

Minutes of the Princeton Historical Commission
October 16, 2008

Attendees: Joyce Anderson, Sheila Dubman and Alex Fiandaca

New Business

Town Plan Implementation

- Members discussed the items in the Implementation Plan Guide that specify the Commission's involvement:
 - 1) Adopting the Community Preservation Act (Phase 1 item 1) and
 - 2) Seeking financial and technical assistance to support Princeton's preservation efforts (Phase 1 item 7).

- Members discussed additional Implementation items of interest including:
 - 3) Zoning bylaw to establish East Princeton and Worcester Road as Industrial districts (Phase 2 item 1),
 - 4) Zoning bylaw to allow accessory apartments (Phase 2 item 2) and
 - 5) Zoning bylaw to allow conversion of single family homes into multi-unit dwellings (Phase 2 item 3).
 - 6) Plan to develop a master facilities plan and asset management plan for town-owned property (Phase 3 item 6)

- Not included in the Implementation Plan (but discussed during Master Plan meetings):
 - 7) Adoption of a demolition-delay bylaw.

Responses to Implementation Plan items

- 1) The Freedom's Way Heritage Landscape Reconnaissance report was suggested as a tool for gaining support and drafting a Community Preservation Plan.

- 2) Alex presented some thoughts on Mechanics Hall (attached) to help initiate the process of finding a resolution for the building. Members agreed that the Commission's role was not to lead a preservation effort but to support such an effort by providing guidance on available grants should the town decide to do so. Likewise, if the town chose to sell, the Commission would provide guidance on preservation restrictions geared toward preserving the historic integrity of the building. The current lack of grounds maintenance at Mechanics Halls and the impact on the surrounding residential area was also discussed. Members agreed the town should take responsibility of at keeping the area tidy by maintaining the shrubs and driveway. The possibility of a volunteer effort to paint the façade was also mentioned.

- 3, 4, 5) Members agreed to inform the Implementation Committee of the Commission's interest in the proposed zoning bylaws. Of particular concern is the impact of apartments on the houses on the town common, specifically, placement of fire escapes, on-street parking and increased noise and traffic. It was pointed out that while our concerns about apartments are many, we should limit our input to concerns relating to historic integrity.

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- 6) Members would like to see the restoration of the second floor of Bagg Hall included in a master facilities program
 - 7) As of September 18th, per building inspector John Wilson, the Commission has been added to the signatory list for demolition permits for buildings older than 50 years. A demolition delay-by-law will be pursued for the May town meeting. Memebers wondered how this by-law would come about and the process was estimated as follows: At the Commission's request, the Implementation Committee will bring the issue to the Planning Board. The Planning Board will likely ask Judy Barrett, (Town Plan consultant) to initiate drafting the by-law. The Planning Board will then put the bylaw on the warrant for town meeting.
- A meeting with Chris Skelley (from MHC) will be planned in the new year to learn more about demolition delay bylaws and preservation restrictions.

Old Business

Plaques for National Historic Register Districts

- Members will meet November 5th to finalize plaque designs and continue scouting possible sites.

Meetinghouse Cemetery

- This fall's phase of conservation is underway. Workshop feedback from our conservator, Ta Mara Conde, was very positive. She informed Alex that we were the hardest working and most enthusiastic group she has led.

Next Regular Meeting: November 13th, 5 PM Town Hall Annex

Additional Meetings:

8:05 PM Tuesday, October 21th Implementation Committee (Thomas Prince School Library)

3:00PM Wed Nov. 5th PHC meeting at the Annex to discuss NR Plaque locations and plaque designs

7:30 PM Wednesday Nov. 19th Planning Board (Annex) to discuss proposed Accessory Apartment Bylaw

6:45 PM Thursday, November 20st All Boards meeting

December 18th PHC meeting Discuss the agenda for January Selectboard meeting

January 5th Selectboard Meeting: Discuss Mechanics Hall and Demolition Delay Bylaw

Respectfully submitted, Alex Fiandaca

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Mechanics Hall

As Mechanics Hall stands vacant, it runs the risk of falling into further disrepair and becoming a target for vandals.

Many groups and individuals share the goal of finding a resolution for Mechanics Hall.

A Mechanics Hall Study Committee survey revealed that many residents are in favor of restoring Mechanics Hall as a town-owned building.

Town officials and those who have participated in the Town Plan (members of both Historic Preservation and Community Facilities and Maintenance elements) and Freedom Trail Heritage Landscape Inventory Program, have had the opportunity to more closely scrutinize the property. These people have observed that while the building is structurally sound, there are several issues that would make this a very expensive restoration.

There are many arguments for and against keeping Mechanics Hall as a town-owned building, and until all arguments are allowed to be heard there will be no consensus and no progress.

Princeton's Reconnaissance report from the Freedom Trail program includes guidance on seeking a re-use plan for Mechanics Hall, which might be worthwhile first step.

One option discussed by the Historic Commission is the possibility of selling Mechanics Hall with preservation restrictions that will require the next owner to maintain the historic integrity of the building. Restrictions must be very carefully worded and applied in perpetuity to fully protect the building. Too loose a restriction could, in an extreme but not impossible circumstance, allow the façade to be maintained while the rest of the building is destroyed.

Should the town choose to restore Mechanics Hall or sell/rent to a third party who wished to do so, the Historic Commission could serve as a resource for guidance on available preservation tools such as preservation grants and rehabilitation tax credits.

AF 10/16/08