

Amherst Historical Commission
MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC HEARING & PUBLIC MEETING
Tuesday, May 19, 2015
Town Room, Town Hall
7:00 p.m.

Present: Mike Hanke (chair), Laura Lovett, Meg Vickery, and Jan Marquardt

Guests: Nate Malloy (Staff liaison); Jim Wald (Select Board liaison); Tom Davies and Jim Brassord (Amherst College); Carol Gray, Kristine O'Donnell,

PUBLIC HEARING

7:00 P.M. 8 Barrett Hill Road/ 25 East Drive, Amherst College (14C-67)

Chair Mike Hanke began the public hearing by reading the Preamble. Amherst College requests permission to demolish the Amherst Day School (Little Red School House) built on campus in 1937.

Report from Applicant: Tom Davies, Director of Design and Construction for Amherst College outlined the College's need to demolish the School House. He introduced plans for the new Science Center that requires the demolition of both the school house and the four social dormitories from the 1960s. Davies informed the Commission that the College had hired Sheply Bullfinch to research the history of the building which was designed by the firm of McKim Mead and White. They came back to the College with no significant information about the school house, reporting that it was not listed in the archives of the firm. Davies also reported that while the College has moved buildings in the past, the cost estimate to move the School House was between \$3-500,000. The building would have to be broken into 3 parts to move it from its site, which would be difficult because of the steel framing embedded in the concrete slab. The College can find no feasible re-use for the building on campus and would like to tear it down.

Staff reviewed the material distributed in the packet and reminded the Commission that in 2012 the building was closed and has since been vacant. At this time proponents for saving the structure and pre-school program approached the Town's CPA Committee to seek possible funds to preserve the building. The Historical Commission wrote a letter of support for preserving the building. The CPA Committee determined that funding the project was pre-mature as supporters did not have a place to relocate the school at the time and there was no consent from the owner.

Jan Marquardt asked if the College had looked into ways to incorporate the old building into the new. Laura Lovett mentioned the new building addition to South College at UMass which is incorporating an older building into a new addition. Davies said that this had not been considered and pointed out that the school house and new science center would be out of scale: the science center will be approximately 230,000 sq. ft. while the schoolhouse is 2-3,000 sq. ft.

Mike Hanke asked if the College had any other buildings on campus by the firm McKim Mead and White. Davies referred him to Fayerweather Hall of 1893, which is a great example of the firms' work completed during their prime years.

Meg Vickery asked about salvaging the fine interior finishings and Davies said that this would be a matter of course as well as documenting the structure before its demolition.

Public Comment: The Chair then opened the meeting to the public.

First to speak was Carol Gray whose son Cameron attended the school. Gray pointed out that this is a rare example of a building that was built as a pre-school, and served the community for 75 years. It was the first pre-school in town and was started through a petition from faculty of Amherst College asking for such a pre-school. She praised the large rooms and sees potential there for alternative uses. She said that in 1952 the College president noted that there were no other building on campus better built than the schoolhouse. Ms. Gray recounted earlier efforts to save the building in 2012 which had a good deal of support but her committee could not find a resolution with Amherst College. She said her ad hoc committee had just recently learned of the plans to demolish the building and asked the commission for more time to find a new home and purpose for the building. She said that this could be a fall CPA proposal and urged the commission to issue a delay because the building is a community treasure and a rich part of the Town's history as 1,700 students used the school during its 75 years of operation.

Christine O'Donnell, former teacher at the pre-school program, spoke in support of the school house, citing a children's book about a lonely building and how it was happy again after it had been moved. She also mentioned the important lessons that Amherst College students had learned from working in the pre-school and that this was a unique opportunity for the college to teach education appreciation.

Jeff Sharpe, of Amherst, also spoke in support of saving the building. While he understands both sides, he wonders if a compromise is possible. He referred to the demolition of Penn Station in

New York City, after which many realized it was a mistake. He wondered if more people knew that a building by McKim Mead and White was threatened if there might not be donations to save the building. He also pointed out that the cost to move the building is not exorbitant compared to the overall cost of the new science center.

Joanna Morse, also of Amherst, spoke next. Her child went to the school and she had been on the committee to save it several years ago. She mentioned that at the time, the committee had a site with a private landowner and there was much interest from parents to try and save it. She mentioned that at the time, they had learned of an endowment for the school that was linked to the building and was around \$400,000 which would cover moving costs. She said that there are unresolved questions about the endowment and said it could be a source of funding to relocate the building. Joanna and Carol Gray asked the commission for more time to research the endowment and what alternatives are available.

The Commission asked for clarification about the endowment. Jim Brassord, from Amherst College, said the endowment was for the education of faculty children, and not for moving the structure.

Carol Gray also mentioned that they had a quote from Granite State movers that estimated the cost of relocating the structure to be closer to \$60,000-100,000. She suggested that perhaps Amherst College could provide a 50/50 match.

Jeff Lee from Amherst noted that the architect of the building, James Kellum Smith, was a significant architect, having designed the Mead Art Museum, War Memorial and the Museum of National History in DC. Alumni of the Little Red School house include, Uma Thurman, and Bill Cosby's children. He asked that Amherst College be willing to work with the committee to find a solution.

Eric Bright of Belchertown had 3 children at the school and noted that as a building specifically designed for children, it is a real treasure; as a society we are not building like this anymore.

Cameron Gray Lee, age 10, also spoke in defense of the building.

The Public Hearing was then closed at 7:49 p.m. and the Historical Commission reviewed the Standards of Designation as a Significant Structure. The Commission reviewed the standards and voted this a significant structure. Following Article 13 of the Zoning Bylaw the Commission voted as follows:

	Y	N	Abstention	
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	3	0	1	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	0	4		Is identified with a person or group of persons who had some influence on society, or;
13.4103	3	0	1	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	3	1	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	1	2	1	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	0	4		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 review of criteria, the commission discussed the pre-school’s role in early childhood education in the town and state, noting it is an early example of a building purposefully developed as a preschool. The commission noted that its use as a preschool helped bring families together from the college and the town, adding to the cultural development of the community. The commission also said that it is a good example of an early to mid 20th century building.

After the commission determined the school to be a significant structure it debated whether or not to impose a delay. Laura Lovett said that as a historian of children, the school merits more investigation, especially if this was the first purpose built pre-school. Jan Marquardt agreed that more research should be done. Meg Vickery said she had not realized how much work and progress the committee to save building had accomplished in previous years, including finding an alternate site. She said that the building and its possible reuses merits more research. She did not like the idea of sending the interior millwork to the Restore when reusing the building had not been thoroughly examined. Mike Hanke expressed concern that there will be hidden costs to moving the structure that could make it financially unfeasible. He said he understood the nostalgia for the building and that it may have historical importance. But he also pointed out that though the firm McKim Mead and White is given credit for the structure, this was well past the firm’s heyday. He questioned whether the total expense to move the structure—acquiring

property, installing new utilities and foundation, updating to current codes—will really benefit the town.

Jim Brassord of Amherst College was given permission to speak. He argued that the College works hard at preservation on campus and has done due diligence for this structure. He responded to commission's questions about studying the interior of the building by saying that the College looked at macro issues and the ability of repurposing the built to align with the College's mission. When it was determined that there is no viable path to reuse the building on campus, the College did not, and does not plan to, complete a thorough study of the building's interior. He said that if the price had been reasonable they could have moved the building. He also said that a year delay could impact the construction schedule for the new science center.

Carol Gray spoke up asking for more time for citizens to work with the College to try and find a solution to save the building.

Jan Marquardt moved to issue a 12-month demolition delay. Laura Lovett seconded. During the discussion Mike Hanke argued that the Commission must do some research during the delay and remain aware that the owner has already completed sufficient research on the building. Staff said that according to the bylaw, the owner/applicant and citizens can return to the commission during the delay to present their findings and research. The commission voted unanimously (4-0) to issue a 12-month delay, noting that by fall 2015 the preservation committee should return to the commission to report its progress. It was the commission's opinion that the history of the structure and more detailed cost estimates could be determined by this date, and if a solution is not viable or there has been little progress, they would consider lifting the delay.

The Demolition Delay proceedings adjourned at 8:40 pm.

Public Meeting: began at 8:45

Membership: Staff reminded the Commission that membership is a crucial issue that needs to be addressed especially as Mike Hanke's term is up in late June.

New Business:

1. PARC Grant for North Common: Staff said the Commission needs to hold another public forum to discuss the proposed design and programming for the North Common. This is necessary to apply for the PARC Grant due in mid-July. The Commission said that the forum can help solidify the parameters and priorities for designing the site, noting it is a complex space that needs to be updated carefully. The commission said they are available on June 16 to hold a forum.
2. Demolition Applications
 - a. 50 N. Whitney. The applicant wants to demolish an enclosed porch and construct a new kitchen. The commission voted unanimously (4-0) to not hold a hearing and allow demolition.
 - b. 35 Tyler Place- Barn. The applicant wants to demolish a 19th century barn that is in disrepair. The commission voted unanimously (4-0) to not hold a hearing and allow demolition.

Old Business:

1. Preserve UMass – expressed dismay at the University’s plans to demolish West Experiment Station. The HC concurred.

Next Meeting:

June 2, 7 pm