



TOWN OF STRATHAM

INCORPORATED 1716

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STRATHAM HERITAGE COMMISSION

Minutes

December 12, 2023

Stratham Municipal Center

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

Absent: None

Chair Merrill called the meeting to order at 7:07 pm.

Secretary's Report: Dave Canada made a motion to approve the November 14th minutes, Jeff Hyland seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Treasurer's report: Forrest Barker said the next treasurer's report will be in January. Mr. Merrill provided Ms. Barker an invoice of \$1,500.00 for the first half of Lisa Mausolf's work for the Gifford/Brown inventory form.

Mr. Merrill enrolled in two, half-day beginner-level GIS training workshops through the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension service, so he can learn how to make basic digital maps. Mr. Canada made a motion to use the operating budget to cover the training costs for Mr. Merrill's workshops. Mr. Hyland seconded and the motion passed unanimously. Mr. Merrill provided Ms. Barker with the invoice for \$118.00.

Correspondence: Mr. Merrill said he would weave the correspondence into the meeting.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Planning Board: Mr. Canada noted that the Flannagan barn at 249 Portsmouth Avenue has been demolished. On December 6th the Planning Board met and reviewed a preliminary six-lot subdivision at the former Ken Lanzillo property at 189 Bunker Hill Ave. The current proposal includes demolition of the existing 1950s residence. Adjoining neighbors attended the meeting with concerns about drainage.

The Planning Board had previously discussed reducing the minimum acreage for cluster developments from 20 to 12, but at their most recent meeting they decided to stay with 20 acres. Mr. Canada expressed the Heritage Commission's concern about maintaining adequate natural buffers between developments and the main roads. The Board also discussed adding a requirement to the cluster development regulations that any pre-existing historical structure must be retained unless it is beyond repair.

Select Board: Mr. Houghton reported that it was budget season and by the 18th of December they will have a draft completed. It is going well and there's no big news from a budget perspective, any increase should be modest. The Recreation Commission is looking at a site development plan for Stevens Park, with potential for pickleball courts and parking lot expansion as well as a pavilion.

Demolition Review Committee: Has not met.

Heritage District Advisory Committee and Open Space Plan Steering Committee: Mr. Hyland reported that the Heritage District Advisory Committee and the Open Space Plan Steering Committee have not met.

OLD BUSINESS

Historic register nomination: Mr. Merrill and Lisa Mausolf have a site visit scheduled for Friday 12/15 at the Brown/Gifford house. Lisa is working on completing the NHDHR inventory form, as previously agreed.

Town marker project: Mr. Merrill and Rebecca Mitchell met and settled on approximately eight photos for the marker project at the base of the Lincoln Trail at Stratham Hill Park. The photos include one of Robert Todd Lincoln and a newspaper clipping from the day he recited the Declaration of Independence at the 1860 Stratham Hill celebration of July 4th. There's also a photo of the pavilion, the fire tower, and flagpole all of which have been on the top of the hill. Ms. Mitchell also wants to include the Lane family ownership of this land, and how it was used as a common ground before it was designated as a public park. There is so much info on the sign, the question was raised whether this should be at the base of the trail or the entrance of the park. Mr. Merrill replied that the original plan was to include another sign at the front of the park, which would include imagery and information about Portsmouth Avenue, the former trolley stop, Amos Tuck, and the Lanes. There was further discussion about whether one or two markers should be used at the park, of what size, and in what locations. Mr. Merrill suggested giving this more thought and discussion at a future meeting.

The Commission further talked about durability of the signs, and Mr. Merrill suggested that a kiosk roof could help prevent fading and damage from the sun and moisture. Ms. Mitchell and Mr. Merrill will continue working on the content of the markers, and Mr. Hyland volunteered to look into graphic designers and sign manufacturers. Mr. Canada noted that Rye included QR codes on their signposts (rather than on the signs themselves) in case the signs outlive the electronic links. If technology changes, the QR code could be replaced without replacing the entire sign. Keeping detailed information online rather than on the marker would bring viewers

to the Heritage Commission's website, and allows for editing the information in the future as needed, without making a new sign.

Mr. Merrill brought up that he has been in contact with Jim Graham, who has worked for the UNH alumni magazine and *The Concord Monitor*, as a potential person to research and write text for our other planned town markers. Mr. Merrill will forward his email chain with Mr. Graham, which includes his CV and examples of his previous work.

Potential future town marker projects discussed include: Winnicutt Mills; Town Center (Old Town Hall, the Elms, Wiggin Memorial Library building, churches); Bunker Hill Avenue at the Municipal Center (schools, Bartlett/Cushman house, Smyk Park / Flynn house); and Brown-Gifford Farm.

Veterans Memorial Garden: Ms. Cushman reported that she and Mr. Merrill met with David Moore about the recent policy provided by DPW staff regarding the Veterans Memorial Garden. Mr. Moore concurred that the policy as drafted lacked municipal cooperation or support. All present agreed that the Heritage Commission is responsible for the administrative work, and town staff will maintain the facility (including the malfunctioning lights) and can help remove bricks for engraving when assistance is needed. Ms. Cushman took a brick to Exeter Monument, and she inquired about correcting a misspelling on the Gulf Wars monument. Exeter Monuments said they could fill in the extra letter (for a price) -- Ms. Cushman will check our records to see if the misspelling was the Commission's fault or if the application was correct and Exeter Monuments is responsible. Mr. Merrill and Mr. Canada stated that we should not have to pay if the engraver made the mistake, and Ms. Cushman agreed. She will follow up.

Cemeteries: Ms. Cushman said she looked for a deed for the Scammon Cemetery on River Road and could not find it. Mr. Merrill thought it was owned by the town but when Ms. Cushman looked, the tax maps said the cemetery was owned by "unknown." Mr. Hyland said that he has a copy of a will that shows money was left for the town to maintain the cemetery. There was confusion whether the cemetery had been subdivided out of the Smith property or if the cemetery became its own subdivision by default. Mr. Hyland will find the will and bring it to a future meeting, and Ms. Cushman will consult further with Town Clerk / Tax Collector Deb Bakie.

Historic house placards: Mr. Merrill brought up the idea of the Stratham Historical Society potentially supporting a new historic house placard program at a recent SHS business meeting. The Historical Society appeared to lack enthusiasm for the proposal. Ms. Mitchell said to Mr. Merrill after the meeting that she thinks this should be a SHS initiative. But Mr. Merrill feels it is an important thing to get done, which will require leadership and funding from the Heritage Commission. He noted that it fits well within our mission, both as an offshoot of our recent townwide inventory of historic resources, as well as to build public awareness of our town's numerous historic buildings. Mr. Canada suggested bringing up a firm proposal to work collaboratively with SHS at its next business meeting.

Mr. Merrill found two companies that make historic house placards. The town of Rye uses Timberline Signs. They use wood (species unspecified) and machine lettering. They cost \$65 per sign. The towns of Exeter and Hampton use the company Hand Painted Wooden Signs and their

placards are hand-painted on clear cedar, and coated with a sealant. These signs are \$210 each, which is a bulk-order rate. They also offer manmade MDO boards for \$20 less, but the owner said they deteriorate faster than cedar, particularly in the sun. He also said he could include promotional material for the placards as well as an order form on his website. Ms. Cushman wanted to make sure the Heritage Commission would be able to verify house dates. Mr. Merrill said we would retain full control over the placement of orders, and content of the signs. All agreed that subsidizing the cost would increase community participation.

Mr. Canada proposed that the cost could be split in thirds with the owner paying a third, the Heritage Commission paying a third, and SHS paying a third. Mr. Hyland said he knows of another sign company in this field, and will reach out to them. Mr. Bedard said it would be a good idea to get another quote because \$65 and \$210 are very different. The Commission also discussed that installation might be a barrier for people putting up signs and Mr. Bedard said he would be able to help some people with installation. Mr. Canada also expressed willingness to help. Mr. Merrill feels that we would achieve a greater success rate if we could offer free installation to the homeowners who want it.

The Stratham Historical Society initiated the original historic house placards in the 1980s, using the 1793 map, but the Heritage Commission thinks that any house built prior to 1900 should be eligible. Mr. Merrill noted there are approximately 130 eligible homes from the 18th and 19th centuries still standing, according to the townwide inventory.

2024 Public Program: The commission discussed a date for the February program and settled on the 16th of February at 7:00pm with a storm date of February 23rd. Mr. Merrill did not use a microphone at last year's program, and he asked if those in the audience could hear him. Mr. Hyland and Ms. Cushman said they heard him just fine, so we will not worry about setting up a mic this year. Mr. Merrill will try to get a promotional article in the Stratham Stroll magazine before its deadline. The February program will also be promoted in the Select Board newsletter and the Historical Society's email blasts. Mr. Merrill will also contact Exeter public access TV to see if they can film the event for us again.

NEW BUSINESS

Heritage Commission End of Year Town Report: Mr. Merrill presented his write-up for the annual Town Report. The Commission thought it looked great. Mr. Houghton suggested rewording the last paragraph, so people understood that Ms. Mitchell had moved out of town.

Social Media: Mr. Merrill raised the issue of our Facebook page, noting that the three people who previously maintained it are no longer on the Commission. He is seeking a new volunteer to make occasional posts, and to relay any inquiries to the Chair. None of the current members are active on social media. Mr. Hyland said he would talk to his wife to see if she would be willing to volunteer for this role. Mr. Merrill said that we would provide the content, she would just need to post it, and pass along any inquiries from the public back to us.

210 Portsmouth Ave.: Mr. Merrill said he reached out to the owner of 210 Portsmouth Ave with window repair recommendations and received a response that replacement windows were

already ordered. Mr. Merrill asked if the owner could please keep the original windows and suggested storing them in the barn. Mr. Bedard said he would be willing to examine the barn, which needs some structural repairs.

Easement stewardship update: The town has hired a new building inspector, William Dinsmore. Mr. Merrill asked Mr. Canada to set up a date with Mr. Dinsmore and property owner Mark Perlowski for a site visit. Mr. Canada will work with Mr. Dinsmore to complete the monitoring report.

Mr. Canada made a motion to adjourn at 8:49 pm, Mr. Highland seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Forest Barker, Secretary