

Stratham Heritage Commission
Meeting Minutes
May 13, 2020

Present (Participating via conference call): David Canada, Michael Houghton, Nathan Merrill, Rebecca Mitchell, Forrest Barker.

Absent: Tammy Hathaway, Florence Wiggin

Convened: 7:26 PM

Chairman Canada opened the meeting reading the State of New Hampshire authorization and regulations for conducting public meetings via conference call as stated in RSA 91-A and the March 31, 2020 Memorandum from the NH Attorney General.

Mr. Canada, in the absence of Ms. Hathaway, asked Ms. Mitchell to serve as secretary and Ms. Barker to serve as a voting member.

Secretary's Report: Having distributed by email the draft minutes of the March 11, 2020 meeting Mr. Canada asked if there were any additions or corrections. Seeing none, **Ms. Mitchell moved and Mr. Merrill seconded that the minutes be approved as presented. In a roll call vote all present voted Aye.**

Treasurer's Report: Ms. Barker reported that with accrued interest the current balance of the Heritage Fund is \$6,729.

Committee Reports

Planning Board: Mr. Canada said that there is nothing to report of concern to the Heritage Commission.

Technical Review Committee: Ms. Mitchell said that nothing has come before the committee.

Demolition Review Committee: There have been no demolition applications sent to the committee.

Select Board: Mr. Houghton reported that Select Board meetings have been dominated by response to the impact of Covid 19, rescheduling Town Meeting, and adjusting the 2020 budget to meet the changing circumstances and demands on the Town resources. He further reported that the Board had voted to go ahead with the engraving at the Veterans' Memorial Garden. They also approved going ahead with the Town Wide Area Survey and the Historic Markers since the funds involved (the Heritage Preservation Fund and the Varsity Wireless Fund) cannot be transferred to other areas of the Town budget.

Route 33 Legacy Highway Ad Hoc Committee:

Ms Barker reported that the committee's meeting, held just prior to this Heritage Commission meeting, discussed a draft of zoning language for the Rt. 33 Legacy District prepared by Town Planner Tavis Austin. Much of the discussion at that meeting focused on getting an appropriate balance between regulation and incentives for investment and adaptive reuse in the district. Mr. Merrill said that while he was unable to attend the meeting, he had submitted detailed comments on the draft, and spoken to and shared his views with Mr. Austin. He said that while Mr. Austin is eager to move ahead, he wants to make sure the Heritage Commission has had a full opportunity for discussion and contributions prior to taking any zoning draft to the Planning Board. Mr. Canada said that, as far as he knows, the Planning Board has not been pushing to accelerate the process.

Ms. Mitchell said that she had read the draft and is concerned that there is language taken from the Town Center zoning that is not suitable for this new district. She reported that she had recently read Durham's zoning for its Historic Overlay District and thought there is some language there that could be useful to the Ad Hoc Committee, citing particularly the regulations concerning signage and car parking.

Old Business

Old Town Hall Window Frame Bulletin Boards: Mr. Canada reported that while Town expenditures have been frozen, he used his own funds to order the informative plaques previously discussed, in order to take advantage of a temporary price reduction. Once the budget is approved, we can reimburse him.

Conservation Commission Easement: Mr. Canada reported that the Conservation Commission is moving ahead with investigating feasibility of the easement discussed in a prior non-public meeting.

Town Meeting: Town Meeting is scheduled for Saturday, July 11 at 9 AM.

Photo Project: Mr. Merrill reported that all of his photos, and many of former member Wally Stuart's images have been copied onto an external drive given to him by Town Administrator David Moore. He needs to finish copying the remaining photos from Wally's Flickr account.

Town-Wide Area Form Survey: Ms. Mitchell reported that preservation consultant Lisa Mausolf had submitted her proposal and it is now being meshed with the Town's standard Professional Services Agreement. In her proposal Ms. Mausolf said that while the current circumstances surrounding the Corona Virus pandemic may cause some delays, she expects the project can be completed within a 12-month period with a draft available for review at six months. She will require mapping assistance and coordination with the Planning Office. That aspect of the proposal will be reviewed by Mr. Austin before a final proposal is signed.

RSA 79E and 79D Applications: Ms. Mitchell remarked that recent Select Board minutes indicated that Mr. Austin had reported that 79E application for 82 Portsmouth Avenue was incomplete. Mr. Houghton said that he expects the application will go forward and that it would be helpful for the Board to have comments from the Heritage Commission. Ms. Mitchell remarked that she was not sure if a 79D application for the barn at 271 Portsmouth Avenue had been submitted. She further noted that some time ago, in response to uneven assessments of old barns, Mr. Merrill had prepared a chart of barn assessments that was shared with the Town Assessor. The 271 Portsmouth Ave. barn was at that time taxed considerably higher than its condition warranted and in comparison with other barns. Ms. Mitchell reported that the new owner has spent a considerable amount of time and money clearing outside and within the barn, and has plans for painting as well as other improvements and maintenance work. Mr. Merrill and Ms. Mitchell both expressed the view that the Commission has enough information to support both the 82 Portsmouth Avenue 79E application and a 79D application for the barn at 271 Portsmouth Avenue. **Mr. Merrill moved that the Commission delegate Ms. Mitchell to write a statement of support for each of these Discretionary Preservation Easements, the house and barn at 82 Portsmouth Avenue and the barn at 271 Portsmouth Avenue. Ms. Barker seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously in a roll call vote.**

Historic Marker Design Prototype: The members discussed the prototype design submitted by Phineas Graphics that Mr. Canada sent to Commission members prior to the meeting. Mr. Houghton said that he likes the format with the content contained within a distinctive border. Ms. Barker said that the colors are effective and distinctive. Ms. Mitchell said that the colors complement the Town Seal and overall the design succeeds in reflecting historic aesthetics while also looking contemporary. Mr. Merrill referred to comments from his daughter that he had earlier shared with the Commission. He said that he is not keen on the white lettering for the main heading, Mr. Canada expressed a similar reservation. Ms. Mitchell said that she would raise this with the designer who may have some alternate versions for consideration. Mr. Canada said that he thinks this should be “put to bed” and authorization should be given to make a final decision with Phineas Graphics. **Mr. Merrill moved that Ms. Mitchell be authorized to finalize the design and content for a historic marker for the Fire Tower. Ms. Barker seconded. The motion passed unanimously by a roll call vote.**

New Business

Conservation Commission Land Conservation Priorities: Prior to the meeting Mr. Canada distributed a draft revision of the Conservation Commission’s Land Conservation Criteria, a guidance document originally developed by the Ad Hoc Conservation Bond Subcommittee. Ms. Mitchell noted that one of the criteria is whether public access will be included in a proposed easement. She said that sometimes that can be a problem for land that would be desirably preserved, and that legislation and regulations regarding historic preservation commonly use the standard of “public enjoyment” that may or may not include public access. Mr. Canada pointed out that public access is only one criteria and

Mr. Merrill pointed out that only three out of five criteria must be met in the initial evaluation. Mr. Merrill added, and there was enthusiastic consensus, that the Commission appreciates the opportunity to review comment on the Conservation Commission's policy proposal. Ms. Barker noted that having land conserved around historic structures enhances the structures' appeal and competitiveness for grant funds like LCHIP that can help to permanently protect the buildings in the future. The consensus of the Commission is that the guidelines look good, with only two suggestions for improvement: 1. Consider using "public benefit" and/or "public enjoyment" in addition to or in place of "public access." 2. Improve clarity of the two-step evaluation process (page 1 of the document vs. pages 2-3).

Election of Officers for 2020-2021: Mr. Canada nominated Nathan Merrill to be chair. Ms. Mitchell seconded the nomination. On a roll call voted Mr. Merrill abstained while the remaining members each voted Aye. Mr. Merrill nominated, and Mr. Canada seconded Forrest Barker to continue as Treasurer. In a roll call vote Ms. Barker abstained while the remaining members each voted Aye. Mr. Canada nominated, and Mr. Merrill seconded, Tammy Hathaway to continue as Secretary. In a roll call vote all members voted Aye.

Membership: Ms. Mitchell noted that the Commission is allowed three alternate members and at present there are two. She suggested that considering the many projects ahead it would be good to have a full complement of members. Mr. Merrill expressed his agreement.

Oral history query: Mr. Merrill reported receiving a query from a Stratham resident about any ongoing oral history program in Stratham. Ms. Mitchell said that at one time a Communications class at UNH annually conducted oral histories in Stratham and presented them at the Historical Society's Annual Meeting. She further stated that oral histories, like writing town histories, are commonly undertakings of historical societies rather than heritage commissions. Mr. Merrill said that he would respond to the query with that information.

Summer Meeting Schedule: Mr. Canada said that in recent years the Commission had decided to forego meeting in the summer and proposed that the Commission next meet in September or at the call of the Chair. Ms. Mitchell asked Mr. Merrill for his opinion as incoming Chair. He requested that members keep the second Wednesday in June available for meeting and he will cancel if there is no pending business. His primary concern is not losing momentum with the Route 33 Legacy Highway project, and that we might need to convene a meeting to discuss draft zoning language that will be forthcoming from the Ad Hoc Committee.

The meeting adjourned at 8:28 PM

Respectfully submitted,
Rebecca Mitchell, Secretary Pro Tem