

Stratham Heritage Commission
Meeting Minutes
Land Use Conference Room
June 12, 2019

DRAFT UNTIL APPROVED

Present: David Canada, Michael Houghton, Nathan Merrill, Rebecca Mitchell, Forrest Barker, Florence Wiggin

Absent: Tammy Hathaway

Guest: David Moore, Town Administrator

Convened: 7:03 by Chairman Canada

In the absence of Ms. Hathaway the Chairman appointed Ms. Wiggin to voting membership and Ms. Mitchell as Secretary.

Secretary's Report: Mr. Merrill made a motion, seconded by Ms. Wiggin, to approve the minutes of the May 8, 2019 meeting. Approved unanimously.

Treasurer's Report: Ms. Barker reported that \$5,331 remains in the operating budget and the Heritage Fund stands at \$6,602.

Committee Reports

Planning Board: Mr. Canada reported that recent meetings had not covered any items relevant to the Heritage Commission mission. He and Mr. Houghton briefly discussed the Robie Farms subdivision with 17 lots approved, but no site plan approved as of yet. They also reported that Porsche has returned to the Planning Board for a re-do of their Portsmouth Avenue property.

Technical Review Committee: No report.

Demolition Review Committee: No report.

Master Plan Steering Committee: Ms. Barker reported that the next step is a meeting with the Planning Board to review the draft. Mr. Merrill reported that after sharing the draft with commission members he sent an email to Nate and Krista of Horsley-Witten, Master Plan consultants to the Town, with both his comments and those he had received from commission members. He also asked commission members to send him photos that could be used to illustrate the master plan. The overwhelming reaction was that historic preservation issues had gotten scant attention in the draft, noting that it does not adequately recognize the preservation achievements since the last master plan, affirm the Town's vision of well-protected historic resources, and make recommendations for future steps to be taken to realize that vision. Among the steps mentioned were revising and strengthening the demolition review ordinance, and completing a historic survey of the town. Mr. Moore elaborated on the idea that the master plan is where the town shows its values and commits to pursuing those values. Mr. Canada said that his view is that those values must be manifested in actions that have real teeth and urged consideration of a historic district with regulatory powers

Mr. Houghton stated that in his view the Master Plan should provide routes toward agreed upon goals not get into the details of specifics. Mr. Merrill initiated a discussion of future conservation easements and whether the Town needed to recommit to more funds for that purpose. There followed some discussion of the ways in which conservation easements and the Heritage Commission's mission intersect, particularly in the area of preserving farm land for agricultural uses and the ways in which those uses are not always compatible with public access and recreational uses that are often included in conservation easements. . Ms. Mitchell made a motion, seconded by Mr. Merrill, to have Mr. Merrill summarize into a written document the Commission's discussion and thoughts on the Master Plan and submit it to the Master Plan consultants.

Old Business

Preservation Revolving Fund: Mr. Canada summarized the possible desirability of such a fund that would provide loans for owners of eligible properties to make approved repairs and improvements. Repayment of those loans would then provide the funds for future loans. He noted that Mr. Moore had some experience with such a fund in Portsmouth and asked for his insights. Mr. Moore explained how the economic development grants worked, the origin of the fund in Federal block grant funds, and how it got more complicated over time. As the paperwork for administering the loans became burdensome the city moved to simply making grants. Mr. Merrill reported that he has drafted a spread sheet of criteria that could be used to determine eligibility and will share it with the commission. Mr. Moore asked if there is any model for such a fund in New Hampshire. Ms. Mitchell reported that for some time the staff and board of the NH Preservation Alliance had considered proposing a revolving fund for preservation projects but there are no concrete plans. Mr. Canada wondered whether a revolving fund would need enabling legislation on the state level.

Scamman Farm: Ms. Mitchell reported that the old barn had been moved onto its new foundation. She had received a quote for a bronze National Register plaque with wording approved by the Scammans. The next step is to ask them to sign the proposal and then a proof for final approval will be submitted.

NH Historical Markers: Teddie Smith has agreed to represent the Historical Society and the Society agrees that the first marker should be for the Lane Homestead. Ms. Mitchell will prepare the draft wording and will communicate with the owners of the Lane Homestead. It was generally agreed that the best site for the marker would be in the area beside the pond where tankers trucks park to fill up.

Letter to Elizabeth Muzzey: Mr. Canada reported that he had sent a letter to Ms. Muzzey, Director of the NH Division of Historical Resources, expressing the commission's disappointment with the way in which NHDHR handled the announcement of the Scamman Farm listing to the National Register of Historic Places. She responded outlining the listing process and agreeing that in future care will be taken to make sure property owners and relevant local bodies are included in the public notification process.

Appeal to the Zoning Board of Appeals by Ron Deane: Mr. Canada reported that he and Ms. Mitchell attended the May 14 meeting of the ZBA and spoke in support of Mr. Deane's appeal to exceed the allowed square footage for a home based business. He wants to use the second floor of the garage he built at 245 Portsmouth Ave. (National Register-listed Kenniston's Tavern) as the site of his antiques business. The special exception for the use and the variance for the square footage were both approved unanimously.

New Business

Farm Implement Request from visitor: Mr. Canada shared a letter that the Conservation Commission received from an out-of-state visitor to the trails in the Town Forest, Eric von Aschwege. Mr. von Aschwege, a historic gunsmith, spotted next to one of the trails the remains of a 19th century farm cart that he thought he could use to build a travelling forge. The Conservation Commission discussed the request at a May meeting and the membership was fairly equally divided among three proposals:

- 1) Allow Mr. von Aschwege to remove the cart and repurpose it but if he chooses to sell it to give the Town the first right of refusal.
- 2) Allow Mr. von Aschwege to remove and repurpose the cart but require him to bring and demonstrate it at Town events such as the Stratham Fair.
- 3) Leave the cart in place for the enjoyment of others and as a reminder of the agricultural past.

The Conservation Commission sent both Mr. von Aschwege's request and their divided findings to the Select Board with the suggestion that the matter be brought before the Heritage Commission. Mr. Houghton, Select Board Chair, agreed and asked for comments. After some discussion Mr. Merrill moved that the Commission, being of the opinion that the cart should stay in place as a historic artifact, urge the Town to decline Mr. von Aschwege's request. The motion passed with Mr. Houghton abstaining.

NH Preservation Alliance Conference: Ms. Mitchell reported that she attended Statewide Historic Preservation Conference in Littleton on May 31. She attended a session on "Preserving and Conserving Rural Landscapes," a lunchtime Heritage Commission roundtable, and a workshop on the Secretary of the Interior Standards and the building code for existing buildings that are also historic. She also noted the revitalization of Littleton's main street and riverfront areas. The latter area, formerly a site of industrial uses, was the subject of a Plan NH charrette. Property owners and local business leaders had come together to implement the Plan NH recommendations in a phased manner taking advantage of the area's scenic qualities and economic opportunities.

Gifford Barn Repair: Mr. Canada circulated the proposal for repairs to the barn at the Town-owned Gifford Farm on Jack Rabbit Lane, and expressed his pleasure that Parks and Recreation Director Seth Hickey had involved the Heritage Commission. Work is expected to begin this summer. Mr. Moore reported that the Town has hired a new Public Works Director who brings valuable skills and background to the job.

Pending Projects: Mr. Canada distributed a spreadsheet of pending projects with leading and assisting actors, due date of reports, and status. In the ensuing discussion the following assignments were agreed upon:

Historic District Draft: Mr. Canada

Demolition Review Ordinance revision: Mr. Canada, Ms. Mitchell

NH State Historical Marker Application: Ms. Mitchell, Teddie Smith (Historical Society)

Route 33 Zoning: Mr. Merrill, Mr. Houghton

House Bill 384 re Cemetery Access on State Owned Land: Mr. Canada

Interpretive Sign Project – Varsity Wireless Funded: Ms. Mitchell, Mr. Moore

Portsmouth Avenue Survey: Ms. Mitchell, Mr. Merrill

Expansion of RSA 79E: Mr. Houghton

Photo Storage/Website Project: Mr. Merrill, Ms. Barker with Wally Stuart

Old Town Hall Baseline Documentation: Ms. Mitchell

Conversion of salvaged Old Town Hall window frames into new bulletin board frames for the Municipal Center: David Moore.

In a discussion of other pending matters there was a consensus that at this stage there is no obvious topic for a February program and the Winnicutt Mills interpretive sign is best deferred pending an agreed upon design for all such signs in Stratham.

Veterans Memorial Garden: Ms. Mitchell reported that she and Ms. Bakie have agreed upon the text for the revised application and Ms. Bakie is working on the layout. In addition, based on her work in military personnel, Ms. Bakie may want to propose a change to the policy.

Cornet Thomas Wiggin House, 249 Portsmouth Avenue: The commission authorized Mr. Canada to send a letter to the owners expressing the commission's concern and readiness to help.

Summer Recess: The commission agreed to schedule no meetings for July and August with the understanding that meetings may be called. In the meantime the chair will monitor progress on the pending projects.

The meeting adjourned at 9:05 PM

Respectfully submitted,
Rebecca Mitchell, Secretary Pro Tem