

**Stratham Heritage Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
Land Use Conference Room  
September 12, 2018**

Present: David Canada, Mike Houghton, Nathan Merrill, Rebecca Mitchell, Forrest Barker. Paul Deschaine arrived at approximately 7:30.

Absent: Tammy Hathaway, Florence Wiggin

**Convened:** 7:05 PM by the Chair, Mr. Canada

In the absence of Tammy Hathaway Forrest Barker became a voting member.

Secretary's Report: In the absence of Ms. Hathaway Mr. Canada presented the minutes. The minutes of the June 13, 2018 meeting were approved as written. The minutes of the Special Meeting of August 6, 2018 were approved as written, with Ms. Mitchell abstaining because she was absent from that meeting.

Treasurer's Report: Mr. Canada reported that the commission has a balance of \$5,610 remaining in its 2018 budget. The Heritage Fund balance is \$7,610.25 and the Heritage Preservation Fund balance is \$145,050. The report was accepted (Ms. Barker/Mr. Merrill, unanimous). Mr. Canada noted that due to the resignation of Wally Stuart from the Commission, we need a new Treasurer. Mr. Merrill nominated Ms. Barker. Discussion ensued. Mr. Merrill promised to help train/mentor Ms. Barker in the Treasurer role. Unanimous vote in the affirmative to appoint Ms. Barker as Treasurer.

Committee Reports:

Planning Board: Mr. Canada reported that the Planning Board approved Mark Perlowski's revised site plan and conditional use permit applications for converting to condominiums all three buildings at 149-151 Portsmouth Ave. (including the Old Town Hall) in his Town Center redevelopment project, with the land being owned jointly. The plans included a 6 bay garage to be built behind the Old Town Hall in the space previously approved for an open parking lot. Mr. Houghton reported that the Audi dealership submitted a revised site plan to include an easement that would accommodate the Gateway road plan and a paved parking area where a building had been approved. The revision was approved.

Technical Review Committee: Ms. Mitchell reported that no matters have come before the committee.

Demolition Review Committee: Mr. Canada reported that no applications have been received for review. He further pointed out that the owners of the property at 104 Union Road have subdivided the property as the DRC had suggested, a good example of the DRC working with owners to preserve a historically significant house while also working

with them to develop a financially beneficial outcome. Ms. Mitchell asked if they had done work on the old house. Mr. Canada reported that it is currently for sale.

Master Plan Steering Committee: No report as Ms. Barker and Mr. Merrill were unable to attend the last meeting.

## **Old Business**

Bartlett-Cushman House: Mr. Canada reported that with funds in the Town building maintenance budget, Public Works Director Colin Lavery got a quote from Exeter Glass of a cost of \$400-\$500 per window to replace the six windows deemed beyond simple repair in the barn and connecting shed. Mr. Merrill moved and Ms. Barker seconded a motion that the commission advise Mr. Lavery to spend up to \$2,400 to replace the six affected windows in the barn and shed, which passed unanimously. Mr. Merrill mentioned that the intention had also been to acquire storm windows to protect the repaired arched bay windows. Mr. Canada said that he had previously had a quote from Ron-Bet of Kittery and would revisit that.

Ms. Mitchell reported that as requested she had contacted Kathleen Wheeler of Independent Archaeological Consulting in Portsmouth for an estimate of a Phase 1 archaeological investigation of the site of the brick schoolhouse that stood in the southwest corner of the property. She received a proposal in August for an investigation “with the objective of finding and delineating the footprint of the schoolhouse, sampling a portion of the schoolyard, and perhaps finding some of the postholes related to the fence lines” for an estimated fee of \$9,712. There was general agreement to not pursue the investigation. Mr. Merrill noted the importance of making sure that documents describing the property should take note of the location of the former school.

With respect to the subdivision and sale of the property Mr. Houghton reported that the Town is currently waiting for and expects to receive state approval of a plan to create two lots with a north to south dividing line with the house lot retaining the entire Portsmouth Avenue frontage. The property cannot be listed for sale until the lot boundaries are determined and approved. Mr. Houghton further reported that there was a “robust” discussion of the Bartlett-Cushman property at the September 10 meeting of the Selectmen. The board has asked the realtor, Tate & Foss, to present two proposed listing prices for the property – one with a preservation easement on the exterior and one with a preservation easement on both exterior and interior.

Mr. Houghton said the BOS invited the HC to come up with a budget figure for proposing to voters in March if we want to pursue a Town rehab of the house, in lieu of a sale. However, he said the board members would most likely not support such a proposal at TM. Mr. Canada asked if the BOS could remain neutral on the matter for the purposes of presenting it to voters at TM, and Mr. Deschaine responded in the negative – the BOS must take a vote on all warrant articles that require expenditures of taxpayer funds.

Mr. Merrill asked if the selectmen would support rehabilitation of the interior and Mr. Houghton replied “no.” Recalling that in past years any expenditure over \$1,000 required approval of the Board of Selectmen, Mr. Canada asked what is the current policy. Mr. Houghton replied that anything over \$2,500 requires BOS approval at the present time.

Mr. Merrill asked if the Selectmen have the authority to sell the property without a Town Meeting vote. Mr. Deschaine said that while the Board of Selectmen may authorize the sale of a Town-owned property following a public hearing, a petition of 50 voters would take the question of sale to a Town Meeting.

Ms. Mitchell asked whether Tate & Foss had experience valuing the effect of preservation easements on property sales. She said that she would enquire if the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance had any guidance for that kind of estimation.

Mr. Canada said that if the Town sells the property with only the exterior protected with a preservation easement then the Town could hold and monitor the easement. Mr. Merrill said that he does not like the idea of the Town holding the easement, citing possible conflict of interest in the future. Ms. Mitchell agreed saying that the building would be best protected with a third party representing the preservation value of the building. Mr. Canada proposed waiting to resolve the question of easement stewardship. Mr. Houghton and Mr. Deschaine said that the terms of the sale should be settled. Mr. Canada said that it should be possible to develop an easement for the exterior and the selectmen could determine who will hold the easement. Ms. Mitchell said that the NH Preservation Alliance had lined up a consultant to prepare a Baseline Conditions Report and that she will ask them to delay that until early October. She also agreed to inquire whether the Alliance had any knowledge of realtors with experience in selling historic properties, especially any with easements.

Mr. Deschaine and Mr. Houghton discussed the current status of the listing agent. Mr. Merrill requested that he and other commission members get a copy of Tate & Foss’ notebook of market analysis materials that they presented to the selectmen at the board’s August 20 meeting.

Mr. Merrill expressed great frustration with the change of position among the Board of Selectmen regarding their newfound resistance to protection of key interior architectural features in the proposed preservation easement.

Portsmouth Avenue Survey: Ms. Barker reported that she has created a list joining together the property addresses in the survey with the owner names and mailing addresses from the Assessing Office.

Old Town Hall: Mr. Merrill reported that Mark Perlowski had asked that the commission submit a letter of support to be presented at the public hearing of his RSA 79-E application. The hearing is scheduled for the Board of Selectmen’s meeting on October 1. Ms. Mitchell offered to draft the letter. Mr. Deschaine said that it is important that the

letter contain “findings” that address the requirements enumerated in the statute. He further stated that the easement draft has been sent to Mr. Perlowski’s lawyer. Independent of that, it is still unclear whether it is Mr. Perlowski’s intent to ultimately have more than 3 condominium units on the property – i.e. an intent to divide the Old Town Hall or another of the other buildings into condominiums.

Mr. Merrill reported that with help from Mr. Perlowski’s son and Town Highway Department staff he was able to salvage 3 window frames. They are currently stored in the basement of the Gifford Farm barn which is not a good place for extended storage. The commission liked Ms. Mitchell’s idea of converting the frames for use as bulletin boards in the Town’s Municipal Center. Mr. Canada said he would speak with Mr. Laverty about that project.

Ms. Mitchell said that while she has begun writing the Baseline Report for the Old Town Hall she will need help collecting the requisite photographs. Mr. Merrill said that he had received a portfolio of photographs from Wally Stuart and will share those.

Scamman Farm: Ms. Mitchell reported that she has received the draft of the Preservation Company’s National Register nomination of the farm. It has also been shared with the NH Division of Historical Resources. While it is anticipated that the final version will be submitted by the end of the year, it is not clear whether it will reach the State Historical Resources Council or the National Park Service by that time.

Veterans’ Memorial Garden: Ms. Mitchell reported that this month the commission received an application for a name on a brick and one for a name to go on a monument. For the latter she has requested proof of honorable discharge.

Photo Archives: While Wally Stuart feels his health prevents him from continuing as a commission member he wishes to continue working on the photo project as a volunteer. Mr. Merrill will coordinate next steps with Mr. Stuart to ensure a smooth transition of stewardship of the photo website.

Interpretive Signs: There has been no work done on the interpretive signs for the area affected by the Varsity Wireless tower erected at 313 Portsmouth Avenue. Mr. Canada said he remains interested in seeing a sign at the mill site on the Winnicutt River and Ms. Mitchell said that there had also been a discussion of a sign at the Old Town Hall as part of the rehabilitation there. Mr. Houghton agreed with Ms. Mitchell’s statement that with the signage opportunities proliferating it is important to identify a uniform design. It seems likely that professional help will be needed to move this forward.

Historic Demolition Review Ordinance: Mr. Canada reported that no work was done on this over the summer other than that he had received links to ordinances in use in other municipalities that could serve as partial models.

Stratham Memorial School Anniversary: Ms. Mitchell said that she had emailed Katelyn Belanger, Assistant Principal, indicating her willingness to assist with anything planned

for the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the building. Ms. Belanger expressed thanks and said the school would respond after a new principal was in place. Nothing further has been heard from the school.

## **New Business**

Budget: Mr. Canada presented a 2019 commission budget proposal totaling \$4,700 that represents a 17.5% reduction from the 2018 budget due to reducing the Survey/Consultants line by \$1,000. In the ensuing discussion Mr. Houghton said that the commission might want to hire a consultant and/or a college intern to move some projects forward and publicize successful preservation stories in Stratham. Mr. Merrill questioned the proposed \$1,000 reduction, particularly in view of Mr. Houghton's suggestions for future work. No objections were voiced to submitting a level budget for 2019. Mr. Merrill motioned for a level-funded budget for 2019. Vote was unanimous in favor.

While not a matter for the commission budget, there was a discussion of maintenance needs for the Bartlett-Cushman House. The storm windows for the bay windows were mentioned again. Mr. Deschaine mentioned the condition of the side door facing Bunker Hill Ave. Ms. Mitchell stated her view that weather stripping should be applied and that the door be rendered inoperable by some reversible means. Mr. Houghton asked about the condition of the exterior ground level entry to the cellar. Ms. Mitchell said that while in the attic she had noticed some light infiltration in the area of the flashing around the south side chimney. Mr. Canada said that he would get in touch with the roofer, Chris Bickford, about that.

Publicity for Resources for Maintaining Historic Structures: Tabled.

Publicity for Barn Easement Information and Resources: Mr. Merrill cited the success other NH towns have had with compiling town-wide barn inventories. Mr. Houghton suggested that this might be a good project for a paid internship. Ms. Mitchell said that she would explore possible internship programs such as one connected to the preservation degree program at Plymouth State.

Membership: Mr. Merrill noted the need to recruit an alternate member.

Parker Cabin: Mr. Merrill asked if there had been any response from NH Fish and Game concerning the fate of the Parker Cabin. Ms. Mitchell reviewed the history of efforts to protect the cabin including the NH DHR determination of eligibility for the National Register and various communications with NH Fish & Game staff. She said that it appears to be a case of demolition by neglect. She said that the state legislature recently established a commission to study the operations of NH F & G and this might be an opportunity to ask if they need help with managing historic structures on their lands. Mr. Canada suggested we could contact one of our legislators since it appears NHF&G staff have been unresponsive. Mr. Merrill suggested a better first step would be to contact Glenn Normandeau, NHF&G Commissioner.

Gifford Farm: Mr. Canada asked Mr. Houghton if the Board of Selectmen is considering selling the Gifford House or any other of the Town's properties. Mr. Houghton said there has been no serious discussion of such a move. He promised to notify the Commission if there are any future discussions.

The meeting adjourned at 9:16