

**Stratham Heritage Commission
Stratham Municipal Center – Hutton Room
Meeting Minutes
October 14, 2020**

Present: Nathan Merrill, Michael Houghton, David Canada, Rebecca Mitchell, and Forrest Barker via telephone

Absent: Tammy Hathaway, Florence Wiggin

Convened: 7:02 PM

Chairman Merrill welcomed members and asked Ms. Barker to take a voting position and Ms. Mitchell to record the minutes.

Secretary's Report: Mr. Merrill distributed the minutes of the September 9, 2020 meeting. Mr. Canada noted three minor corrections. Ms. Mitchell moved to accept the minutes as amended; Mr. Canada seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Treasurer's Report: Ms. Barker reported that the Heritage Fund stands at \$6,946. The latest accounting indicates that the commission has spent \$568 of its 2020 budget leaving a remaining available balance of \$5,131.

Committee Reports

Planning Board: Mr. Canada reported that Ms. Barker attended the Board's September 16 meeting to present the Route 33 Legacy Highway Ad Hoc Committee report. Mr. Houghton said of the Planning Board review of that report that it is his sense that the Board "embraces" the sense of the report. He also said that the Planning Board is having an ongoing discussion of establishing guidelines for permitting new driveways on Town-owned roads. Mr. Merrill, also a member of the Ad Hoc Committee, expressed his regret that he was unable to attend the Sept. 16 meeting. Mr. Houghton responded that there is collective interest in avoiding zoning changes that would not be in the Town's best interest, such as changes that would lead to further loss of houses and historic character along the corridor.

Ms. Mitchell asked about the fate of the Gateway regulations that had emerged from the Gateway Master Plan. Mr. Houghton said that the Planning Board is proposing to eliminate the Technical Review Committee, but that standards for architecture and materials remain. Mr. Merrill asked about landscaping in the district. Mr. Houghton and Mr. Canada both spoke to this query saying that there have been some changes but the Gateway standards remain in a "pared down" form reflecting the lower density anticipated as a result to the continuing lack of water and sewer infrastructure. Mr. Canada noted that the connectivity requirements remain, although simplified and with scaled-down streets.

Technical Review Committee: No meeting

Demolition Review Committee: No meeting

Select Board: Mr. Houghton reported that recent meetings have considered guidance for Halloween and also have worked on getting a head start on budget planning. The Board is still waiting for definitive guidance from the state regarding the PFAS contamination, while it appears that the root cause is firefighting foam. Mr. Merrill said that he recalls a tractor-trailer accident at the traffic circle that led to a heavy application of foam several decades ago.

Mr. Houghton said the Board is working on procedures and policies relating to membership on volunteer boards, commissions, and committees. Mr. Canada recalled that Portsmouth had dealt with removing board volunteers and may have developed a useful policy for such circumstances. Mr. Canada and Mr. Merrill spoke in general support for developing procedures and policies. At the Town Administrator's request, Mr. Merrill reviewed the proposed board appointment policy and provided detailed feedback.

Mr. Merrill asked in light of the proposed Gateway zoning changes whether the Select Board is "walking away" from any further actions regarding Gateway infrastructure. Mr. Houghton said that it is his sense that the lack of water and sewer in that district will continue to be a shortcoming and the need for engagement will not be going away.

Route 33 Legacy Highway Committee: Mr. Merrill distributed copies of the committee's final report.

Old Business

Old Town Hall window frame display shelves: Ms. Mitchell reported that Stuart "Skip" Stearns of the Stratham Historical Society had responded quickly to her suggestion that he prepare a changing display based on his "Postcards From Stratham" contributions to Stratham Magazine. Further displays can be developed especially after the Municipal Center is more open to public activities.

Report on potential conservation easement and historic register nomination:

Mr. Merrill reported that the Conservation Commission appears to have walked away from pursuing an easement though the property owner remains interested, and that he will investigate the basis of that decision. The commission discussed pursuing a historic register nomination for the property as a preservation tool. Mr. Merrill reported that he had approached the property owners and they responded enthusiastically in favor. Ms. Mitchell said that she had approached the Preservation Company and they have indicated they will prepare a proposal. Mr. Canada suggested determining the cost difference between a National or NH State register nomination. Mr. Merrill noted we will need to determine a budget placeholder for our 2021 operating budget request.

Town Wide Survey: Ms. Mitchell reported that the final product is due at the end of June with some allowance for the eventuality of delay due to Covid 19 restrictions. She said that Lisa Mausolf is currently very busy with projects due at the end of the year but anticipates getting going with the late autumn photography.

79-D barn easements: Mr. Merrill and Ms. Mitchell both said they would approach barn owners previously contacted regarding the easement program. Ms. Mitchell also mentioned that the former White Gate Farm on Frying Pan Lane has a new owner and she will make sure he is aware of 79-D.

Town Historic Marker Program: Ms. Mitchell reported that she has begun assembling images for an initial marker in the series to be funded through the Varsity Wireless mitigation funds.

Highway (State) Marker project: No progress to report.

Parker Cabin: Mr. Merrill reported that he has received no response to his letter expressing the wishes of the Commission regarding the anticipated archival copies of the Historic American Buildings report on the cabin and our wishes regarding the educational display should it be removed from the Great Bay Discovery Center.

Membership: Mr. Merrill said that it came to his attention that we are “down” an allowed voting member. Ms. Hathaway expressed to him her wish to remain an alternate member. Ms. Barker agreed that she would like to have her name proposed to the Select Board as a full voting member.

Old Town Hall: Ms. Mitchell reported that Lisa Mausolf is willing to update her State Register nomination work and has received the appropriate guidance from the NH Division of Historical Resources. She will do that work for \$100. Mr. Canada seconded Ms. Mitchell’s motion to appropriate \$100 from the 2020 budget. The motion passed unanimously. Ms. Mitchell said that to support the work she will prepare a list of building changes since the initial state register nomination. Ms. Mitchell also said that she had recently received a copy of the signed easement and will review it with the goal of preparing the supporting baseline condition report and guidelines for monitoring the easement.

New Business

2021 Operating Budget and Heritage Preservation Fund Request:

Mr. Merrill noted that the goal of the Heritage Preservation Fund is to maintain a balance of \$250,000 to support preservation projects and challenges that arise outside the town meeting calendar. Noting that in 2020 the expected annual contribution was lowered from \$50,000 to \$25,000, Ms. Mitchell said that while 2021 conditions may result in a similar lowering it is important to request \$50,000 so that standard is maintained. Mr. Houghton and Mr. Canada both expressed their support for that approach. The official description

of the Fund was provided by Mr. Moore and read by Mr. Merrill. All agreed that the language remains accurate and appropriate. Mr. Merrill summarized by saying he would request \$50,000 for 2021, 2022, and 2023 in the Town's capital reserve fund spreadsheet.

There was general agreement to keep the commission's operating budget request at the 2020 level. Regarding unspent 2020 funds, there a discussion of asking the Preservation Company to submit an invoice for work completed by December 31. Ms. Mitchell will reach out to convey the message.

Ms. Mitchell moved to request a 2021 operating budget identical to that of 2020; and furthermore to request \$50,000 for the Heritage Preservation Fund via the Capital Reserve Funds program. Mr. Canada seconded her motion and it passed unanimously.

Heritage Commission Camera: The commission's camera is unused since members tend to use their own equipment for photography. Mr. Merrill said that he will investigate whether any Town entity could use it and what the policy is regarding such unused equipment purchased with Town funds.

Other: Regarding future meetings, there was unanimous agreement for continuing to meet in person while following guidelines regarding masks and distancing. Telephone access will be available.

There was also agreement that there be no plans for a February program, but that efforts be made to promote past programs available through the Town website and Wiggin Memorial Library.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 PM

Respectfully submitted,
Rebecca Mitchell (secretary pro tem)