

Amherst Historical Commission
PUBLIC MEETING
Wednesday, October 26, 2016
Glass Room, Bangs Community Center
7:00 p.m.

Members Present: Meg Vickery, Jane Wald, Robert Romer, Tom Parker, Steve Bloom, Laura Lovett

Staff present: Senior Planner Jonathan Tucker

Others present: Austin Sarat (Jones Library Trustees), Tamsin Healy, Kathy Lanza, John Kuhn (Kuhn-Riddle Architects), Sharon Sharry (Director, Jones Library), Kent Faerber, James Alexander (Alexander-Feingold), Ed Wilfert, Jim Wald (Select Board), Sarah McKee, Tevis Kimball, Louis Greenbaum, Hilda Greenbaum, Patricia Holland, Barbara Ford, Vincent O'Connor, others

1. Jones Library schematic plan presentation to Historical Commission by Alexander-Feingold

Chair Meg Vickery explained to the audience that the meeting was not a public hearing or an open forum on the design for the library expansion. It was instead an information session. No questions or comments would be taken. The first item of business is presentation of schematic plans for the Jones Library by Architects Alexander-Feingold (AF) for informational purposes for the Historical Commission.

Austin Sarat, President of the Jones Library Trustees, introduced the members of the Trustees and architectural team present.

Jim Alexander, principal of the architectural firm, presented AF's qualifications and experience: the firm has designed numerous restoration projects including 15 libraries, Ellis Island, integrating new additions to historic buildings. Just completed renovation to Old Chapel at UMass. Have brought freshness to old buildings. The firm seeks to balance functionality with preservation. The firm has become familiar with history of the Jones Library and its significance to the community.

Ken Guyotte explained the timeline for the Jones Library project:

Jan 26, 2017 application to MBLC

July 2017, MBLC grant awards

Funded projects will then have 180 days (Dec. 2017) to secure local funding

Final design will begin after local funding has been obtained.

The purpose of the current drawings is for the MBLC grant application. They are not final designs. These preliminary schematic drawings only begin the process of design. AF will continue to be engaged in series of public meetings to refine the design once the grant has been awarded. MBLC will also have input into design.

Because a proposed re-zoning intending to allow the use of some Strong House property had not been passed by Town Meeting, AF is working on a design within the library's property. AF has drawn up a design that removes the 1990s addition and adds a new one behind the west wing and another on the northern side of existing building which will intrude into the existing garden area. A curved walkway to the south main entry solves an access problem.

Historic views of the library from its surroundings give clues to what is important to the community and AF does not intend to change those views in an appreciable way. They intend to retain the 'country house' feel of the Jones in contrast to Carnegie-style libraries of the 1920s period. The dormers and two small wings flanking main entry will be kept.

Tony Schell (AF Principal) described floor plans: the layout of the original 1928 area will be renovated. Interior circulation will be better organized. A central elevator and stair will be consolidated at the core of the building. Winding navigation of collections will be eliminated. Some stone exterior walls will become stone interior walls between the original 1928 building and the proposed addition to the north.

On the first level, the design will relocate the public meeting room on the northeast corner with its own exterior access. It will return the original meeting room to public space rather than being obscured by stacks. On the second level, Special Collections will be relocated to a lower level to create an entire floor for the adult collection. The main part of the historic area on this level will become a public adult reading room. Offices from the first level will be relocated to the second level. The third level will maintain original spaces to be used for staff functions. The top level will accommodate new mechanical systems.

Elevations and sections provide another way to consider the design. East to west sections emphasize the need for an appropriate way to combine old and new sections. Mr. Alexander noted that this will be worked out as plans move forward and after the grant is awarded. Ideas include use of stone and brick, scaling down the west side, including a canopy and arbor. Architects want to make the historic building visible from new building, with the new section as low as possible so that public façade of building remains the same as current. A 'saw-tooth' roof with skylight structures will bring in a sustainable element allowing natural light from the north and surfaces for solar PV panels facing south.

The south elevation shows that the addition to the northeast will be moderately visible from street. The north elevation highlights windows into Special Collections from the garden level. The view from the southwest on Amity Street is a sensitive one and the architects feel that the large existing Norway spruce tree on the Strong House property will help to diffuse view of the new rear addition. Public input will be needed to select appropriate exterior materials, coloration, and windows. The visual connection between the Library and Strong House landscapes will need a lot of attention to get it right. One idea is to use stone for the exterior walls the garden level on north side with brick above.

Commission members questioned the status of the schematic design. They expressed concern about the gambrel area. They emphasized retaining as much existing original interior area and features as possible. They asked about alternatives to a saw-tooth roof and glass bump-outs.

Alexander-Feingold representatives responded that public comment has emphasized keeping as many features of the original library as possible. However, some alteration is needed to alleviate the problem of inadequate young adult and children's spaces. Approximately a third of existing interior spaces and features – those considered most important to the community – will be retained.

Ms. Vickery thanked the Jones Library representatives for the presentation.

2. Approval of Minutes

Mr. Parker moved, Ms. Lovett seconded, and the Commission unanimously voted approval of the minutes of September 22, 2016.

3. Demolition delay for 1095 West Street

Mr. Tucker noted that the representatives of Hampshire College had requested a continuance. Mr. Parker moved, Ms. Wald seconded, and voted unanimously to continue the public hearing to Wednesday, November 16, 2016, at 7 pm.

4. Demolition delay preliminary reviews

- a. 807 Main Street Federal House. The Victorian porch is failing and the owner wishes to replace it with an open deck. A Town inspector reports that the situation is not dire and the porch can be repaired in spring 2017.

Ms. Wald moved, Mr. Parker seconded to hold a demolition delay public hearing. Voted 0-6-0, deciding not to hold a demolition delay hearing.

- b. 119 North Whitney Street. The owner wishes to demolish garage, which sits on the same location as 1916 structure, but it is unlikely that the building in question is an early twentieth-century structure.

Mr. Romer moved, Mr. Bloom seconded to hold a demolition delay public hearing. Voted 0-5-1, deciding not to hold a demolition delay hearing.

5. New Business

- a. FY18 Community Preservation Act -- Historic Preservation Project Proposals.

Mr. Tucker reported receipt to date of three proposals for CPA from private entities:

- 1) Jewish Community of Amherst steeple and belfry (originally Second Congregational Church)
- 2) Renovations to Ithmar Conkey house (664 Main Street)
- 3) Farmhouse for North Amherst Community Farm (1089 North Pleasant Street)

Mr. Tucker noted that the Historical Commission should consider whether to pursue its own historic preservation projects for FY18.

b. Nolumbeka Project

Mr. Tucker described the Nolumbeka Project, a private initiative to encourage communities to create better regulatory protections for ceremonial landscapes and other Native American archaeological features. The Project has used GPS and aerial photography to map and mark for future research areas most likely to contain archaeological deposits. Project staff want to open discussions with local Historical Commissions to raise awareness and collaborate in creating regulatory protections on a local level. They also want to directly involve tribal representatives in these efforts. The Nolumbeka Project has scheduled a meeting on December 3 to initiate this effort.

Mr. Parker and Ms. Wald agreed to attend the December 3rd meeting.

6. Old Business

a. Thompson Memorial sign update.

The design has been approved and production will proceed with Dorsey Memorials.

a. Writers Walk signs update

Letters accompanied by drawings and draft language have been delivered to property owners for their approval. The Historical Commission will need to complete individual sign designs, schedule a presentation to Select Board for signs in public way, and meet with Amherst College representatives to obtain rights to locate three signs on College property. Concern over frost heaves and vandalism resulted in a recommendation to sink concrete plinths deeper than 20 inches, with the top of plinths at a height accessible to wheelchair users.

7. Next Meeting

The Commission set its next meeting for November 22, 2016, at 7:00 pm.

8. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:49 p.m.