

Minutes
Meeting of Great Barrington Historical Commission
November 16, 2015
Meeting Room
Great Barrington Fire Station
37 State Road
Great Barrington, MA 01230

ATTENDING:

- *Members:* Marilyn Bisiewicz, Malcolm Fick, Don Howe, Paul Ivory, Gary Leveille, Bill Nappo, David Rutstein

MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 14, 2015

- On a motion by Gary and second by Bill, the September 14, 2015 minutes were approved unanimously

CITIZENS' SPEAK

- Historic Marker Program: Sharon Gregory asked when the plaques are produced for the Historic Marker program. Don replied that there are marker plaques installed on three town buildings: Town Hall, Mason Library and Ramsdell Library. A Historic Marker Oversight Panel, comprised of a representative each from the Historic District Commission, Historical Commission and Historical Society, administers the program and judges applications (which are available, with a program description, on the town website).
- Walking Tours: Sharon presented her idea for walking tours of the town's historic areas and districts, such as the Taconic-West National Register Historic District and the homes in the Castle Hill neighborhood. She downloaded inventories of properties in the Taconic West District from the Massachusetts Historical Commission's MACRIS database but needs more detailed information for accurate, historical and architectural descriptions. Paul will make copies of the National Register Nomination form, replete with scholarly material, to Sharon. Paul also mentioned that a rich future resource for this kind of project will be the updated survey of the town's historic resources, and for which the Commission has applied to the CPA and MHC for funding of the first of three projected phases.

ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY PROJECT

- Paul has submitted Steps 1 and 2 applications to the CDC for a grant of \$15,000 to help fund the first phase of a project to update the historic resources survey of the town. He has also submitted a Letter of Intent to the Massachusetts Historical Commission Survey and Planning Grant Program as the first step in requesting a grant of \$15,000 to match a CPA grant. The total budget is \$36,615 with two \$15,000 requests to CDC and MHC and \$6,615 in in-kind labor by the Historical Commission and other volunteers.
- For Phase 1, Paul estimated the completion of forms for 40-50 new sites and updating 100 sites from the 1985 survey (which includes 463 sites).
- Paul noted that if we are not awarded the MHC grant, some of the work can still be accomplished with CPA funds alone because architectural historian firms usually charge a "piece-work" rate.

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT

- Sharon Gregory noted that the town is retiring debt over the next few years and there should be more funding for community projects. Malcolm stated that the CPA's priority is to support town projects and that it's important for eligible recipients to receive grant information in time for proper planning and submission.
- Paul stated that once documentation of the environmental conditions of the Ramsdell's second floor is completed, a priority CPA project application is stabilizing the temperature and relative humidity in those spaces. He has discussed the eligibility of the project with Karen Smith who felt that it would fit but her chief concern is the long-term use of the building. Bill, the Commission's representative on the CPC, stated that grants have been approved for collection storage at the Wheeler House.
- Sharon felt that a CPA grant could fund walking tour promotional and interpretive signage at the Mason Library and Town Hall which she estimated would cost \$10,000. The signs would promote Malcolm's walking tour app and would feature a bar code scan and download feature.

WALKING TOURS

- Malcolm reported that this spring the walking tour app will publish an additional option of a Great Barrington Trails 3 1/2 mile route around the town. Malcolm has taken photos along the route that will be incorporated into the tour.
- Housatonic Heritage and W.E.B. Dubois National Historic Site presented Dubois walking tours this summer and will produce a virtual tour on-line. The tour will use a photograph supplied by Gary.
- David announced that he will be leading a tour of the Town Hall vicinity on Saturday. The members noted that while the walking tour app provides basic material about a site, David's tours present a more detailed narrative. David will send information about the tour to Bill who will enter on the Commission's Facebook page. David is also producing a tour that centers on the Searles High School, which he termed "the best known building in town."

FY16 BUDGET AND WORK PLAN

- The Commission reviewed the budget and work plan for FY16. Daedalus will conserve the Newsboy monument in the spring, the specific dates to be determined with Paul. Bill will be included in meetings with Joe Sokol and Malcolm will write a letter to the Newseum about the statue and query about any support it might provide.
- The insertion of period photographs onto the Commission's Facebook is an ongoing program.

FY17 BUDGET AND WORK PLAN

- The Commission reviewed the draft budget and work plan, to be submitted to the Town Treasurer by December 1. The budget request \$7,470, the same amount as FY16, with the largest expenditure being \$5,000 to continue hiring a contract archivist.
- The \$995 budgeted in the draft for purchasing the walking tour app license was transferred to the purchase of archival supplies as the three-year fee has been paid through July 2018,
- Progress on the project to draft a walking tour app for "The Hill" depends on Sharon's progress with the project. Marilyn volunteered to assist her. She will show Sharon the blueprints of the Baldwin house which would provide a great visual.
- Don reported that the next major phase of the Historic Marker Program will be the production of standardized design informational/interpretive plaques for historic sites. Sharon suggested the formation of a sub-committee to plan and execute the program. Paul asked Sharon to write a project description and committee charge to ensure that all are working toward the same goals.
- Paul will incorporate the budget edits from the meeting, send copies to members and submit to the town.

ARCHIVIST WORK PLAN

- Members reviewed the archivist's work plan excerpted from the Letter of Agreement.
- On-going projects include such management and care projects as discerning Commission and Society objects, updating inventory forms and upgrading storage conditions.
- Special projects include scanning the Veterans' Graves Inventory book, a WPA project for all cemeteries in Great Barrington, (the book was donated by Buddy Atwood) so it can be indexed and searched, drafting a housekeeping schedule and identifying valuable materials that warrant an insurance rider.
- Marilyn reported that she has organized an oral history program in which eight local women who grew up in Great Barrington help identify the large number of wedding photographs in the Marie Tassone collection.

PLANS FOR RAMSDELL STORAGE SPACES

- The top priority for the town collection is to stabilize the environment in the second floor storage and work spaces. The fluctuations in relative humidity and temperature are extremely deleterious to the artifacts stored there.
- The Commission has undertaken the first step in addressing this problem: documenting the T and RH over the course of a year. This provides the baseline data for the second step, production of a design to stabilize the environment by an environmental engineer. The proposal for a system provided by a professional engineering firm is the documented basis for fund raising proposals.

- Paul will gather contact information on Landmark Facilities Group, Norwalk, CT, a firm that specializes in museums, which he employed while at Chesterwood. Bill will send the names of local firms.

LINKS WITH TOWN FACEBOOK PAGE

- The town web page coordinator, Karen Smith, has asked for a link to our Facebook page with its historical images. Bill will contact Karen and coordinate the link.
- Paul thanked Bill for all his work in overseeing the Commission's Facebook page.

DEMOLITION DELAY BYLAW

- Malcolm recommended that the Commission pursue the passage of a demolition delay bylaw at the 2016 town meeting. Except for more Local Historic Districts, there's very little the town can do to preserve our historic buildings. It wouldn't be a ???????? but a general bylaw and would require a public hearing. Although the controversy the town is experiencing with the present Searles High School is a clear impetus for bringing this forward now, the new bylaw would not affect that building.
- The law applies to buildings that are at least 50 years old and whose owners request a demolition permit from the Building Inspector. The Historical Commission would be required to determine if the structure is historic. If affirmative, a delay of the demolition is instituted. During this breathing space all parties work to find a means to save the building.
- The endorsements of the Selectboard, Planning Board and Historic District Commission need to be sought. The Selectboard, which is required to approve of the measure, would need to hold a public hearing. Malcolm will bring the proposal to the Planning Board.
- Malcolm will draft a motion for the next Commission meeting.
- Two members of the audience spoke in favor of the proposal, noting that historic buildings are money makers; their preservation is clearly linked with tourist dollars coming into town. Too, demolition of our heritage doesn't leave us with the kind of town we want.

SEARLES HIGH SCHOOL MEDIA RELEASE

- Ed Abrahams asked if the information in the Commission's recent media release on the significance of the Searles property was the same as the findings letter sent to the developer. Attorney Kate McCormick asked if was based upon deliberations at a Commission meeting. Paul Ivory replied that it was basically the same information that was included in its findings letter but with some editing to enhance the understanding of the content. Sharon Gregory commented that the release helps to clarify why the site is appreciated.

OTHER BUSINESS

- The town web administrator requested a group photo of the Commission. Heather Bellow of the Edge took the photo and forwarded it to Karen Smith.
- Paul collected the completed Conflict of Interest forms from the members.

NEXT MEETING DATE

- Monday, January 11, 2016, 7:00 pm at a site to be determined.

ADJOURN

- Motion made, seconded and passed unanimously.



