



TOWN OF STRATHAM

INCORPORATED 1716

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STRATHAM HERITAGE COMMISSION

Minutes

September 12, 2023 at 7:00 pm

Stratham Municipal Center

Present: Nathan Merrill, Michael Houghton, Rebecca Mitchell, Forrest Barker, Lucy Cushman, Jeffy Hyland, David Canada

Guests: Drew Bedard and David Moore

Chair Merrill called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM.

Secretary's Report: Rebecca Mitchell made a motion to approve the June 13, 2023, minutes and Dave Canada seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Treasurer's report: Forrest Barker reported that the HPF Capital Reserve Fund balance was \$260,809, the Heritage Fund Balance was \$7,210, and the available Operating Budget Balance was \$5,500.

Correspondence: Mr. Merrill said the correspondence will be incorporated into the scheduled agenda items.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Planning Board: Mr. Canada reported that Brad Sawler is converting the former bicycle shop adjacent to the old Stratham Hill School at 240 Portsmouth Ave into office space for his business. A historic marker for the schoolhouse is required as part of the approval. Mr. Merrill is working with Mr. Sawler on selecting an appropriate sign and mounting location. The bakery at 100 Portsmouth Ave is progressing with some changes to the original plan. 249 Portsmouth Ave was granted an extension on their demolition timeline and must start this month and end by November 3rd. Prior to January 15, 2024, the owner must submit a proposal for a new facade and roof for a 20'x20' cement block structure that will be left after the demolition of the

surrounding barn. Mr. Canada also reported that 85 College Road is applying for a conditional use permit for a driveway in the shoreland protection zone.

Select Board: Mike Houghton explained the proposal for Stratham Community Power that has been put together by the Energy Commission. This represents an opportunity for residents to save on electricity rates. Other towns in the state have participated and enrollment will be automatic although residents can opt out of it. There will likely be a special Town Meeting in October or November for voters to further discuss and hopefully approve this opportunity.

Demolition Review Committee: The DRC has not met this summer. Mr. Merrill reported that the owner of Emery Farm at 16 Emery's Lane applied to remove a dilapidated lean-to from the south side of the barn, and Mr. Merrill as the Chair of the DRC did not think the Committee needed to meet to vote on this, so he gave the ok to the CEO/BI to issue the permit.

Heritage District Advisory Committee: Jeff Hyland reported that the committee has not met this summer but there are multiple properties in the District currently for sale and this might prompt a meeting in the future if applications from new owners come in.

Open Space Plan Steering Committee: Mr. Hyland reported that the committee had a couple of meetings over the summer and engaged in community outreach at Stratham Hill Park on some Thursday food truck nights. The turnout was light, but it did help raise awareness and there is an online survey that residents are encouraged to complete. Several Commission members noted that they have completed the survey.

OLD BUSINESS

Historic register nominations: Mr. Merrill reported that the proposed Richard Scammon Farm National Historic District has been determined eligible for the national historic register by the New Hampshire Historical Resources Council. NH Division of Historical Resources staff have submitted the listing to the National Park Service. It should be officially listed in early October, at which point there will be a generic press release issued from NHDHR. Mr. Merrill suggested that the Commission should complement this with our own PR to celebrate the achievement and educate the public about the property. Mr. Merrill also mentioned that the Society for Protection of New Hampshire Forests finally approved our requested name change for their conservation land parcel, from "Strathlorne Forest" to "Scammon Forest." The Society intends to add some modest signage for the public trail on the property, which will presumably incorporate the new name for the parcel. Mr. Merrill further suggested that the Commission should work with the Select Board to discuss placing a marker on River Road denoting the new historic district. Mr. Hyland raised the issue of the Scammon family cemetery that is adjacent to 21 River Road and incorporated in the new historic district. He noted that it was long ago deeded to the Town of

Stratham, along with a donated endowment from his late uncle for its long-term upkeep. He said that Sandy Smith has done some basic caretaking of the plot over the years that he has lived at 21 River Road, but with his advancing age and health issues, the cemetery needs more work. Mr. Hyland would like to engage in an open dialogue with the Stratham Cemetery Trustees and Scammon family descendants about long-term upkeep of the site. Mr. Merrill voiced support for this and confirmed that the cemetery is indeed owned by the Town according to tax records.

The good news continued, with Rebecca Mitchell reporting that her 18th-century house at 200 Portsmouth Avenue has been recently listed on the NH Register of Historic Places.

Town marker project: Nothing new to report.

State marker project: Mr. Merrill and Ms. Mitchell will work together to submit the application for the Lane Homestead by November 1st. The primary tasks needing completion are the bibliography and the petition signed by residents.

Maps of historic properties and historic streets: Mr. Merrill reported that there are no updates from Mark Conners. Mr. Hyland said he took streetscape photos and will bring them to the next meeting so the Commission can look at them on the screen together and decide which streets to pursue.

Veterans Memorial Garden: Rebecca Mitchell will work with Lucy Cushman to transfer the VMG records and application system. And she will introduce Ms. Cushman to the people at Exeter Monuments, who do the engraving of bricks and obelisks for the Town at our direction.

SHS building repairs: Drew Bedard reported that the masons started repointing the chimney and that he is wrapping up the windows and should be done with Phase 1 by the end of the month or the first week of October.

Easement stewardship update: Mr. Merrill noted the good news that exterior painting of the Lane homestead is finally completed.

Cemeteries – potential Eagle Scout project: Lucy Cushman said that Cole Emanuel is unclear if he will choose the cemetery project to complete his Eagle Scout rank. Ms. Cushman will follow up with him. Mr. Merrill said that if he doesn't want to do this project that the HC should seek another interested Scout to complete this important task, noting that documentation of the approximately 30 cemeteries in town is woefully inadequate.

NEW BUSINESS

Historic house placards: Brad Sawler at 240 Portsmouth Ave asked for the HC's advice on house placards for the old Stratham Hill School. Mr. Merrill reached out to Mark Connors who reported back that Portsmouth is currently doing new placards and they are using cedar for the base, the letters are painted, and then the whole placard is painted with a clear protective sealant. Each sign is around \$250. Brass plates were another option mentioned but the Commission thought they were less visible from the road and Mr. Merrill made the point that the regular house placards should be different from the National Register plates. The previous placards in Stratham were done by the Historical Society, but they are simply painted plywood and most of them are now missing or in poor condition. Mr. Merrill will follow up with Mr. Sawler. Ms. Mitchell feels that the Historical Society should undertake a new town-wide placard program, and open it up to 19th century dwellings (the previous program was only made available for 18th century buildings).

Membership and officer changes: Mr. Merrill informed the Commission that Tammy Hathaway has resigned from the Commission due to her ongoing health challenges. There is some confusion surrounding which members are currently official voting members and which members are alternates. Mr. Moore will follow up after checking the official records. It is presumed that Mr. Hyland will be the next most senior alternate member to be moved to a voting position. Mr. Merrill noted that we have also lost our Secretary with Ms. Hathaway's resignation. Ms. Mitchell nominated Forrest Barker to be the new Secretary. Mr. Canada seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Mr. Bedard has applied to the Select Board to join the Commission as a new alternate member. Mr. Merrill noted that he currently serves as an at-large member of the DRC, so he would like Mr. Bedard to take Ms. Mitchell's place as one of the three HC reps on the DRC. Mr. Bedard agreed. We will now need a new at-large member for the DRC. Mr. Merrill asked the group for suggested recruits. Ms. Mitchell thinks that David Ryng would be a good addition to the DRC. Mr. Merrill asked her to inquire if he would be interested in serving.

Goals/plans for 2023-2024: Mr. Merrill stated that the town wide survey is done and the River Road historic district project is nearly complete. But the Commission still has a number of on-going projects that have languished. The state and town marker projects are still ongoing. Mr. Merrill also proposed that the Commission think about the next house for a potential state or national register nomination. Mr. Merrill said that working on one house every year or two would be a good pace to maintain, and we have adequate funds in the budget to hire preservation consultants to do the work. He suggested we should consider the Brown/Gifford farm, Ida Folsom brick house on Stratham Heights Road, and the two Goodrich farms (Stratham Heights Road and Portsmouth Avenue). He asked the Commission to give these some thought, and asked for other ideas. Ms. Mitchell concurred that the Brown/Gifford farm should be a high priority.

Mr. Merrill alerted the Commission to two upcoming virtual Preservation Alliance programs for Heritage Commission members. He particularly encouraged the newer members to consider signing up for the free online seminars this fall.

Dave Canada made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:26 pm. Ms. Mitchell seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Forrest Barker, Secretary