

TOWN OF GREAT BARRINGTON  
MASSACHUSETTS



**GREAT BARRINGTON HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION**  
**Regular Meeting Minutes from October 20th, 2016**

Town Hall

6:30 pm

**Attendees-**

Donald Howe, Chair  
James Mercer, Vice-Chair  
Holly Troiano, Secretary  
Barbara Syer, Member  
Patricia Ryan, Alternate  
Abby Schroder, Alternate (Left @ 7:45 pm)

Benchmark Development- Michael Charles, Brian Cohan and their attorney Nick Arienti.  
John Dewey Academy- Robert Gaughran and Attorney Jeffrey Cook.  
Chris Rembold, Town Planner  
Members of the Public including the Press.

**Meeting opened and called to order by Chair Howe at 6:30pm.**

**MEETING MINUTES**

Motion made by Barbara Syer to approve Minutes from the Special September 29<sup>th</sup> Meeting as written with a second by Holly Troiano. All present voted in favor.

**PUBLIC HEARING**

Motion to open public hearing on Application by Benchmark Development for Site Review of Proposed Improvements to a parcel of land of the Searles Castle Property by Barbara Syer with a second by Holly Troiano. All present voted in favor.

Chair Howe noted a Site Visit by the HDC to the proposed site had taken place on the previous Tuesday October 18<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 pm. Members Howe, Mercer, Troiano, Ryan and Schroeder attended. Vice-Chair Mercer confirmed that the Design Advisory Committee had reviewed this proposed parcel along with the adjoining parcel with the building on Bridge Street.

Chair Howe give a summary of conversations that Vice-Chair Mercer and he had with the Development Team prior to the Site Visit and this Public Hearing. Discussions included comments on the original Powerhouse for Searles Castle on an adjoining property and preservation of the large foundations at the easterly side of the former Dry Cleaner's Building.

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Chair Howe also noted that when the proposed development will be one parcel in the future combining the present two parcels. At that point, the HDC will have reviewed only of the overlay portion and this will remain in effect and any future review will be limited to the same overlay portion.

**Benchmark Development-** Attorney Nick Arienti introduced Michael Charles as presenter of the proposed development. The Site Plan was the item under review at this public hearing. The three to four story building will be able for review in the future. The mixed-use development is allowed as part of an overlay zoning district. The Planning Board will be reviewing the plans for compliance with the code and recommendation to the Selectboard for their special permit review.

**John Dewey Academy-** Attorney Jeffrey Cook for the School noted the thirty-one years of stewardship by the Bratter family has been challenging with owning the complex and thus responsible for its Blue Dolomite surfaces. Carol Bratter, Owner and Bobby Gaughran, Head of Buildings were present affirming the family commitment to the operation of the School.

**Public Comments-**

Ed Abrahams of the Selectboard spoke the need for the proposed project was something good and needed by the Town, but also sympathetic to the historic significance of Searles Castle.

Paul Ivory of the Historical Commission spoke of the historic importance of the Powerhouse which was the original generating plant for the Castle and some adjoining properties. He also noted that the Quonset hut addition of the 1950s has significance as well.

Sally Harris of the St. James Place Development spoke of how she felt that the project will have an overwhelming detrimental impact to the Castle complex.

Tom Lovett of Berkshire Properties Real Estate spoke in favor of the economic benefit to the Town.

Motion made by Holly Troiano that the Public Hearing be closed and seconded by Barbara Syer. Motion passed with members Howe, Mercer, Troiano, Syer, and Ryan voting in favor.

**Commission Review-** Chair Howe noted that he feels that the proposed building is not in keeping with the present parklike setting adjoining the Carriage House of Searles Castle. The Board had discussions on appropriateness and hardship approvals. The Town Planner raised an

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issue on quorum in the Bylaws. Chair Howe continued with the quorum definition that is part of the Historic District Commission Rules & Regulations.

Motion made by Holly Troiano that proposed Site Plan was Appropriate and motion seconded by James Mercer. Motion failed with members Mercer, Troiano and Ryan voting in favor and members Howe and Syer opposed of issuing a Certificate of Appropriateness.

A second motion made by James Mercer that proposed Site Plan was appropriate under a Certificate of Hardship and motion seconded by Holly Troiano. Motion passed with members Howe, Mercer, Troiano and Ryan voting in favor and member Syer opposed. A Certificate of Hardship will be issued for the Site Plan phase of the proposed development.


**NEW BUSINESS**

John Dewey Academy has submitted to the Commission an Application for Replacement of their Main Street Entrance at Searle Castle. This item will be on the agenda at the next HDC meeting.

Motion to adjourn by Holly Troiano with a second by Barbara Syer. All present voted in favor.

Next HDC Regular Meeting is scheduled for December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 at 6:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

  
Donald V. Howe, Chair  
February-28-2017