

# **Stratham Heritage Commission**

## **Meeting Minutes**

**October 12, 2016**

**7:00 pm**

**Land Use Conference Room**

Present: Rebecca Mitchell, Nathan Merrill, Florence Wiggin, Terry Barnes, Wally Stuart

Guests: Tavis Austin (~8:00 pm) and Paul Deschaine (~8:15 pm)

Convened: 7:05 pm by Chairman Mitchell

Alternates: Mitchell appointed Wiggin to serve as a voting member in the absence of Canada

Minutes: September 14, 2016 minutes were approved as presented (Wiggin, Stuart, unanimous)

### **OLD BUSINESS**

Treasurer's Report: Stuart reported that town bookkeeper Valerie Kemp is on vacation, so his numbers are out of date. As of 8/31/16, the Heritage Fund contained \$4,440. As of 7/31/16, the operating budget had \$2,815 available. There was an erroneous journal entry of \$264 for Veteran's Garden engravings that was taken from the administrative account instead of the memorials account. Stuart will meet with Kemp next week to have the error corrected and to get updated account balances for our November meeting. The current balance of the Heritage Preservation Fund is unknown; Stuart will check with the Trustees of the Trust Funds to get our current funding balance. Mitchell and Stuart will meet soon to develop a first draft 2017 budget for discussion at our November meeting. Merrill volunteered to help with this effort if needed.

Lane Homestead: UPCOMING EVENTS: Oct. 20th at 10:00 will be the formal celebration for the closing of the Lane Homestead Preservation Easement, at the property, all are welcome. Nov. 4th at a time TBA, the NH Preservation Alliance (NHPA) board of trustees and other invitees will be coming to the Seacoast for tours of several sites. Stops in Stratham include the Lane Homestead, Bartlett-Cushman House, and Stuart Farm. Mitchell said she hopes to prepare a handout for that event highlighting those properties and other preservation challenges and issues facing the commission's work for the town.

A dozen-plus Lane family descendents came to Stratham for a tour of the Homestead hosted by new property owner Greg Pruitt and Mitchell. They were thrilled with their tour of the property, and some family members stayed to view the 300th anniversary parade the next day.

Mitchell brought a few copies of the easement document and baseline documentation report for sharing and review by any interested Commission members. She also shared copies of the final project budget that was submitted to LCHIP and reviewed the numbers. All bills have been paid and the project is officially completed and closed. Our budgeted funds for 2016 were adequate to cover all of the expenses, with the cost of the grant proposal preparation and the appraisal having been covered by the Heritage Preservation Fund in 2015.

Bartlett-Cushman House: Mitchell noted that the barn roof was not replaced when the other roofs were done last year, and that it and other structural repairs to the barn should be planned for in 2017's budget.

The proposed widening of the Bunker Hill Avenue / Portsmouth Avenue intersection was discussed. **Motion: (Merrill, Stuart, unanimous): The Heritage Commission supports widening the end of Bunker Hill Avenue to accommodate two egress lanes (one for left turns, one for right turns). The Commission does not support further widening of Bunker Hill Avenue or Portsmouth Avenue to accommodate a deceleration (right turn entry) lane, or two incoming lanes into Bunker Hill Avenue. The Commission prefers to have Bunker Hill Avenue widened to the north (Smyk property) rather than to the south (Bartlett-Cushman property) so as not to impinge on the historic B-C site. The Commission supports relocation of the stone wall along the Smyk property if it needs to be moved to accommodate the widening of the street to the north.**

Mitchell raised the issue of potentially executing a preservation easement for the B-C house. It was discussed whether or not this would need to go to the voters for approval. She reported that Peter Michaud of NH Division of Historical Resources (NHDHR) suggested that a historic district could be established for that sole property. Mitchell noted that a historic district would not protect the character defining features of the interior but that having a historic district would make the town eligible for Certified Local Government status. Merrill suggested consideration of including the abutting "Ridge School" if we were to pursue a historic district. Mitchell suggested keeping it simple, with possible expansion to other properties later. There was more discussion. Deschaine added that another alternative would be simple deed covenants added by the town. **Motion: (Merrill, Barnes, unanimous): The Commission supports our Chairman investigating various options for long-term protection of the Bartlett-Cushman house by consulting with Nadine Miller (NHDHR) and Jennifer Goodman (NHPA) and others. Factors to consider include cost, complexity, and flexibility for adding additional properties in the future, pending further investigation.**

Mitchell met recently at the Bartlett-Cushman house with David Canada, David Choate (Realtor and NHPA board member), and Steve Bedard (contractor specializing in renovation of historic

properties). Bedard felt that the renovation budget proposed earlier by Dockham Builders was significantly high. He is going to work on developing an alternative proposal for the interior. The town has postponed reissuing the RFP until there is follow-up from Bedard and Choate.

Old Town Hall: Mitchell met on-site with Lisa Mausolf for documentation of the property for the state historic register nomination. Lisa became increasingly impressed with and excited about the property as their tour progressed. She took extensive photographs. Both will meet on Oct. 25th with retired town clerk /tax collector Joyce Rowe to learn and document more details about the specific interior workings of the building during her long tenure there. Mausolf promises to have her work completed and invoiced to the town prior to year-end (so that we can pay for it out of this year's budget as planned). Merrill will follow up with property owner David Short to get the letter of consent signed.

Chase's Tavern: Mitchell, Merrill, Stuart, and Hathaway met on Sept. 27th with property owner John Reiss at the site, 16 Emery's Lane. A comprehensive tour of the residence and detached barn was provided. The property is also known as the farm of the street's namesake, several generations of the Emery family. In its earlier life as a tavern, the property is well documented as the site of many town and other public meetings. Mitchell shared copies of Richard Scammon's article that was published in the March 1899 edition of Granite Monthly magazine, which includes coverage of the town's taverns, and particularly this one in greatest detail. The main part of the house (front part alongside the street) retains well-preserved interior integrity, including the original kitchen's cooking fireplace, and upstairs a paneled fireplace wall. This upstairs room is known as "the ballroom" by some of Stratham's older residents today, although Mitchell noted that a more apt moniker would be a "meeting room" for its likely usage during many decades of Chase family ownership. The rear ell of the house was added later. Mitchell added that there is mention of an earlier addition on the north end having been removed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The rear addition is in poor condition and has undetermined historic value. The barn maintains its original appearance inside, including a large concrete-lined water storage tank that was filled via a pump and gravity-drained for irrigation of vegetable crops outside. Both the barn and the house need extensive work in the near future if they are to be adequately preserved. The owner is seeking our advice for ways to protect it for the long-term from demolition by any future owners.

Mitchell suggested that we could pursue National Register designation for the property, for which it is almost certainly eligible because of its well-documented past in the town's civic operation, its well-preserved interior features, and its connection to the Emery family's farm operations. Merrill noted that the only true way to protect the structure from the whims of future owners is to put a preservation easement on it -- and that Reiss appears to be a willing partner in such an effort. Merrill also noted Emery's Lane is the closest thing we have to a true historic district, and that this property is a key element of that neighborhood. There was more

discussion. Mitchell noted that Reiss is invited to our November meeting, where the discussion can continue. Mitchell also suggested that we could feature Stratham's taverns in our annual winter program for the community. There was consensus that this is a good idea.

Planning Board: Merrill reported briefly on the Technical Review Committee's recent efforts to review and amend the Gateway zoning ordinance. Austin reported on recent Planning Board discussions on this same topic. The Planning Board voted to support development of a master plan for the Portsmouth Avenue state right-of-way corridor within the Gateway.

The proposed subdivision of the Breslin Farm at 96 Stratham Heights Road was briefly discussed. Merrill has completed a letter outlining concerns of potential adverse impacts to the abutting farm that is permanently protected with a town-funded conservation easement.

Mitchell and Merrill reported on their visit to the Oct. 5th Planning Board meeting to discuss the Commission's concerns regarding the long-term fate of the many historic properties along the Portsmouth Avenue corridor. (A written copy of their presentation is attached to these minutes as an appendix.) The Planning Board members asked many good questions, and were receptive to the notion that planning work needs to be done. They voted to establish a Gateway-like ad hoc committee to develop a master plan and proposed zoning language changes for further discussion and development. It was agreed that the committee should include two Planning Board reps, two Heritage Commission reps, and several citizens and property owners from within the corridor and just outside the corridor (to ensure we include abutters' voices in the process). Merrill will work with Austin to recruit members and will then reconvene with the Planning Board at a future meeting. Mitchell also suggested hiring a consultant to complete an "area survey" of the Portsmouth Avenue corridor from the PRE zone to the Greenland town line. Consensus agreed that it should be pursued and a budget figure needs to be developed for the 2017 budget proposal. Mitchell will investigate further.

Demolition Review Committee: A demolition permit could be forthcoming for part or all of a large barn at 271 Portsmouth Avenue (which was a motivating factor for the recent zoning discussion with the Planning Board).

Mitchell suggested some possible changes to the Demolition Review Ordinance, noting that it was put together rather hastily in its original form, and was one of the first in New Hampshire to be approved. She suggested increasing the number of days allowed for review of the demolition application, as well as adding a requirement that the property owner meet with the committee (unless waived by the committee). It was also suggested that demo permits could be withheld until all other required plans and/or permits were approved by other town land use boards. Merrill added that he'd like to have Austin review the Master Plan and relevant zoning regulations to make sure that we are encouraging saving existing structures. This would also

include addressing the problem that surfaced with the cluster ordinance that incentivized the developers of the former Foss property to tear down the Foss home in order to get a density bonus for having open frontage on town through-roads. Austin agreed to look into all of the above.

300th Anniversary: The Heritage Commission ox-drawn cart float was a big success and garnered much positive feedback. The Commission extends its gratitude and thanks to teamsters Tyler and Ben Allen of Lee, and to Dana Dowling for constructing and installing the framework for our banners. This coming Saturday Oct. 15th is the final 300th anniversary event, with Family Fun Day at the park, and fireworks scheduled for 7:00 pm.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

Next Meeting: November 9, 2016 at 7:00 pm in the Land Use Conference Room.

Adjourned: 9:15 PM (Barnes, Merrill, unanimous)

Respectfully submitted,  
Nathan Merrill