

STRATHAM HERITAGE COMMISSION
Stratham Municipal Center
Meeting Minutes
September 14, 2022

Present: Nathan Merrill, Michael Houghton, Rebecca Mitchell, Forrest Barker

Absent: Tammy Hathaway, Jeffrey Hyland, David Canada

Guest: David Moore, Town Administrator, joined the meeting at 7:25 and left at approximately 7:55.

Called to order by Chair Merrill at 7:05 pm.

Secretary's Report: Mr. Merrill distributed the minutes of the June 8, 2022 meeting. Ms. Mitchell moved and Ms. Barker seconded that the minutes be approved as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Treasurer's Report: The quarterly report, not being available, will be presented at the October meeting.

Board and Committee Reports

Planning Board: Mr. Houghton reported that little business has come before the board. The Optima development is going forward, the proposed development off Stoneybrook is quiet at present with Town Planner, Mark Connors remaining engaged. Any plans for redevelopment of the former Vo Tech site remain unclear. At this point the Board is not working on any ordinances to bring before Town Meeting.

Select Board: Mr. Houghton reported that no big issues have come before the board, and summer meetings largely dealt with administrative matters such as developing an employee manual. The September 13 election went well though it is recognized that the distant parking at the Memorial School presents some challenges.

Demolition Review Committee: No applications have come before the committee, though Mr. Merrill has informed committee members of the application for demolishing the barn at 249 Portsmouth Avenue.

Heritage District Advisory Committee: In Mr. Hyland's absence, Mr. Merrill reported that the committee has not met other than once for organizational purposes. It has not yet met concerning the barn at 249 Portsmouth, the Cornet Wiggin House, a National Register listed property. A discussion of how the Heritage Commission should relate to the HDAC followed. Mr. Houghton and Mr. Moore pointed out that HDAC meetings are public. The consensus of the discussion was that the commission takes a serious interest in the future of this property and would appreciate being present at any site visits.

18 Jana Lane: As Mr. Moore needed to move on to another meeting in the building this new business was taken out of order. Commission members had reviewed the materials regarding the potential Town purchase of the property. Ms. Mitchell noted that while that subdivision (Jason Drive etc.) is not yet historic, the commission generally supports the idea of connectivity between adjacent developments as leading to healthy community life. Those present strongly support Mr. Merrill's suggestion that if the Town purchases the property an informational marker be created to narrate the past uses of this area that stretches from Portsmouth Avenue to the Squamscott River. Ms. Mitchell moved and Ms. Barker seconded that the commission vote in favor of the Town's acquisition of this small parcel. The motion passed unanimously.

Stratham Fair/4 H Buildings History: Mr. Merrill and Mr. Moore reported that work is ongoing to properly recognize the naming of the existing Lynn Garland Display Building and the new naming of the Livestock Barns to honor Lorraine and James Stuart. Mr. Merrill is drafting language for future plaques or signs that will be affixed to the buildings. Mr. Moore plans to organize a modest ceremony at next year's Summerfest.

Mr. Moore left the room at the conclusion of this discussion.

Old Business

Historic Register Nominations:

21-23-25 River Road: Mr. Merrill reported that he authorized paying the Preservation Company up to \$1,000 to complete the paperwork for nominating the Scammon Farm Historic District (including the conserved land owned by the Society for the Preservation of NH Forests) to the National Register of Historic Places.

200 Portsmouth Avenue: Ms. Mitchell reported on the work she is funding to list her property, the Joshua Hill House. She and the consultant Andrew Cushing have resumed work after he took some time off to transition into his new role at the NH Preservation Alliance. Their aim is to have a completed state register application by the end of the year.

Town-Wide Area Form: Mr. Merrill reported that corrections and additions continue.

Town Marker Project: Ms. Mitchell reported that she is close to completing the draft text for the sign to be located at the bottom of the Lincoln Trail. The topics will include an introductory statement about the hill; Fourth of July 1860; the hill as a long-time spot for relaxation and recreation; the Lester Lane landscape compass; and the fire tower. She commented that much of the research is too lengthy to fit on a marker, and Ms. Barker then suggested that a QR code on the marker could be linked to that more complete content.

State Highway Marker: No progress to report.

Smyk Park History: this item was tabled.

Procedural Rules: Mr. Merrill presented the revised Procedural Rules that update the Funding section for greater clarity and make some other minor updates and corrections. David Moore asked Mr. Merrill to share the draft document with Christiane McAllister, Town Finance Administrator to review the section pertaining to sources and uses of funds. Ms. Mitchell moved to accept the Procedural Rules as presented. Ms. Barker seconded the motion and it passed with a unanimous vote. Mr. Merrill will follow up with Ms. McAllister.

Digitization of 20th century aerial photography: Mr. Merrill reported that the Planning Department is in the process of scanning the large paper copies of US government aerial photography. The goal is to create digitized copies that will both preserve the images and make them available for a variety of purposes including interactive mapping.

Neighborhood Heritage Districts: Mr. Merrill, Ms. Barker and Ms. Mitchell each reported some progress toward gathering reminiscences and information on the two earliest subdivisions, Crestview Drive and William Circle.

Goals for 2022-23 season: There was general agreement with Mr. Merrill's view that a major focus will be on completing projects already in progress. With the completion of the Town Wide Area Form the commission will work with the Planning Office to develop a list of scenic byways and historic streets. The goal of developing a comprehensive history of Stratham farms will continue, with the understanding that it will most likely require hiring specialized help. Members present agreed with Mr. Merrill that a major goal should be to present a program in 2023 though no topic was settled upon. This discussion will be carried over to the October meeting to include more commission members.

New Business

NHPA membership renewal: Mr. Merrill reported that he renewed the commission's membership during the summer.

Open Space Plan: Mr. Houghton reported that a steering committee will be formed to work on identifying possibilities for the Town to create greater connectivity between population centers and conservation areas of the town. Mr. Merrill asked if the committee should include a representative from the Heritage Commission.

Richard M. Scammon "Sketch of Stratham" Photographs: Mr. Merrill described his work on identifying the properties illustrating Scammon's "Down the King's Highway" article in the 1899 *Granite Monthly*.

Old Family Cemeteries: Mr. Merrill reported that recent investigations of the Merrill cemetery (no direct relation) on the property at 84 Bunker Hill Avenue has revealed what appear to be 55 burial plots, many more than previously recorded. This certainly merits

further investigation and raises questions regarding the status of other graveyards on private lands in Stratham. Mr. Merrill noted that Lisa Mausolf's town-wide inventory will hopefully include more detailed information on all known cemeteries in town. He suggested we should open dialogues with the Cemetery Trustees and the Stratham Historical Society leadership on how to better document and maintain the privately owned graveyards in town.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Mitchell, secretary pro tem