

Amherst Historical Commission
MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC HEARING & MEETING
Tuesday, July 22, 2014
Town Room, Town Hall
7:15 PM

Attendance: Michael Hanke, Chair; Meg Vickery, Laura Lovett, Lynda Faye, and Nathaniel Malloy, staff liaison

Guests: Jim Wald (Select Board liaison to commission); Jane Wald (Ex. Director of Emily Dickinson Museum); Elizabeth Armstrong; Paula Chadis; Janet Keller; Ann Hollingworth; Edith MacMullen; Betsy Matthews; James Steinberg; Paola Di Stefano; Phil Gosselin; Nina Shandler; Michael Shandler; Cinda Jones; Beverly Ziomek; Mary Jane Laus

Minutes: Minutes from May 20th, 2014 approved unanimously

Public Hearing:
7:30 pm, 134 Montague Road (5A-139)

Mike Hanke opened the public hearing by reading the preamble and requested that those attending be courteous and not interrupt when others are speaking.

The applicant, Cinda Jones, began with her argument against applying a Demolition Delay on her property, a large red barn (almost 6,000 sq. ft.) set behind the Cowl's headquarters on Montague Road that her family has owned for almost 300 years. She said that while demolition is something she has tried assiduously to avoid, her 18 months of research has not yielded any viable alternatives. She pointed out that with the University of Massachusetts just down the road, the potential for a profitable village center on her property is great. She is preserving three out of 4 barns on her property, including one large barn which Atkins Farms will occupy by next summer.

She then described for the Commission the steps she has taken to try and save the barn. These include discussions with timber engineers about removing the south third of the barn which is in poor condition and shoring up the other 2/3rds. She has also discussed with Jane Wald of the Emily Dickinson Museum the potential for dismantling the barn in questions and re-erecting it on the Dickinson property. She said that the work involved in making the barn viable again would cause financial hardship and that, though she loves the barn and played in it as a child, her family has always welcomed change as needed to benefit their business. She presented to the Commission emails from Thomas Harris, of Architectural Timber and Millwork Inc, which included rough estimates of the costs of all the alternatives that ranged from \$200,000 to stabilize for agricultural storage up to \$300,000 for a more intense or commercial use. She also included an email from Robert Leet of Whetstone Engineering which included a cost estimate of \$200,000 to \$300,000 just to do the basic work of re-roofing, fixing the foundations, re-supporting the

floors, replacing the decayed and insect infested members, bracing the walls and removing the low mezzanines and replacing the required structural members. There would be additional costs to actually outfit the barn for a commercial uses such as HVAC, electrical.

Cinda Jones said forcibly that the purpose of a demolition delay is to give the owner time to research and explore alternatives to demolition, and that given the advice she has taken from experts, such as Tom Harris and Robert Leet, as well as advice from Robert Morra, the Building Commission, she has already done what the demo delay would require. Furthermore, she posited that it is vital that something be done before next summer when Atkins opens its satellite store in the neighboring barn.

When Commission members asked Cinda Jones the cost of dismantling the barn for the Emily Dickinson Museum, it was unclear whether the figure of \$200,000 given by Tom Harris would come from Cowl's or the future owner. Cinda said that if the Dickinson homestead did not want the barn timbers, she and her crew would carefully dismantle the barn and use the timbers around their property. When pressed by Commission members it appeared unclear exactly how much the various options on the table would cost. The applicant then prioritized her future options for the barn:

1. DoStaff to Emily Dickinson Museum
2. DoStaff to the Porter Phelps House in Hadley
3. Reuse the barn material on the site and find a future use for the timber

Then the chair, Mike Hanke opened the hearing for public comment.

The first to speak was Janet Keller, of 120 Pulpit Hill Road. She asked the Commission to impose a delay in order to explore saving at least part of the barn. She announced that there are community members who have met to explore financial alternatives to demolition and that they would be happy to work with Ms. Jones to make those happen. She also said that the barn is a significant structure on the historical landscape and referenced section 13.4 of the Demolition Delay Bylaw. The barn has been part of the Cowl's family for generations and is the site of this influential family's business in town. It is an important visual landmark in North Amherst village and even moving it to another location would be detrimental to the integrity of the neighborhood and history. A demolition delay will allow more time to research ways to save the barn.

Then Melisa Perot of 15 Summer Street spoke to the Commission, referring to the editorial in today's paper by Louis Greenbaum which forcefully made the case for a demolition delay. She

also pointed out that the Town's 2005 Preservation Plan identified the area as a potential Local Historic District and in 2012 the Select Board approved a Study Committee for a North Amherst LHD. Although the study committee has yet to form, this property would be examined. She said that the loss of this historic barn would be a great loss to the historic landscape of this area and to remove it and rebuild it elsewhere seems hasty. She also wondered if the barn is demolished if the area would become zoned for residential? Staff deferred the question to Building Commissioner Morra.

Next to speak was Paola di Stefano of Montague Road. Her house is directly across from the barn and she has lived here for 20 years. She discussed how for years, neighbors have wanted this corridor along Montague Road to remain residential/rural and how they value the historic nature of the area. While she acknowledged that the large development planned for the Cowl's properties cannot be avoided, the barn stands on the outer fringes and will serve as a visual buffer from Montague Road. She asked for a delay in order to preserve this historic landscape.

Patricia Holland of 105 Montague Road was next to address the Commission. She brought up the issue of the barn along West Street that was recently awarded CPA funds for its preservation and that the Historical Commission had deemed that barn significant. She said that the Cowl's barn is more worthy of saving than the West Street barn. She is also worried about the wide views into the new development and the effect that will have on Montague Road.

Nina Chandler of 74 Summer Street. She posited that the barn is a large and noticeable structure which is very much a part of this area and provides a buffer between the street and the businesses within the property. She believes saving it is beneficial, especially with the development of the Local Historic District in the works.

Janet Keller, returned to speak, offering to share photos of the beauty of the landscape.

Ms. Jones responded to the public comments, arguing that CPA funds, as were awarded to the West Street barn come with too many strings attached. Mike Hanke, interjected that these are preservation restrictions. Jones also said that she is more interested with a tax benefits for saving the barn and that she has inquired of the town if this is possible and has not yet heard back.

The open hearing was then closed.

Prior to the Commission's discussion of the barn, Lynda Faye asked staff that even if the Commission found the structure significant, the Commission is not under any obligation to issue a Delay. Staff agreed that this is the case. Mike Hanke then read through the relevant sections and criteria and standards for designation as a significant structure of the Demolition Delay Bylaw.

Following Article 13 of the Zoning Bylaw the Commission voted as follows:

	Y	N	
13.40	0	4	It is listed on, or is within an area listed on, the National Register of Historic Places, or is the subject of a pending application for listing on said National Register, or;
13.410	Historical Importance		The structure meets the criteria of historical importance if it:
13.4100	4	0	Has character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the town of Amherst, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts or the nation, or;
13.4101	0	4	Is the site of an historic event, or;
13.4102	4	0	Is identified with a person or group of persons who had some influence on society, or;
13.4103	4	0	Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historic heritage of the community.
13.411	Architectural Importance		The structure meets the criteria of architectural importance if it:
13.4110	0	4	Portrays the environment of a group of people in an era of history characterized by a distinctive architectural style, or;
13.4111	4	0	Embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type, or;
13.4112	0	4	Is the work of an architect, master builder or craftsman whose individual work has influenced the development of the Town, or;
13.4113	0	4	Contains elements of architectural design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represents a significant innovation.
13.412	Geographic Importance		The structure meets the criteria of geographic importance if:
13.4120	0	4	The site is part of, or related to, a square, park, or other distinctive area, or;
13.4121	4	0	The structure, as to its unique location or its physical characteristics, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, village center, or the community as a whole.

During the voting the commission discussed that the barn and Cowls family have been business pioneers in the town who influenced the development of the community, especially North Amherst. They were involved in the trolley, timber, agriculture, land development and other enterprises. The barn itself is a good example of a cow barn with a shed addition. It is built up to allow a breeze for threshing and basement for sloughing down manure.

The Historical Commission thus determined that the barn is a significant structure, and turned its attention to imposing a demolition delay.

Staff then outlined the processes of delay, including the conditions of demolition delays. Staff also stated that a delay must be for 12 months, but that if during that time, Cinda Jones returns to the Commission requesting the Commission to lift the delay because all resources and alternatives have been exhausted, that it may be possible.

Commission's discussion:

Lynda Faye commented that Ms. Jones has been very clear about costs etc., but that she did not believe it was the purview of the commission to consider finances in their decision. Mike Hanke countered that it is difficult to make such a blanket statement and reiterated that the mission of the commission is to preserve the historic landscape, not prevent demolition, and that the commission should look for ways to save it. Meg Vickery offered the idea of working to list the barn (and possibly house) on the National Register which would allow for substantial tax credits to be applied to the cost of renovation. Lynda Faye added that the intent of the Demolition Delay is to give the owner and town a chance to explore other options to demolition and that in this case, Ms. Jones has certainly done that already. Lynda Faye asserted that the barn is clearly a landmark, but wondered what could be the advantages of applying a delay. She also wondered if it was possible to apply a delay to just the 2/3rds of the barn still in good condition.

Mike Hanke commented that the bulk of the barn seems strong and true and is in no real danger of falling down, though the south side is rotten and in need of repair. He also voiced concern about the barn's importance to the neighborhood and he has difficulty seeing it moved successfully. He wondered if a fence couldn't be put up around it to protect the public while a solution is found. He also wondered what the Emily Dickinson Museum thinks of the idea of reusing the barn on their property. Mr. Hanke sees no need to hurry, and a delay offers time to explore more options. Laura Lovett commented on how quickly things have moved on this—in just a short time there are preliminary cost estimates, community interest—and said that a delay might offer more time to explore financial options. Mike agreed that it would be good to have other experts weigh in on the cost of the different options. Ms. Jones said that she did not want National Register recognition for the barn as it would come with too many restrictions, especially with the looming Local Historic District. Staff said that a delay offers more time to come up with hard numbers for the various options. Ms. Jones requested permission to remove the broken slates that are falling from the roof and take out the broken windows. She also requested that if the delay is lifted that it would give her enough time to dismantle the barn carefully rather than in a rush.

Jane Wald, Director of the Emily Dickinson Museum said Cinda Jones came to her and asked what she would think of taking the barn. Ms. Wald noted that the Museum's Master Plan includes constructing a barn-like structure on the property as part of their landscape restoration. While the Cows barn is bigger than what could fit on the site, the remaining 2/3rds that are in good condition probably would. But the process of agreeing to this would take time and a thorough archeological study would need to be done first. The Museum would also need a very

clear idea of what expenses would be involved, but they haven't had time to do this yet. Lynda Faye followed up commenting that one key aspect of the barn is its location and relationship to the house. Moving it will destroy that integrity. Mr. Hanke asked Ms. Jones if there were no delay would she remove the barn immediately. And would it be done slowly and carefully? Ms. Jones answered that indeed she would dismantle it very carefully if given enough time. Ms. Faye asked what will replace the barn in that space if it is demolished. Ms. Jones thought perhaps a parking lot, or possibly using part of the foundations for an amphitheater for live music etc. Laura Lovett wished for more time and a chance to hear from experts. Ms. Faye is strongly in favor of retaining the barn, but does not want to impose great hardship on Ms. Jones. Meg Vickery also expressed concern about holding things up for Ms. Jones, but felt that she would like more definitive numbers about costs and viability of the various options on the table. Given the importance of the barn within the landscape this was needed.

After comments and discussion, the commission voted unanimously, 4-0 to impose a 12-month demolition delay with the option to revisit the issue within the next couple of months, giving Ms. Jones a chance to collect more expert opinions and hard financial data. It was decided that the Commission will meet with Ms. Jones again on August 11 in the Town Hall at 9:00 am.

The Public Hearing ended at 9:25 pm

Due to the hour and attendance from residents of Cushman Village Center, the commission discussed only this other topic on the agenda.

New Business:

g. Impacts of the Proposed Retreat on the Cushman Center

The floor was opened for comments from members of the public who attended to express their concern over the effects of the proposed Retreat, the subdivision east of Cushman Village Center. Edie McMullen, former chair of the commission, reminded the commission that Cushman Village is a historic site, an old paper mill village where mill owners built and rented small family homes for their workers, it is home to the oldest ice house in Amherst and it is a cohesive community. Ann Hollingsworth from Henry Street spoke to the commission. She lives in one of the workers' houses built by Roberts on the Rhode Island system. Laura noted that this system was actually very exploitative to families working for the mill owners. Edie and Ms. Matthews and Ms. Hollingsworth all asked that the commission consider the historic nature of the area in our comments to the planning board.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 pm

The next meeting is scheduled for Tue. July 29th at 7:15 p.m.