

Minutes  
Meeting of Great Barrington Historical Commission  
January 6, 2014  
Great Barrington Town Hall, Selectmen's Meeting Room

ATTENDING:

- *Members:* Malcolm Fick, Don Howe, Paul Ivory, Gary Leveille, Bill Nappo, David Rutstein
- *Guests:* Chris Rembold, Town Planner; Debbie Oppermann, Executive Director, Great Barrington Historical Society

MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 4, 2013

- The minutes were accepted unanimously.

RAMSDELL LIBRARY NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION

- In response to a letter from the National Register office at the Massachusetts Historical Commission, Paul will submit a GBHC letter in support of the nomination.

STATUS OF FILLING ARCHIVIST POSITION

- The original potential candidate has withdrawn her interest due to a scheduling conflict with another job. The librarian who expressed interest in the position is still unsure about pursuing the position until she learns the results of her application to another position.
- Gary will contact Margaret Cherin to check her availability and interest.

PRESERVATION STRATEGIES FOR HOUSATONIC SCHOOL: Chris Rembold

One of the proposals to purchase the school in 2010 and 2011 indicated that tax credits were crucial to a successful project. If the building is to be saved, the financing scheme needs to include eligibility for Historic Tax Credits - unless an ultra-rich developer can do it on his/her own. To qualify, the building needs to be on the National Register or eligible to be listed. Chris asked the Commission if it can help get the school eligible or listed. This is the most direct path to help attract a serious developer.

The school is neither on any state nor, incomprehensibly, local (c. 1985) survey. It is not listed on MACRIS.

Chris asked the Commission to complete the inventory form as the prerequisite step to ascertaining eligibility. As a general rule MHC prefers completing a town-wide survey first but will consider individual sites if there's a potential for redevelopment.

Paul will contact MHC about the steps needed to make it eligible. The next step is researching the building so an inventory form can be completed. David will check past town reports for historical information.

STATUS OF COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT GUIDELINES

- The Community Preservation [Act] Committee is drafting an RFP for projects it can fund. It will be a two-phased process: preliminary application followed by selection of projects for the next level.
- The Committee should be issuing its guidelines by the end of February and after a public hearing. Bill will share the draft guidelines once they're issued.

- The Selectmen and Finance Committee will decide if a project should be funded by the CPA or town capital funds or if it should be included in the regular town budget.
- Since 40% of the total fund (\$400,000 this year) is mandated for historical projects, there will be \$40,000 available for distribution.

#### PLAN AND FUNDING FOR TOWN-WIDE ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY

- The next step is to prepare a scope of work and cost estimate and seek funding.
- To complete at least the first phase of the town-wide survey, the Commission's plan was to apply for both CPA funds and a state Planning and Survey grant for a match. However, for the current year, only Certified Local Governments are eligible to apply for the latter. Chris noted that CPA funds don't require a match.

#### PLAN AND FUNDING FOR NEWSBOY FOUNTAIN RESTORATION

- The Daedalus conservation treatment proposal and cost estimate is on file.
- The Commission submitted the conservation work as a capital project in the FY15 town budget. Chris recommended pursuing the CPA for funding because it's a historical project and a purpose of the program is to relieve the town budget for such projects.

#### COLLECTIONS AND RAMSDELL LIBRARY PROJECT

- Paul continues to draft a report to the Town Manager and Library Board presenting the importance, plans and needs of the Town Historical Collection, and an assessment of the various locations that will meet the mission of the Commission and stewardship and interpretive goals for the objects and archives. He will fold the current three pieces into one stand-alone document.
- The 2010 architectural plans and specifications for the renovation of the Ramsdell Library include drainage and access to the basement.
- The potential goal the library board has cited for the Ramsdell is to preserve the building as a community center, not just a library. As patronage declines, making the spaces available for community purposes, such as storage and exhibition of the Town Historical Collection, will clearly help preserve this historical building.
- The Historical Commission envisions museum storage in the basement, exhibitions on the first floor and public programming on the third floor.

#### FYs 14 and 15 BUDGET AND WORK PROGRAM SALIENT PROJECTS AND OBJECTIVES

- Salvage Archaeology for Main St. Reconstruction Project: Paul will contact the state archaeologist for any guidelines that might exist for this sort of project. We envision an informal arrangement with the construction foreman to alert a member of the GBHC of any areas of interest that are uncovered. In previous work, Gary rescued stone pavers from Wilkinson Construction.
- Purchase Archival Supplies: Gary has already made purchases from University Products.
- Smartphone Walking Tour App: Malcolm and Marilyn are working on family fun type activities and will report at the next meeting.
- Planning for Demolition Delay Bylaw: Since it is too late to make necessary preparations for a 2014 town meeting warrant, we should look to next year's meeting. The Selectmen and Planning Board need to support the bylaw. Sheffield is drafting a bylaw now. Don has spoken with Chris Skelly about holding a demolition delay seminar for the HDC, HC, Selectmen and Planning Board in the summer or early fall.

- Mahaney Gift: Exhibition of Pieces from Ruth Baldwin Collection: The membership gratefully acknowledged the work of Marilyn and Bill in planning and mounting the very informative exhibition in the Mason Library.

#### HISTORIC MARKER PROGRAM

- Paul is working on the latest draft of the program guidelines.
- Gary volunteered to fill the Historical Commission slot on the review panel.
- Don reported that the HDC will apply to the CPA for a grant to fund plaques to be placed on town-owned buildings in local historic districts.

#### PLANNING BOARD PROPOSAL FOR A BYLAW FOR HOSTELRIES IN HISTORIC BUILDINGS: Malcolm Fick

Malcolm reported that the Planning Board is proposing a bylaw to increase the authorized sleeping capacity of hostelries in historic properties by eliminating the ceiling on the number of beds. This does not apply to historic buildings not used as hotels or B&Bs. The purpose is to enhance the economic viability, preservation potential and adaptive usability of old buildings as hostelries. For example, a developer would be able to use Searles Castle, Monument Mills or other buildings deemed historic by the Historic District Commission or the Historical Commission, as inns. The bylaw will give flexibility for use of historic buildings and facilitate their redevelopment.

#### EXHIBITION IDEA: David Rutstein

David suggested a special exhibition on the same theme as the Smithsonian Institution's *101 Objects that Made America*. A Great Barrington version of this idea could feature 30 to 40 objects representing individuals, events, structures, businesses, etc. that shaped the town. Such objects could include the program from the opening of the Mahaiwe Theater, a slate shingle from the original Searles Castle roof, a Stanley thermos bottle and the program for the Great Barrington High School commencement exercise for the class of 1884, that included W.E.B. Dubois. The membership all agreed that this was a wonderful idea. David will work on fleshing out a program for the exhibit.

#### NEXT MEETING

- Monday March 3, 2014 at 7pm at site to be determined.

#### ADJOURN