

**Amherst Historical Commission**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
**Tuesday, February 15, 2017, 7:00 p.m.**  
**Town Room, Town Hall**

Present: Meg Vickery (chair), Janet Marquardt, Ted Parker, Bob Romer, Jane Wald

Staff Present: Jonathan Tucker

Guests: Maurianne Adams (Lincoln-Sunset Local Historic District Study Committee)

**1. Demolition Delay**

Preliminary Reviews – 27 Spaulding Street – Relocating doors & windows

A demo delay application for the relocation of an existing door and a window at 27 Spaulding Street, for preliminary review. The proposed changes (already begun) will occur on the east and north faces of the building. In response to internal changes, a rear door (accessed via an existing deck) is being moved left to occupy the space previously occupied by a window, and the window will be moved to the right and around the corner to face north out onto the driveway, serving a new interior bathroom.

Ms. Marquardt moved, Mr. Parker seconded, voted 0-5-0, to hold a demolition delay hearing. Motion defeated.

**2. New Business**

**a. Demolition Delay Regulations – Review**

Mr. Parker presented a revised draft by-law for review by the Commission. An original draft (May 2, 2016) provided language for moving the powers of the Amherst Historical Commission, including the demolition delay process, from the Zoning By-Law into the General By-Laws. Proposed alterations:

- Paragraph 2.8: Empower AHC to preserve/protect archaeological assets as well as historic assets.
- Paragraph 4.2 Administrative Determination of Qualification for Historical Commission Review.
- Paragraph 4.3 Preliminary Review to be undertaken by Chair or designee and two other members of the Commission. Findings of no significance will permit Building Commissioner to issue demolition permit.
- Paragraph 4.4 Public Hearing for potentially significant structures within 45 days of date of application.
- Paragraph 5.011 Standards and Findings for Designation as a Significant Structure or Site shall include archaeological importance.

Mr. Parker's revision included lengthening the delay period to 18 months and proposed Paragraph 4.5 concerning alteration of a demolition delay.

- Historical Commission or Building Commissioner may propose alteration of delay
- Alteration of delay is placed on AHC agenda with notification to abutters
- Public meeting held to hear arguments and public comment

In discussion, Commission members agreed that the full commission should participate in preliminary review and in public hearings of a demolition request. Further discussion of

process and procedure sought clarification of the point at which a structure is determined to be “significant,” resulting in a consensus that the Commission should vote on significance immediately after its preliminary review, rather than at the beginning of a public hearing. The definition of “days” as “business days” will be added. It was pointed out that it is difficult for homeowners to understand what makes their structure potentially significant if it lies outside a historic district. Commission members agreed that outreach and full information at the beginning of a demolition permitting process is critical.

The Commission also discussed making greater use of binding conditions and non-binding recommendations in its disposition of demolition requests.

The timeline for placing articles on the warrant for Town Meeting means that a decision concerning the Demolition By-Law must be made by February 28.

- b. CPA Historic Preservation Proposals – Status  
Mr. Romer and Mr. Tucker presented the Commission’s proposals at the CPAC’s January 31 meeting and answered questions. The CPAC discussed at length the fact that FY18 CPA requests far exceed FY18 CPA revenue. The public hearing for the CPA proposals will be held the evening of Monday, March 6.
- c. North Common - Design Process  
State has changed RFP process with the introduction of a “designer selection form.” A Designer Selection Committee will be formed to review submissions. Ms. Vickery and Ms. Marquardt volunteered to represent the Historical Commission on the committee. Mr. Tucker asked that suggested changes to the RFP be sent to him as soon as possible.
- d. West Cemetery:
  - 1) Permission to remove Baker headstone for restoration  
A purchase order for restoration of the damaged Baker headstone on the east side of the 1730 Knoll has been approved. However, under state law, the Town has to grant permission for removal of the Baker headstone. Mr. Parker moved, Ms. Marquardt seconded, voted 5-0-0 to recommend to the Town Manager that permission be granted to remove the Baker headstone for restoration.
  - 2) Information about Security Issues  
Increasing vandalism in the cemetery raises issues of how to improve security. Proposed measures include pruning shrubbery to eliminate hidden spaces, completing the perimeter fence, recruiting senior citizens to lock gates at night, increasing security lighting, and installing web cameras.
- e. 26 Spring Street – Proposed mixed-use building  
A new mixed-use building has been proposed for this location (formerly occupied by a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Chauncey Lessey house demolished a few years ago). The site abuts two NHR Districts, and the Historical Commission may be asked for an advisory opinion about the proposed building. It is a 3 ½ story building, housing a small retail space in the left front and entry/circulation for upper level residences on the right. The lower level behind the retail and circulation spaces serves as interior parking for the building. The architecture

and materials are compatible with those of the adjacent Grace Episcopal Church building.

f. **Other Items Not Anticipated**

Lincoln-Sunset Local Historic District. Ms. Adams reported to the Commission the progress of the LHD proposal with the Planning Board. The Study Group took seriously Planning Board's recommendation to not use North Pleasant Street as the eastern boundary. A new map shows options for new eastern boundary, "an interestingly jagged boundary" which is the result of the different depths of properties that face North Pleasant. The structures now excluded are still fully documented, which will be useful to the Historical Commission in dealing with demolition requests.

A second area of discussion addressed design criteria and standards. The Massachusetts Historical Commission offers general criteria guidelines, and states that LHDs can consider design, arrangement, materials, massing, etc. Individual Local Historic District Commissions around the state have developed criteria of varying specificity and detail. The standards for Northampton's Elm Street Historic District, for example, are extremely specific. On the other hand, Tom Ehrgood, chair of the Dickinson LHD Commission, sees the Commission's job as protecting structures rather than preserving or restoring structures. The Planning Board prefers a general approach and believes specific detail in the standards would be onerous for owners. Mr. Tucker suggested that the LHD base its standards on those of the Design Review Board as expressed in the current Town By-Laws.

Ms. Marquardt moved, Mr. Parker seconded, voted 5-0-0 that the Amherst Historical Commission endorses the creation of the North Prospect-Lincoln-Sunset Local Historic District with the revised eastern boundary.

3. **Old Business**

a. **Writers Walk signs – Update & Next Steps**

Ms. Marquardt reported on her meeting with Jim Brassord, Chief of Campus Operations, to ask for help in funding the four signs identifying Amherst College properties. He declined the request for funds, which means that the set of signs cannot be fabricated within the available budget. Discussion noted that different, smaller signs embedded in the pavement or sidewalks could be paired with an app to create a more effective walking tour. The signs would be much less expensive and available funds could be spent on app design with much more robust information.

b. **Thompson Memorial sign**

Mr. Romer and Mr. Tucker announced that the sign has been installed. The next step in this project is to plan a celebration. Deferred to next meeting.

4. **Next Meetings**

March 9, 2017, at 7:00 p.m.

5. **Meeting adjourned 8:55 p.m.**