

STRATHAM HERITAGE COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes
Land Use Conference Room
May 8, 2019

Present: David Canada, Nathan Merrill, Michael Houghton, Florence Wiggin, Rebecca Mitchell, Forrest Barker (arrived 7:08)

Absent: Tammy Hathaway

Guest: Dori Wiggin

Convened: 7:02 by Chairman Canada

Secretary's Report: Mr. Merrill made a motion, seconded by Ms. Wiggin, to approve the April 10, 2019 minutes as written. Approved unanimously.

Treasurer's Report: Ms. Barker reported that with accrued interest the balance of the Heritage Fund stands at \$6,589.66. After payments for expenses related to the February program the operating budget funds available stands at \$5,331.

Committee Reports

Planning Board: Mr. Canada reported that work continues on the subdivision plan for 90R Winnicutt Rd., the former Treat property. The existing mid-century modern home and attached office will be retained on its own lot, with the backland subdivided off for development.

Technical Review Committee: No report.

Demolition Review Committee: No report.

Master Plan Steering Committee: Mr. Merrill reported that the Master Plan Public Forum will be Monday, May 13, at 6:30 PM. He expressed his concern that Horsley Witten has not been forthcoming in regard to progress on the master plan. There have been multiple meetings with a range of interest groups but no sense of the shape of the final product has emerged. Ms. Mitchell said that it is vital that the master plan emerges with the authority derived from thorough community engagement

Old Business

House Bill 384: Mr. Canada reported that at the May 8, 2019 meeting of the Senate Election Law and Municipal Affairs Committee. Representative Patrick Abrami introduced the bipartisan bill and asked that it be tabled until the fall. Dori Wiggin spoke saying that she and her husband had not been informed of this bill in its formative state

and that, lacking any involvement with any other parties possibly affected by this bill, she urged this proposed legislation be changed to a session bill, with effect limited to just the trail to the Wiggin burial site at Sandy Point. Mr. Canada circulated copies of his testimony (attached) which included the comment that NH citizens “have a proprietary interest in state lands” that includes access to sites such as burial grounds that are of community importance. His remarks also stressed that the proposed bill in no way negates RSA 289 that includes protections for family burial grounds. Mr. Canada said that he was pleased that Senator Tom Sherman expressed the opinion that the proposed bill makes sense as a state statute not a session bill. Mr. Canada again stressed that any concern that the Town might be moving to take over the site is addressed by the provisions of RSA 289.

Ms. Wiggin spoke reiterating her support for making this a matter for session law and her concern that statewide those concerned about family burial grounds are not aware of the proposed HB 384. In a discussion of how these families might be informed Ms. Wiggin said that there is a New Hampshire Cemetery Association. Mr. Canada said that he would be willing to communicate with them. Ms. Wiggin went on to say that she is planning to apply to Fish & Game for a permit, effective for one year, to maintain the trail to the Wiggin burial site. The bill now remains in committee and will be taken up again in the Fall.

Bartlett-Cushman House: Mr. Canada reported that the closing for the sale of both the preservation easement to the NH Preservation Alliance and the house on 1.1 acres of land to Robert Daros and Ellen Falk took place on April 17 with both himself and Mr. Houghton present representing the Heritage Commission and Board of Selectmen. Ms. Mitchell reported that Mr. Daros has already consulted with the Preservation Alliance regarding his plans for the barn and has done some interior demolition in the ell kitchen area. He also hired a local stonemason to work on the steps at the south and north entrances.

Scamman Farm: Mr. Canada reported that he spoke with Doug and Stella Scamman and they would like to have a National Register plaque mounted at an as yet undetermined site. Ms. Mitchell said she will work with the Scammans to agree on the wording and design of the plaque and would get a quote from a NH firm.

Mr. Merrill said that he has drafted a letter to NH Division of Historical Resources expressing the commission’s dissatisfaction that neither the commission nor the Scammans were informed of the National Park Service listing, learning of it only after the NH DHR press release appeared in various media outlets. Mr. Merrill said that he would email his draft letter to commission members soliciting their comments. The commission voted to delegate to Mr. Canada the final edit and sending of Mr. Merrill’s letter.

NH Historical Markers: Mr. Canada reported that he spoke to Bruce Kerr, Stratham Historical Society president, and confirmed that the society’s executive committee agreed to collaborate with the Heritage Commission and further agreed that the Lane Homestead is the best site for our first proposed marker. Society member Teddie Smith has expressed

an interest in working on the wording for the marker and Ms. Mitchell said she would work with her.

Demolition Ordinance Review: Mr. Canada reported that following discussions that he and Mr. Merrill had with Town Planner Tavis Austin it appears that having demolition regulations with real “teeth” requires having a historic district or districts in place. Ms. Mitchell and Mr. Merrill spoke of their concern that any such historic district regulations be respectful of property owner rights, community sentiment, and the particular nature of Stratham’s scattered historic properties. The consensus of those present was that work should continue to explore how best to effectively and sensitively regulate historic properties of value to our community.

Expansion of RSA 79E: Mr. Canada reported that Mr. Austin has said that he will research whether the provisions of RSA 79E, the Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive, may be applied outside of downtowns and village centers.

Noyes Property: Mr. Canada reported that he has heard from the owner that there is a potential buyer for the property who has no interest in preserving either the house or the barn. Mr. Canada said that he will follow up with the owner for more information.

New Business

Veterans’ Garden: Mr. Canada handed off to Ms. Mitchell one application for inclusion in the garden.

Election of Officers: Mr. Merrill nominated a slate of officers effective from the date of this meeting through the May 2020 meeting: David Canada, Chair; Forrest Barker, Treasurer; Tammy Hathaway, Secretary. Mr. Merrill said that he would be willing to step back in as chair in the future. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Revolving Loan Fund: Following a discussion at the commission’s April meeting the commission is interested in exploring a fund that could make loans to owners of historic properties for approved maintenance and renovation. Mr. Canada suggestion that the commission tap into the expertise of Town Administrator David Moore. Mr. Canada said he would speak with Mr. Moore. Thinking ahead to how such a loan fund might be administrated, Mr. Merrill distributed copies of a spreadsheet that he has drafted – “Proposed Inventory and Ranking of Historical Resources.”

Pending

249 Portsmouth Ave.: Mr. Canada reminded Ms. Mitchell that she agreed to draft a letter expressing the commission’s concern and willingness to help the owners to find solutions to the deterioration of the property.

The meeting adjourned at 8:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Rebecca Mitchell, Secretary Pro Tem

NEXT MEETING JUNE 12, 2019

Stratham Heritage Commission
Addendum to May 8, 2019 minutes

Testimony of David Canada on HB 384
Senate Election Law and Municipal Affairs Committee
May 8, 2019

Good morning. I am David Canada and I am here representing the Stratham Heritage Commission as its Chair to speak in support of HB384.

One of the iconic features of NH is the small private cemeteries found throughout the state. Since much of our area has been reforested, many are found deep in overgrown, hard to access sites. Many of these sites remain of keen interest to descendants and historians and it is important to provide access to them. When a private landowner controls the area leading to these cemeteries, interested parties are at their mercy. That should not be the case when the state's largest landowner, the state, controls the land leading to them since, after all, the state holds land in trust for its citizens.

This bill is not about any one town or about any one agency. It could come up anywhere but I will use the example that brought the underlying concern to the Heritage Commission's attention.

Governor Thomas Wiggin was the first governor of the Upper Plantation of New Hampshire. He was the founder of Stratham and initially owned all the land within the town. His direct descendants include 12th and 13th generation Wiggins living in Stratham today. Naturally, his family burial site is of importance to them and it is of importance to Stratham and posterity

In a recent meeting with New Hampshire Fish & Game personal on another matter, it was asked if any special permission was necessary to maintain the access trail to the Thomas Wiggin burial site which is located on some back land at the Great Bay Discovery Center, a F&G holding. There is a trail to the site but when Commission members tried to get to the burial ground it was completely impassible. We were told that a request could be submitted to authorize temporary maintenance but that it would be only good for a year. When asked if anyone in the room, which included Director Normandeau, thought there would be objections, the reply was that permission would be unlikely.

Not only do the citizens of the state have a proprietary interest in state lands, but cities and towns should have a say on the necessary regulation of these widely held properties within their borders. Maintaining trails like the one leading to the Wiggin site is not just a matter of convenience, it is a matter of safety too. There are physical dangers as well as dangers of disease carried by ticks and other insects found on these trails. Climbing through brush exacerbates this risk. I will provide pictures showing how badly obstructed the Wiggin trail has gotten since it was last cleared for our tri-centennial in 2016.

This bill does not really create anything new. Citizens are already allowed access to most state land including the Wiggin site. It is not about cemetery maintenance, rules, or laws. It has no effect on RSA 289 which pertains to cemeteries. What it does is give an affirmative right to a town to maintain access to important historical cemeteries over state land so long it does not impinge on the mission of whatever agency utilizes the land in question.

This bill has been thoroughly vetted by the agencies impacted and all of the concerns they expressed were addressed. It was passed unanimously by both the House Public Works Committee and the House itself. This is a good bill. The Stratham Heritage Commission, which includes two Wiggins, on behalf of all interested parties to historical burial sites, asks that you support this legislation.



