

Stratham Heritage Commission

Meeting Minutes

September 13, 2017

7:00 pm

Land Use Conference Room

Present: Nathan Merrill, Rebecca Mitchell, Dave Canada, Wallace Stuart, Michael Houghton, Florence Wiggin

Absent: Tammy Hathaway

Guests: Paul Deschaine, arrived about 7:30

CONVENED: 7:00 pm by Chair Merrill.

Secretary's Report: The minutes of the meetings of June 14 and August 8 were approved as presented.

Treasurer's Report: Mr. Stuart reported that the commission has \$1519.39 remaining in its operating budget. The most recent balance for the Heritage Fund is \$7,020.69. The Heritage Preservation Fund balance of \$93,489.00 does not reflect any interest accrued.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Planning Board: Mr. Canada reported that the PB has identified eliminating the bonus for street frontage in cluster developments as a topic for discussion. The impetus is the HC's concern that it leads to the needless demolition of possibly historic structures. Any change would require voter approval. The PB will be working on any such proposed changes between now and December. Mr. Merrill inquired about the status of the Master Plan and Mr. Houghton reported that a Request for Proposals is in the works.

Technical Review Committee: Mr. Merrill reported that the TRC has not met.

Demolition Review Committee: The DRC met on August 17 to consider an application to remove the roof of the house at 58 High St. so that the applicant can add a second story to the structure. At that meeting committee members agreed that there should be a more efficient means of acting on cases where there is clearly no historical significance. This will be discussed under New Business.

OLD BUSINESS:

Bartlett-Cushman House: Mr. Merrill distributed the bulleted and non-bulleted version of the “Bartlett-Cushman House Preservation Goals and Objectives.” The document, based on the Bartlett-Cushman House Character Defining Features Report, was prepared by Ms. Mitchell. Mr. Canada moved that the commission approve both versions and send them on to the Board of Selectmen. The motion was seconded by Mr. Stuart and passed unanimously.

Mr. Merrill reported that the Highway Department has agreed to replace the glass missing from one of the dormer windows and from one of the front door side lights.

Mr. Houghton said that at the September 11 Board of Selectmen’s meeting the question was raised about what body is responsible for maintenance and upkeep of the house. In the ensuing discussion there was agreement that the house, like all other Town-owned buildings, is the responsibility of the Board of Selectmen with the Heritage Commission having an advisory role. Mr. Merrill emphasized that the commission appreciated being consulted in matters pertaining to the Bartlett-Cushman House.

Mr. Deschaine arrived at the meeting and distributed his revision of the “Preservation Goals and Objectives” to include a description of the area to be available for lease, comprising approximately .45 acres of land. His revision also added a list of the Town’s potential future uses of the land outside that area. In discussion there was a consensus that the list need not be part of the document which would then simply state that potential lease holders wishing to use land outside the .45 acres would have to describe in detail their suitability/compatibility with potential future uses of the Town. Ms. Mitchell responded to Mr. Deschaine’s query about interior spaces to be preserved, saying that those identified rooms or spaces are to retain their present shape and dimensions though removable alterations such as partitions could be allowed.

Ms. Mitchell reported that she had heard from the contractor scheduled to roof the barn. He was hospitalized with a serious illness during the summer but says he will get to the job in 2-3 weeks.

16 Emery’s Lane: Ms. Mitchell reported that the NH State Historical Resources Council had determined that the property is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. A response is due from the National Park Service later this month.

Portsmouth Avenue Survey: Mr. Merrill reported that the consultant, Lisa Mausolf, has begun the deed research and will be doing the requisite photography later in the fall.

Old Town Hall: Mr. Merrill reported that the property, which also includes the adjacent house, is still for sale with a reduced price. He has spoken with the owner about various options including a preservation easement that might lower the price sufficiently to attract a buyer interested in preserving the town hall. He will invite the owner to attend a future commission meeting.

Scamman Farm: Ms. Mitchell reported that the farm had received a small grant for a survey of their early barn presently known as the “tool shed.” The consultant, Robert Pothier, visited the farm to inspect and photograph the barn. He reported that it dates from the mid 18th century and is in very good condition. The Scammans have not yet received his written report and photographs. Ms. Mitchell said she would speak with the staff member at the NH Preservation Alliance who is in charge of the grant program. She further said that she will query Peter Michaud of the NH Division of Historical Resources about next steps toward a National Register Nomination for the farm.

Parker Cabin: Mr. Merrill reported on his recent communication with NH Fish & Game about the status of the Parker Cabin that sits on land purchased by NH F&G with US Fish & Wildlife Service funds. The cabin is a rare remaining example of the modest structures designed in the last century for recreational uses along the shores of the Squamscott River and Great Bay. He heard back from Cory Riley that she is working with the USFWS to re-start the process of historical and NEPA review.

Veterans’ Memorial Garden: Ms. Mitchell reported that Tracey McGrail, the volunteer who has been handling the engraving of names on bricks and monuments, has moved to Hampton. Ms. McGrail is willing to continue that work through the end of this year. Mr. Stuart expressed a willingness to take over the job if and when Ms. McGrail resigns.

NEW BUSINESS:

Website Update: Some content that had been in the former website had not successfully transferred to the new website and steps are being taken to rectify that. The commission needs to add new material as well as to edit existing text and links.

Social Media Policy: Mr. Merrill reported that chairs of Town commissions/committees are now required to sign the Social Media Policy document approved by the Board of Selectmen. Additionally all members adding content to social media sites must also sign the document.

Demolition Review Ordinance and Procedures: Mr. Merrill said that the committee would like to revise their procedures so that cases where historical significance is obviously absent the chair, or member selected by the chair, might make a determination and allow the application to go forward unless a committee member objects and requests a meeting of the committee. There was a consensus of the meeting that this is a sensible approach and steps should be taken to include it in the procedures of the committee.

Membership: Mr. Merrill reported that he sent a letter thanking Terry Barnes for his service on the commission and that there is now an alternate membership vacant.

The meeting adjourned at 8:40.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Mitchell (secretary pro-tem)