

## Historical Preservation Committee

Town of Gorham, Maine

Meeting Minutes

July 10, 2014 5:00p.m.

Committee members present: Councilor Bruce Roullard (Chair), Councilor Sherrie Benner, Town Manager David Cole, Jancie Labrecque, Janet Adams, Marla Stelk and Jane Bell. Absent: Noah Miner.

A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes from the June 12, 2014 Historical Preservation Committee meeting.

### USM Art Gallery

An additional discussion item regarding renovation to the USM Art Gallery building was added to the beginning of the agenda. A concerned Gorham resident informed the committee that USM had removed all historical features of the building in one day during a recent and ongoing renovation of the Art Gallery building. He reported that the building is on the National Historic Register as a building of significance and he wanted to know if there was anything the town could do to stop their activities in light of the building's historical significance. David Cole was asked if USM is exempt from Town ordinances. He reported that yes, they are exempt, but that they usually volunteer information regarding renovation activities in good faith. Janice suggested that we invite USM to our next meeting. The committee agreed that would be a good idea.

### Isaac W. Dyer Estate

Another additional item was added to the beginning of the agenda regarding the efforts of one Gorham resident to preserve a home of historical significance. The owner of the Isaac W. Dyer Estate explained that the house is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and with the Maine Historical Preservation Commission. She reported that there is no tax credit for being listed on the National Historic Register – only if the property is zoned commercial and then you'll be eligible for a tax credit only when the property is sold.

The Maine DOT proposed to construct a bypass through her property via eminent domain, but her property was protected due to its listing. The DOT again wanted to take 15' off the property line and dynamite the edge to drop the level to the level of Fort Hill Road. Once again, the property was protected due to its listing. However, if the town wanted to take the property by eminent domain, they could have because town ordinances would preempt any state or federal historical registry listings.

Getting listed on the National Historic Register took about 2 years to complete. They (she and her husband) spent about \$300k to fully restore the house, including new sills, roof, etc. That expenditure was not, however, a requirement in order to get listed. There are no standards for renovations from the National Historic Register.

### Deb Andrews, Historic Preservation Manager for the City of Portland

Deb Andrews from the City of Portland came to share knowledge with the committee in regard to starting and operating an historic preservation committee. She commented that being listed on the Register is good for recognition but unless federal or state money or licensing is involved, there is no protection with the exception of local ordinances.

She continued to say that the City of Portland took a lot of baby steps in the development of their historic preservation commission and associated codes and ordinances. Greater Portland Landmarks was created after the demolition of Union Station in Portland. In 1990, Portland developed its first preservation ordinance. Portland began by using districts already ID'd by the National Historic Register. The goal was to manage change with national review standards. Individuals were advised to consult with the review board before demolishing an historical building. The advisory review system was set up before ordinances and their decisions were not binding. It was used as an interim step before developing regulations.

A town can adopt a demolition ordinance or a demolition-delay ordinance which opens up the opportunity for negotiation. Plaques, newspaper articles, etc. can celebrate and advertise the town's historic assets. An inventory of historic buildings listed with significant design features can be used for guidance in an advisory role. An advisory board can also provide information on products for historic renovation.

If a local ordinance is certified by the National Parks and the state of Maine, the property owner can take advantage of state and federal tax credits for work done on buildings if they are zoned commercial. Portland hired an outside consultant to create their ordinances. Greater Portland Landmarks has a good list of Q's & A's to address people's fears. Portland has only denied a handful of applicants for projects since 1990. They prefer to work with property owners to develop mutually acceptable designs and plans. In Portland, preservation codes can override regular building codes if not unreasonable. They can also provide oversight and review of City activities and projects.

It can be effective for the town to buy an historic building, fix it up and use it as an example for the community. Gorham could do that with the McClellan House. Towns can create a third party revolving loan fund for renovations, buy properties, fix them up and then sell them back. Cumberland (?) has a "conservation district" that is not a full blown ordinance. It has a lighter touch than a traditional historic preservation ordinance. Portland has a historical resources design handbook/guide with photos and info on how standards are applied – Deb will send us a copy.

### Report out on work done since 6/12 meeting

- Janet brought the owner of the W. Isaac Dyer Estate to share with the committee her experiences with what being on the National Historic Register did and did not do for them.
- Jane and Sherrie still plan to speak with members of the business community about their concerns/interests surrounding historical preservation.

- Marla invited Deb Andrews to speak with the committee today.
- Janice will touch base with the Historical Society and fill them in on our activities.

#### Next Steps

A discussion was held regarding outreach to the greater Gorham community. There seemed to be consensus that it was important to communicate transparently and clearly in order to dispel any potential myths surrounding what having an historical preservation committee and/or ordinances may or may not mean for the community. Bruce would like to hold a public forum in September. There was disagreement regarding how soon and how fully to involve public comment. No new tasks were identified for the committee.

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, August 14 at 5pm.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 6:30p.m.