

Minutes
Meeting of Great Barrington Historical Commission
December 13, 2010, 7:00 p.m.
Great Barrington Fire Station

ATTENDING: Marilyn Bisiewicz, Don Howe, Paul Ivory, Gary Leveille, David Rutstein

REVIEW OF DUTIES OF LOCAL HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Using the “Historical Commissions; Establishment, Powers and Duties” section in *Powers and Duties of Cities and Towns* chapter of Massachusetts General Laws, members reviewed the various functions of the Historical Commission. In general, the law gives a local commission generous latitude to set its own direction, priorities, projects and programs.

Provisions in the law included:

1. Purposes of a Commission
 - A. Preservation. Protection and development of the historical or archaeological assets of the town.
 - B. Conduct researches for places of historic or archaeological value.
 - C. Cooperate with the state archaeologist in conducting above research and other surveys.
 - D. Coordinate the activities of unofficial bodies organized for similar purposes.
 - E. Publish: Advertise, prepare, print and distribute books, maps, charts, plans and pamphlets deemed necessary for its work.
 - F. Make recommendations to the selectmen and Massachusetts Historical Commission for a place to be certified as an historical or archaeological landmark.
 - G. Report the discovery of any archaeological, paleontological or historic site or object discovered in accordance with section 27 of Chapter 9 and apply for appropriate permits
 - H. Hold hearings
 - I. Enter into contracts
 - J. Accept gifts
 - K. Make and sign agreements
 - L. Minutes: Keep accurate records of meetings
 - M. File an annual report
 - N. Acquire, in the name of the town, and manage real or personal property of significant historical value.
2. Membership
 - A. Consist of not less than three nor more than seven members.
 - B. Appointed by the Town Manager, subject to the approval of the selectmen.
 - C. Members’ terms staggered to be one, two or three years.

REVIEW OF NATIONAL REGISTER DEFINITIONS

Because the protective and recognition benefits of the National and State Registers are crucial historic preservation tools that the Commission exploits in the town, members reviewed the definition, operation and affect of these programs.

National Register of Historic Places

- **Definition:** the nation's official list of buildings, districts, sites, structures and objects important in American history, culture, architecture or archaeology. In MA it is administered by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) on behalf of the National Park Service.

The National Register includes:

>National Park historic sites and areas

>*National Historic Landmarks:* sites of national significance, important to all Americans.

>Sites and districts significant to nation, state or community that have been nominated by the states and federal agencies

- **Local Historical Commission's Role:** it is one of our duties to compile and maintain a comprehensive local inventory of significant sites and structures. There is a copy of the Great Barrington inventory in the Mason Library. The Commission is also responsible for preparing National Register nomination forms and submitting to MHC for consideration. MHC also permits property owners to complete the forms as well. All NR properties are documented and evaluated according to uniform standards of the Secretary of the Interior.
- **MHC's Role:** review applications, which are presented to the State Review Board, which votes on forwarding it to the National Park Service for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.
- **State Register of Historic Places:** sites listed on the National Register are automatically included on the State Register.
- **Criteria for Inclusion on the National Register** Properties must meet at least one of the following:
 - >Association with significant historical events
 - >Association with significant persons
 - >Distinguished architecture
 - >Sites that can yield significant historical information
- **Benefits of Listing on the National Register**
 - >*Recognition:* of the property's significance to the community (state or nation)
 - >*Tax Incentives:* owners of income-producing properties are eligible for federal tax breaks for substantial rehabs.
 - >*Protection:* against adverse effects of federally and state funded projects.
 - >*Grants:* non-profit and municipal owners of listed sites are eligible for state matching grants.

Note: listing on the Register doesn't interfere with an owner's rights to alter the property. If the owner uses state or federal funds to work on his/her property, the work will be reviewed by MHC.

Historic Districts: There are two categories:

1. National Register District
 - Is part of the National Register of Historic Places.
 - Listing affords identical benefits and features.

2. Local Historic Districts
 - A locally appointed Historic District Commission makes determination if proposed exterior changes are appropriate.
 - Designation provides effective means to enforce preservation of architectural integrity.

ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Paul Ivory was elected chairman for a term of one year. He will also prepare and distribute the minutes.

MEMBERSHIP ROSTER

Members edited and entered pertinent contact information on a draft roster. The final version will be distributed via e-mail and at the next meeting.

RECRUITING NEW MEMBERS

Members will ponder the names of potential recruits and encourage any well-qualified candidates to e-mail the Town Manager. Paul will ask Mike Fitzpatrick about his interest.

MEETING SCHEDULE

The Commission agreed to convene every other month at a 7:00 p.m. meeting time. The Mason Library was suggested as an alternate meeting site, if the spaces in the Town Hall or Fire Station are not available. David has a key.

BROADBAND REQUEST TO THE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (MTC), via the Town Manager, has requested the Historical Commission's comments on the Great Barrington section of their *MassBroadband 123* project to install a fiber optic cable in western and north central Massachusetts. The project description and map provided by MTC doesn't provide sufficient details about the location of its equipment in Great Barrington. Kevin O'Donnell and the MTC representative have offered to appear at an upcoming meeting. Paul will e-mail Kevin about setting up a meeting.

HISTORICAL COMMISSION SUBMISSION OF ANNUAL REPORT FOR TOWN REPORT

In accordance with the state law and the official duties of the Historical Commission, the Commission is required submit an annual report to the town for inclusion in the Annual Town Report. Paul will prepare the report and submit by the January 14, 2011 deadline.

HISTORICAL COMMISSION PROJECTS, PLANS, PRIORITIES

Members discussed potential ideas for the HC work program for 2011.

- Historical Commission Artifact and Archival Collections to Historical Society: The objects and archival materials the HC had assembled since its founding, c. 1973, are presently located in the Great Barrington Historical Society's storage area on the second

floor of the Ramsdell Library. The GBHS inventory designates those items owned by the HC. Members agreed that because the GBHS has been exercising curatorial care of this collection the HC needs to consider two options:

1. *Help Fund the Care*: by including a line in the HC annual budget.
2. *Deed the Collection to the GBHS*: because that organization is better equipped to preserve, study, research, and catalogue the collection and to make it available for public use and enjoyment, it would be in the best interests of both the historic materials and the town to give it to the HS.

Next steps should include: obtaining a copy of the inventory to document the collection's contents; discussing the proposals with the GBHS and preparing a Letter of Agreement clarifying the goals, care and funding to be provided for the project; affirming that the GBHS would accept the material; conferring with the MHC, Town Manager and Town Counsel about the legality and proper procedures for the conveyance, and implementing the transfer.

- Great Barrington Fire Station: is part of [Massachusetts] Local District A (Downtown Historic District) and is thus subject to the mandatory determination of the appropriateness of any exterior alterations by the Historic District Commission. Some members expressed concern that, for whatever reason, the Town has not consistently submitted to this important preservation oversight. Members agreed with the need to effect fitting measures to help assure compliance with this obligation.
- Documentation and Salvage Archaeology for Main Street Renovation Project: Paul will call MHC to inquire about the HC's response to the opportunities to document the physical past of Main Street's roadbed when excavation exposes such transportation archaeology as trolley tracks, dump sites, granite pavers, etc. Coordination with the Town Manager, DPW and contractor to alert the HC when features are uncovered and to gain access for salvaging materials and/or documenting with photographs is a practicable approach. Too, MHC needs to clarify the extent to which the Local Historic District oversight measures apply to the street and sidewalks in those protected areas.
- Protection of the Great Wigwam and Other Sites: knowing the exact location of historic sites is fundamental to being able to deliver protective measures. The traditional location of the Great Wigwam, probably a glacial deposit and which was venerated by Native Americans, is off North Plain Rd.
- Complete National Register Nomination Forms: needs to be an ongoing goal. Steps include: reviewing the town inventory, selecting priorities, conferring with MHC about procedures, especially any requirements that professional architectural historians complete the forms, and designing a program to execute the project.
- Historic Site Marker Program: is a very effective way of building public awareness of the town's historical assets. Steps would include: consulting the town inventory and one compiled by Mike Fitzpatrick; selecting sites; consulting sign bylaws; determining the format (i.e. plaques, free-standing markers, etc.); selecting priorities; designing the

markers; researching and writing copy; acquiring funding; fabrication and installation; maintenance.

- Historic Preservation Awards Program: would provide special recognition of private and public property owners for sensitive stewardship and/or preservation or restoration of their historic sites or for actions that promote historic preservation in the town. Considerations include: developing categories and criteria, creating a timeline, designing the award and producing publicity and the presentation ceremonies.
- Documentation of Sites That Are Threatened or Slated for Demolition: Over the years the town has lost important buildings, such as the rustic log house on the corner of Berkshire Heights and Barrington Place and interesting architectural details, such as the Eastlake style balustrade on the Taconic Street railroad bridge. If the HC can't find means to preserve these pieces of history, it's important we document them through rescuing architectural fragments and/or photography. Perhaps some sort of handshake agreement with the Building Inspector to alert the HC about impending demolitions would be helpful.
- Heightening Appreciation of Historical Assets: The HC needs to develop programs that enhance the public's sensitivity and appreciation of the town's rich architectural and historical resources. Such activities as the GBHS lectures, walking tours and public programs and Gary's weekly series of articles in the *Record* all contribute to this goal, however, more needs to be done. The HC needs to explore other means that would encourage people to look at the beauty around them and boost their sensitivity to our built environment and inculcate a preservation, rather than a tear-it-down mindset. The marker and awards program, already discussed, would clearly contribute to this goal as would a series of articles, such as "Where is Great Barrington," with photos of architectural details and encouraging readers to figure out where they are in the town.

OTHER BUSINESS

1. Human Bones Recovered from Housatonic River: There has been no notification of the results of the state's forensic anthropological study of the human bones discovered this June. They may be from a cemetery that is undocumented. Gary will draft a letter from Paul inquiring about the status of the examination.
2. Town Master Plan: Paul is the HC representative on the town master plan committee. Preservation of the Town's historical character and assets should be an important component of the plan. Past plans have included historic preservation measures. The HC will be consulted as the plan unfolds.

NEXT MEETING: Monday, February 7, 2011 at 7pm. Paul will notify about the meeting site.

ADJOURN