money for it. He said PARC is mostly for recreation, sidewalks and benches for example. The Commission discussed the history of the project leading up to this point, and the possible role of the Historical Commission CPA funds.

#### West Cemetery projects:

Staff gave an update on the projects. The town tomb is going back out to bid as a full RFP. Lighting has had a turn of events regarding the power and ownership concern. He talked to Gerry Gates, who gave approval for security lighting going forward using his electrical service. The Commission discussed the remaining funds for lighting. Staff noted the possibility of giving back the unused amount to the general fund. About the signs, Staff said he's waiting on drawing changes.

#### Old Business

##### Civil War Tablets—RFP for installation outside Town Hall:

Staff reviewed the history of the project. The Town is contracting with architects to get design and engineering specifications. He expects the town to come before the Historical Commission in the fall for CPA money for the project.

#### Adjournment

The meeting was unanimously adjourned.