



TOWN OF STRATHAM

INCORPORATED 1716

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STRATHAM HERITAGE COMMISSION

Minutes

November 14, 2023

Stratham Municipal Center

Present: Nathan Merrill, Drew Bedard, Forrest Barker, Lucy Cushman, Jeff Hyland, David Canada

Absent: Mike Houghton

Guests: Greg Pruitt

Chair Merrill called the meeting to order at 7:04 PM.

Mr. Merrill asked Mr. Bedard to serve as a voting member in Mr. Houghton's absence.

Secretary's Report: Jeff Hyland made a motion to approve the September 12, 2023 minutes. Dave Canada seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Treasurer's report: Forrest Barker said that the next report will be in January.

Correspondence: Mr. Merrill received a thank you note from the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance for the renewal of the Heritage Commission's membership. The Preservation Alliance also asked Mr. Merrill, Mr. Canada, and former member Rebecca Mitchell about giving a presentation on the Route 33 Neighborhood Heritage District. Mr. Merrill also recommended that they invite Director of Planning and Community Development Mark Connors.

Mr. Merrill received a letter from the NH Division of Historical Resources that the Scammon Farm Historic District at 21-23 River Road was officially listed to the National Register of Historic Places on October 10th, 2023.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Planning Board: Mr. Canada reported that the Planning Board discussed potential zoning changes, including possibly lowering the minimum lot size eligible for a cluster development

from 20 acres to 10 acres. Ms. Cushman, a former Planning Board member, noted that the original reasoning for the 20-acre minimum was so cluster projects wouldn't be visible from the main roads (i.e. there would be enough undeveloped land in the front to serve as a buffer, serving to preserve Stratham's rural character). Mr. Canada said he would bring that comment back to the Planning Board about ensuring adequate buffers are maintained.

Mr. Canada continued that Mark Connors raised the issue of the density currently allowed in the Route 33 Neighborhood Heritage District. He feels that 3 units per acre might be too aggressive. He recommended lowering it to 2 units per acre, or keep the 3 units but disallow wetlands and steep slopes from the calculations. He also suggested limiting the NHD density bonuses to within 800 feet of Route 33.

Mr. Merrill agreed that 3 units per acre is too dense. Mr. Canada suggested reducing it to 2 units and excluding wetlands. Mr. Hyland thought the original intent of the language was to allow use of existing structures for dwelling units instead of building on virgin land.

Mr. Merrill reported that Drew Goddard was very receptive to input that he and Rebecca Mitchell offered for the design of his proposed new office building at 89-91 Portsmouth Ave. Mr. Canada mentioned that the other Goddard property across the street is coming together and looking good. Mr. Merrill gave Mr. Goddard several old photographs of 19th century two-story homes that used to be on Portsmouth Ave. Mr. Goddard particularly liked the old Doug Scamman, Sr. farmstead that stood where Autofair Nissan is today. Mr. Merrill and Ms. Mitchell feel that a modern structure modeled after the house and connected barn would fit well on the site, and would screen the parking lot and proposed new residential duplexes behind it. Mr. Merrill said they plan to continue working together.

Select Board: No report.

Demolition Review Committee: Has not met.

Heritage District Advisory Committee: Nothing to report.

Open Space Plan Steering Committee: Nothing to report.

OLD BUSINESS

Historic register nomination proposal: Mr. Merrill reported that he met with the Select Board, and they voted unanimously to move forward with seeking a National Register nomination for the Brown-Gifford farm. Mr. Merrill then asked Lisa Mausolf if she would be interested in doing the work, and she replied affirmatively, offering a quote of \$6,500 in total to complete the project. \$3,500 would be required to complete the NHDHR inventory form; and if the house is determined eligible for the register, it would be an additional \$3,000 to complete the National Register nomination form. Mr. Canada asked if she could start this year so the Commission could use some of its unspent 2023 operating budget. Mr. Merrill said he would ask. Mr. Canada made a motion to move ahead with Ms. Mausolf to start the inventory. Mr. Bedard seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Town marker project: Rebecca Mitchell has the Stratham Hill Park marker research completed, and Mr. Merrill will meet with her prior to our next meeting. Mr. Hyland has leads for a new graphics designer. Mr. Merrill said that Ms. Mitchell alerted him to a historical timeline project recently put online by the New Hampshire Historical Society. They hired a freelance writer to help them complete the work, and she suggested contacting him about our sign project. Mr. Merrill reached out to him. He is trying to retire and wants to think about it, but he also has another person in mind who he would recommend as well. Mr. Merrill will follow up prior to our next meeting.

State marker project: Mr. Merrill submitted our application to NHDHR on October 30th. He received an email acknowledgment that the application was received and complete. He is not sure when we will hear if it is selected or not.

Veterans Memorial Garden: Mr. Merrill notified David Moore that the monument lights are out again. Ms. Cushman reported that she and Ms. Mitchell met and went to Exeter Monument Works. Ms. Cushman also said that a Public Works employee gave her a policy document which states that the VMG is the Heritage Commission's responsibility and not the Public Works Department. Mr. Merrill will reach out to David Moore for clarification because the VMG is owned by the Town and the Select Board is ultimately responsible for it. The Heritage Commission voluntarily assists in the administrative side of processing applications and arranging engravings for the bricks and monuments, but it would be helpful to have DPW assistance when necessary for removal and installation of the bricks. Ms. Cushman said she would share the policy document with Mr. Merrill, and volunteered to meet with David Moore with him.

Mr. Merrill reported that Mr. Hyland took some nice drone photos of the Veterans Memorial Garden, and Mr. Merrill thinks it would be a good idea to print and frame one of them for display at the Municipal Center. He will ask Mr. Moore about this as well.

Easement stewardship update: Mr. Merrill reported that lots of good progress has been made at the Lane Homestead, with clapboard replacement and painting finished on the Collector's Eye barn. He also noted that significant repairs on the barn at 173 Winnicutt Road have been completed, including window repairs and new paint. This barn is enrolled in the 79-D easement program, which requires proper upkeep.

Noting Greg Pruitt, owner of the Lane Homestead, in the audience, Mr. Merrill inquired if he had anything he wished to discuss with the Commission. Mr. Pruitt said that his property has been discussed in several recent meetings, and he is wondering why other buildings with easements were not discussed and asked when the next Old Town Hall easement inspection will take place. Mr. Merrill stated that the OTH easement is held by the Town, and is normally inspected in November or December. He has delayed initiating the process because the Town is currently working on hiring a new building inspector. Mr. Merrill also said that the Lane Homestead has been brought up multiple times recently because of all the work that has been taking place on the property. The Town does not hold this easement, so we are not directly responsible for monitoring it, but we do have a vested interest given that taxpayer funding was invested in the

preservation easement purchase. He stressed that we are pleased with the significant improvements and investments that have been made over the past two years. Mr. Pruitt also wanted to clarify that there was no definitive list of work that he was going to do. Mr. Merrill said the Commission appreciated his feedback and was glad to have an active member of the community join our meeting.

Cemeteries: No updates.

Historic house placards: Mr. Merrill printed examples from Hand Painted Wood Signs, the company that Exeter and Hampton use for their house placards. According to our townwide inventory, there are approximately 130 houses from the 1700s and 1800s that would be eligible for a new placard initiative. Mr. Merrill brought up the project with the Stratham Historical Society at their recent meeting, and asked for their support. He was met with a tepid response. They agreed to help finance the Lane Homestead State Marker and are hesitant to help fund another project. They offered to provide old blank signs from their placard program in the 1980s, which was open only to 1700s houses. Mr. Merrill will continue the dialogue.

Ms. Cushman spoke with a resident who has one of the old SHS placards, but there has been so much UV damage that it is hardly legible, and they would be delighted to have a new sign if they become available.

Mr. Merrill reported that a simple medium sign with two lines of text from Hand Painted Wood Signs appears to cost between \$160 and \$180, according to their website. However, he has not yet spoken directly with them. Jeff Hyland wondered how it would work and if homeowners would buy a sign from the Heritage Commission. And he felt that there should be some buy-in from property owners. Mr. Merrill affirmed that the Heritage Commission would research and order the placards and suggested that the cost could be split in half between the homeowners and Heritage Commission or there could also be a three-way split between Heritage Commission, Historical Society, and homeowners. Mr. Canada agreed that there should be cost-sharing involved. Consensus is that we want to keep the signs affordable to encourage property owner participation, but they should not be free because we will lose control/ownership of them once they are installed on private property. This conversation will be continued at the next meeting.

2024 Public Program: Mr. Merrill proposed doing a program on the Scammon farm historic district. The material would be relatively easy to pull together because of the recent National Register nomination, and it would provide an opportunity to promote and celebrate the successful listing of the National Historic District. Or alternatively, another topic could be to present the dozen or so State and National Register-listed properties in town.

Mr. Hyland also proposed a talk about historic and scenic streets in Stratham because it would tie into the Heritage Commission's goal of designating historic streets. Ms. Cushman suggested that in the future we should begin planning the public program earlier so there is more time to put together a talk or to book someone to give a presentation. Consensus settled on the Scammon Farm program. Mr. Merrill and Mr. Hyland will work together on developing and presenting the program.

Historic/Scenic Streets: Mr. Merrill wishes to table this to the next meeting when Mark Connors will be joining us. He reminded members that in previous discussions we chose to focus on considering Frying Pan Lane, Emery Lane, Depot Road, Sandy Point Road, Stratham Heights Road, and River Road, and he suggested taking photos to share with the group for future discussion.

NEW BUSINESS

2024 budget: Mr. Merrill reported that he met with David Moore and emailed Mike Houghton in preliminary discussion of our budget and CIP requests. Since the Commission has reached our goal of \$250,000 in the Heritage Preservation Capital Reserve Fund, Mr. Moore suggested taking a pause from our annual \$50,000 requests for the HPF. Mr. Canada concurred. Mr. Merrill suggested requesting a level-funded operating budget in order to pay Lisa Mausolf for the Brown-Gifford farm project, and to not seek any funding in 2024 for the HPF in the CIP budget. It was noted that if we hire someone to help create the town markers, we can cover the cost out of the HPF. Mr. Bedard made a motion to request a level funded Operating Budget and no CIP funds for 2024. Mr. Canada seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Mr. Merrill will report this back to David Moore.

210 Portsmouth Ave.: Mr. Merrill and Mark Connors got a tour of the H. H. Leavitt house, and Mr. Merrill reminded the Heritage Commission that H. H. Leavitt built the Old Town Hall. Mr. Merrill noted that the buildings are in generally good shape, but a lot of work needs to be done. Some structural repairs are needed in the basement, and all new wiring and plumbing is being installed. Many original late-19th century architectural features remain, and Mr. Merrill encouraged the owner to retain as many of them as possible, including the large 2-over-1 windows, front door, and trim work. He noted unusually ornate newel posts and hardware on the windows and doors. Mr. Merrill said the new owners purchased the property as an investment. They plan to capitalize on the Route 33 NHD zoning, by converting the downstairs to rentable office space, while utilizing the second and third floors for a residential apartment. Future use of the barn is not yet determined. The connecting structure between the house and barn is in poor condition and will need major reconstruction or replacement.

Any other business to come before the Commission: Ms. Cushman said that the town-wide survey is used almost weekly at the Historical Society and is a great resource. Mr. Merrill wanted to make sure that the corrections sheets that he provided to SHS were included in the books; Ms. Cushman said she would check.

Mr. Canada made a motion to adjourn at 8:33 pm. Forrest Barker seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Forrest Barker, Secretary