

Stratham Heritage Commission

Meeting Minutes

November 8, 2017

7:00 pm

Hutton Room

Present: Nathan Merrill, Rebecca Mitchell, David Canada, Wallace Stuart, Florence Wiggin, Tammy Hathaway, Joe Lovejoy (substituting for Mike Houghton as BOS rep.)

Absent: Michael Houghton

Guests: Fred Emanuel, Demolition Review Committee

CONVENED: At 7:00 pm by Mr. Merrill

Secretary's Report: The October 11, 2017 meeting minutes were approved (motion Ms. Mitchell, Mr. Stuart, unanimous). The October 11, 2017 non-public meeting minutes were unsealed and approved (motion Ms. Mitchell, Ms. Hathaway, unanimous). The October 30, 2017 Joint Session Heritage Commission and Board of Selectmen meeting minutes were approved (motion Mr. Canada, Mr. Stuart, unanimous).

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Demolition Review Committee: The November 3, 2017 meeting minutes were approved by quorum of the committee: Mr. Merrill, Ms. Mitchell, Mr. Canada, Mr. Emanuel (motion Mr. Canada, Ms. Mitchell, unanimous).

149 Portsmouth Avenue, Parker House / Former Baptist Parsonage

Ms. Mitchell reported that on October 31, 2017 the DRC received demolition application #2017-755 for the Parker House at 149 Portsmouth Avenue, adjacent to the Old Town Hall. Meeting on site on Nov. 3, the committee unanimously voted to invoke the 30-day review period because of the historical and architectural significance of the house. The Demolition Review Committee found that the house, other than suffering from neglect, is generally sound. The interior has some interesting features including original windows, stair railing, ornate cast iron floor registers and a spectacular fireplace. Mr. Merrill noted that the architectural style is unusual compared to other buildings in town. Mr. Merrill explained that the new owner wants the lot to construct a 2-story building to house an office and a kitchen design retail showplace on the first floor and two apartments on the second floor. Those present discussed the importance of photographing the house and salvaging some of the unique features before demolition. Mr. Merrill cited the public hearing option in the Demolition Review ordinance. Mr. Canada suggested that since few members tend to appear at public hearings, a newspaper article might reach a wider audience. It was further suggested that notices of pending demolition could be shared through some of the various town Facebook pages.

Mr. Merrill said that he would explore with the new owner the possibility of allowing the Heritage Commission to have some input regarding the design and siting of the new building.

Mr. Stuart and Ms. Mitchell agreed to meet at the Parker House on Nov. 15 to photograph the house. Mr. Merrill explained that the owner had granted permission to salvage anything from the property and wasn't interested in any compensation. Ms. Mitchell agreed to contact the salvage business in Exeter.

151 Portsmouth Avenue, Old Town Hall

The Demolition Review Committee also received on Oct. 31 demolition application #2017-756 for 151 Portsmouth Ave., the Old Town Hall. The committee unanimously invoked the 30-day review for the Old Town Hall citing "its architectural distinction, its position in the Town Center, and its historic role as the locus of Stratham's governmental, cultural, and social life for more than a century." The new owner has no immediate plans for the Old Town Hall and is willing to wait to see if any proposals emerge from Town Meeting. He may be willing to accept a preservation easement and to preserve and rehabilitate the building for some commercial uses that would qualify for incentives such as RSA 79:E. Ms. Mitchell reported that the Heritage Preservation Alliance expressed willingness to hold a preservation easement on the property, but this could be tricky to get finalized before Town Meeting. Mr. Merrill noted that before the 30 days is up he will write a report to the building inspector which would need to be approved by the Heritage Commission and the Demolition Review Committee and could serve as a public hearing.

Treasurer's Report: Mr. Stuart reported that the Commission has \$1,519.39 remaining in its operating budget. The most recent balance for the Heritage Fund is \$7,027.61. The Heritage Preservation Fund balance is \$93,489.00.

Planning Board: Mr. Canada reported on the Sullivan subdivision off High street, and that the Auto Fair dealership was making minor changes in their parking lot and had approval to use the adjacent lot. He also noted that the Planning Board is, in general, discussing town regulations.

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

OLD BUSINESS:

Bartlett-Cushman House: Ms. Mitchell reported that she had spoken with Jennifer Goodman of the Heritage Preservation Alliance regarding that organization holding a preservation easement on the house. The Alliance's Easement Committee will not be meeting until December, but Ms. Goodman said she would send us a preliminary proposal. In response to a query from Mr. Canada, Mr. Lovejoy reported that there was no formal contract yet with the Bean Group to market the RFP. Mr. Canada stated that he will follow up with Colleen Lake. The barn roof work is completed, and Mr. Lovejoy noted that Colin had replaced the two broken/missing windows.

Mr. Merrill reported that he had spoken with Tavis Austin regarding the urgent need for an updated Master Plan. Mr. Austin said that the RFP for a consultant to assist with the MP update is still on Paul Deschaine's

desk. A wide-ranging conversation ensued concerning the Town's responsibility for protecting historic resources, as reflected in the vision statement of the current (c.1998) Master Plan, and the importance of having a new MP to guide the Town in its decision-making. Ms. Mitchell pointed out that it has been about ten years since the Heritage Commission wrote a Historical Resources chapter, when former town planner Chuck Grassie began a never-finished MP update. The Historical Resources chapter cited and mapped historic properties throughout the town, and it was approved by the Planning Board at the time. Ms. Mitchell will locate her copy and forward it to everyone.

16 Emery's Lane: Mr. Merrill asked if the Commission intends to obtain a plaque marking the property's listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Ms. Mitchell will check in with the owners regarding their interest.

Portsmouth Avenue Survey: No news to report. Mr. Merrill noted the invoice from Lisa Mausolf's research needs to be submitted before the end of the year.

Scamman Farm: Ms. Mitchell reported that the Scammans are still interested in a National Register nomination for the property and that she will be discussing next steps with Stella Scamman on Monday evening.

Parker Cabin: Mr. Merrill had nothing to report.

Veterans' Memorial Garden: Ms. Mitchell reported that Tracy McGrail has moved from Stratham and feels she can no longer volunteer to handle the engraving of veterans' names on the bricks and monuments. Mr. Canada said he will ask Natalie Healy if she would be interested in volunteering. Mr. Merrill explained that typically he forwards a veteran's application to Tracy and she checks that the applicant was honorably discharged, period of service, and home of record at time of service. With that information the name(s) are then submitted for engraving on a brick or monument.

Photo Archives: Mr. Stuart is working with Lesley Kimball exploring options with the new town website to house them on the Heritage Commission Page.

Website Update: Mr. Merrill noted that it would be nice to link Old Town Hall information. Ms. Mitchell will provide the OTH survey form to Lesley Kimball for posting on our web page.

Membership: Nothing to report.

NEW BUSINESS:

Bunker Hill Ave intersection: Mr. Merrill reviewed a draft letter written to the NHDOT regarding the proposed traffic light at NH Route 108/Bunker Hill Ave. Mr. Merrill explained that although not necessarily opposed to a traffic light, he was concerned that there was no master plan for the road, and that

the Technical Review Committee was working on a new design for the Gateway District. Several Commission members had also expressed concern about potential adverse impact to the historic Bartlett-Cushman house as a result of the proposed signalization. Mr. Canada stated that he felt the letter was too negative and made suggestions to redraft the letter, which Mr. Merrill and the Commission agreed to do. Mr. Merrill said he would edit the letter using Mr. Canada's suggestions and it would be discussed again and voted on at our next meeting. Mr. Merrill also noted that it was already past the deadline for formal community input to the NHDOT on this subject anyway, so the letter is really more of a guide outlining our concerns that should be addressed if the project actually comes to fruition.

Gifford House repairs: Mr. Merrill and Ms. Mitchell toured the Gifford House with Seth Hickey (Parks and Recreation) and the tenant to review current and future improvements, after a recent vote from the Selectmen to replace the front door, side door and a floor. Mr. Merrill distributed a memorandum he sent to Selectmen, Mr. Hickey and Paul Deschaine. In it he voiced a strong objection to replacing the doors as they are sound and either original to the house (the front door) or attractive and sound (dining room door). The memo suggests that energy conservation could be improved by installing effective weather-stripping, caulking as needed, and installing well-fitting storm doors. The memo also states that heat loss is often misattributed to doors and windows when greater efficiency can be gained by adding insulation in the attic floor and basement ceiling. Mr. Lovejoy suggested that it would be helpful to have something in writing to guide the Selectmen in the future. Mr. Merrill responded that due to the historical nature of the Gifford property, the Heritage Commission should be informed of any work to be done on the house or barn. He also promised to draft a written guideline for when the Heritage Commission should be consulted regarding changes / improvements to Town-owned property.

New Hampshire Preservation Alliance membership: After a brief discussion in which he noted that NHPA now holds our preservation easement on the Lane Homestead, and is also currently providing assistance with our efforts to save the Old Town Hall, Mr. Merrill requested a motion to pay fifty dollars for a one-year membership in the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance. (Ms. Wiggin, Mr. Stuart, unanimous)

Next Meeting: December 13, 2017 at 7:00 pm in the Land Use Conference Room.

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Tammy Hathaway
Secretary