

Amherst Historical Commission
MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC MEETING
Thursday, April 17, 2014
Town Room, Town Hall
7:15 p.m.

Attended by Meg Vickery, Mike Hanke, Matt Cornell, Lynda Faye, Nathaniel Malloy (staff liaison), Jim Wald (Select Board liaison),

Guests: Steve Bloom (public); John Olsen (UMass professor); UMass students: Gregg Mitchell, Christine Bjorge, Katherine Garland, Andrew Grim.

Announcements

Hampshire Council request

Staff explained that the Council's request for CPA funds in recent years has not been recommended by the Commission or the CPA Committee. Mike pointed out the issue is spending money for a property outside of town and that Amherst would spent disproportioStaffly more than other towns. Lynda said the building is valuable - architecturally, historically, and its impact on the streetscape - and recommends sending a letter in support of rehabilitating the structure, but not that Amherst provide support financially. She moved that the Historical Commission send the provided letter to HCG in support of bill 3920. Meg seconded it, and it passed unanimously.

Letter from PVPC certified local government

Staff informed the Commission that the Town is eligible to apply for Certified Local Government status. The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission has sent a letter notifying the commission of their services to help with this application. Staff asked whether the Commission wanted to look at this later because there is a full agenda with guests speaking.

Minutes-approve minutes

Lynda moved to accept the minutes of March 20, 2014 as written, Meg seconded, and it passed unanimously (4-0).

New Business

Update on North Common public process

Staff gave an update on the project, pointing out two concept plans in the meeting packet. In the forum on April 1st approximately 20 people attended. Lynda asked whether any open space (land) would be eroded by new plan. Staff said it is undecided yet, and that many in the audience asked about the possibility of getting rid of parking (30 spots) to the east. Mike brought up drainage mitigation, and should he would like to see a creative landscape architect look at how the common is used, and envision how to make it inviting. He thinks that it is not a pleasant or comfortable space currently. Staff said the next step is to refine the concept and use

it to apply for a PARC grant this summer and other grants as necessary. Lynda reminded the Commission that it is the only body that would focus on the historical aspects of the space, such as any reference to past use or historical precedent. Meg suggested that if the project moves forward, the Commission request looking at the Olmsted plan from late 19th century. Staff reminded the Commission that the Massachusetts Historical Commission would also have to approve the plans. Staff asked that any other comments be sent to him.

NHR Nominations—for volunteer and Commission

Staff said a retired historian would like to look at a property to assess and complete a NHR nomination packet. The commission discussed possible properties, such as the Baskin House on East Pleasant Street.

Amherst Walking Tour project presentation

Students of Professor John Olsen in the Public History Department at UMass gave a presentation of their digital walking tour project for the Writers Walk. They were Gregg Mitchell, Christine Bjorge, Katherine Garland, Andrew Grim. <http://digital.history.umass.edu/amherst/>. They summarized the project, gave a live tour, and highlighted the flexible editing features for future management, including the addition of new stops or entirely new tours. The Commission enthusiastically received the work. Mike asked about adding a visual tour (map) of the route? Matt suggested promoting the work in a newspaper article. Staff said it could be added to the Town's web site.

Commission membership—expiring terms

Staff reminded the Commission that Meg's and Matt's terms expire this year, and said they should write to the Town Manager to extend their appointments. Meg and Mike said they have asked a few people to consider joining, but received no affirmatives yet. Lynda pointed out we are the only preservation organization in town, and new members should bring that focus.

Support for 332 West Street Barn at Town Meeting

Mike asked Jim Wald and staff if there would be a CPA Committee member present at Town Meeting to speak to this article. Jim said he would be there. Staff shared that volunteers had helped empty the barn, which will defray some of the cost. Mike said he would like to attend to speak to the article if needed.

Preservation Awards

Mike presented his final award form, to which the Commission responded enthusiastically. The Commission approved the wording and discussed when to present it to the recipients. Jim said he is willing to represent the Select Board. Lynda asked about the artwork source files. Mike said will continue to store them as long as he is able, and will also share the InDesign file with staff. Lynda moved that the Commission accept the final piece, with Meg seconding, and all voting unanimously (4-0). The Commission discussed presentation dates and decided the tentative one to be Monday, June 16th.

Use of West Cemetery Mural for Trolley Barn

The Commission discussed approving the use of the West Cemetery mural for Cinda Jones' Trolley Barn building. Lynda suggested giving credit to the Amherst Historical Commission, the artist, and the West Cemetery Mural itself. Meg moved the Commission approve the use, with Matt seconding. It passed with a vote of 3-0-1.

Demolition delay applications

i. 194 Amity Street-partial demolition

Staff said the owners were preliminarily reaching out regarding an addition to the property. Lynda said the Commission's decision on this could be highly visible, and that the project would have to be very carefully watched.

Other items not anticipated: public

Steve Bloom, a member of the public representing owners from the Lincoln-Sunset neighborhood who want to form a Local Historic District Study Committee, was called on to summarize the status of the neighbors' effort to move forward, and to share challenges. Lynda said it is fortunate that the neighbors are excited, and said the Commission would strongly support their work. Mr. Bloom wanted to know the next steps, and why there had been such a delay by the Town to form the study committee. Mike and staff explained the typical process of setting up a study committee and said they will look into what Amherst needs to do. A second member of the public requested seeing updated minutes on the Town's web site.

Old Business

Demolition of Carriage Shops and future of West Cemetery Mural

Mike summarized a meeting he attended with town staff, owner of the property and potential future owners. The potential owners see the cemetery and mural as an asset and are willing to work with the Town and Commission. He highlighted that it is premature to speculate on outcomes, given there's no sale yet. Mike answered questions from a member of the public regarding possible directions the Commission could move to, including easements.

West Cemetery Projects

Staff said the town tomb contract is going back out to bid, and that the signs are ready to go. The Commission discussed how to increase staff's availability for Historical Commission tasks, and Mike said he'd write a letter to Jonathan Tucker and David Ziomek re: allocating more time for staff.

Next Meetings

The Commission set a tentative next date of May 20, 2014.