

Stratham Heritage Commission

Meeting Minutes

May 1, 2014 at 7:00 pm

Land Use Conference Room

Present: Rebecca Mitchell, Nathan Merrill, Janet Johnson, Tammy Hathaway, MJ Werner, Florence Wiggin

Convened: 7:03 pm by Chairman Mitchell

Alternates: Chair appointed Flossie Wiggin and Tammy Hathaway to serve as voting members when MJ Werner and Janet Johnson left at 8:30 pm.

Minutes: April 9, 2014 meeting minutes were approved as amended.

OLD BUSINESS

Treasurer's Report: No update due to town bookkeeper's two-week vacation.

Bartlett-Cushman House:

- 1.) On April 23rd, the Heritage Commission was notified by the NH Division of Historical Resources (NHDHR) that they determined that the Bartlett-Cushman House is eligible for the National Register. We should hear if the B-C House application is approved by the U.S. Dept. of Interior (National Park Service) in late summer.
- 2.) On April 25th, Becky completed and hand-delivered our Conservation License Plate (i.e. "Moose Plate") grant application to Concord. Our request of \$10,000 would partially fund roof replacement.
- 3.) The Board of Selectmen received a request from a town resident to use his metal detector on the B-C grounds. **Consensus opinion of the HC is that there should be no disturbance of the site unless required for maintenance/repair of the property, or a formal supervised archeological dig.**

Regional HC & HDC Meeting:

The April 12th meeting hosted by our own Commission at the firehouse was a success, with 27 participants representing 7 seacoast area communities. Maggie Stier of the NH Preservation Alliance was keynote speaker, and a representative of Rockingham Regional Planning Commission spoke briefly about their efforts to create a regional historic resources master plan. The next regional meeting will be hosted by Exeter, at a date TBD.

Planning Board:

- 1.) Proposed telecommunications tower at 313 Portsmouth Avenue: Nadine Petersen of NH Division of Historic Resources informed Chairman Mitchell that EBI Consulting (responsible for Varsity Wireless' due diligence in the tower application process) had failed to adequately complete the required field reconnaissance for identifying historical resources greater than 50 years old within the project's "Area of Impact" (0.5 mile radius around the proposed tower).

Janet Johnson moved, with second by MJ Werner: "The Heritage Commission requests that the Planning Board not take action on the Varsity Wireless application at 313 Portsmouth Avenue, so that we are allowed adequate time to investigate various mitigation options to help offset the negative visual impacts the proposed tower would have on surrounding historic properties, particularly Saltbox Farm and Stratham Hill Park." Motion passed unanimously. Becky will also contact Dan Crow of the Stratham Hill Park Association to see if his committee would consider making a similar statement.

Furthermore, **Janet Johnson moved, with second by MJ Werner: "The Heritage Commission urges the Planning Board to disallow the telecommunications tower application at 313 Portsmouth Avenue until the existing non-conforming site use is made compliant with the property owners' original Zoning Board of Adjustment approval." Motion passed unanimously.**

2.) Scamman Farm building permit application: Nathan Merrill reported that local hay and pumpkin farmer Kirk Scamman applied recently for a building permit to construct a hay and machinery storage barn on his parents' farm at 69 Portsmouth Avenue. The structure as proposed would be of all steel construction. Kirk and his brother Bruce appeared before the Technical Review Committee because of the proposed structure's location in the Gateway Commercial Business District Zone. There are some back-and-forth negotiations ongoing between the Scammans and the Planning Department regarding the design, building materials, and siting of the proposed structure so as to minimize its visual impact on the landscape. Nathan is concerned that a local farm is being unduly burdened with costly Gateway design requirements, which in his opinion (as a former Gateway Master Plan Committee member) were never intended for agricultural uses.

Consensus of Heritage Commission members at the May 1 meeting was that they regard protecting, supporting and promoting agriculture as part of the Commission's charge to preserve the culture (perhaps best understood as the community character) of Stratham. With that in mind we urge the Planning Board and Town staff to take all possible steps to facilitate the application to erect a new hay and equipment storage barn at 69 Portsmouth Avenue. The Commission further wishes to state that, in its view, the Gateway design guidelines were not created with agricultural uses in mind. The Commission urges the Technical Review Committee (TRC) to work with the applicant toward a barn design and siting that does not place an undue burden on the applicant both with respect to cost and to potential effect upon farm operations. The Commission further urges the TRC to eschew adding non-functional design elements such as ersatz hay loft doors and cupolas. An unpainted metal roof will weather to an unobtrusive surface. Of elements that might improve the design at minimal cost, we suggest that light colored siding is preferable compared to a darker color that would fade, and a slight increase in roof pitch and overhang would improve the structure's outward appearance.

Membership:

Chairman Mitchell welcomed new member Tammy Hathaway to the group. She also announced that Janet Johnson will soon be resigning from her HC seat due to business and family commitments, so we will be seeking a new member to replace her sometime in the near future.

300th Anniversary Committee Report:

Floss Wiggin reported that a fundraising yard sale will be held on 5/14/14, and the Navy Band will perform at Exeter High School on 11/9/14 to raise additional funds. The new town history book is nearing

completion. It is supposed to be finished and sent off to the printer in autumn of this year. The committee received 75 entries for the new town motto contest.

NEW BUSINESS

Nomination for Technical Review Committee:

Town Planner Lincoln Daley informed Becky that the HC is supposed to have a representative serving on the TRC, which reviews development and building proposals in the Gateway and Town Center districts.

Chairman Mitchell moved, with second from Florence Wiggin, that Nathan Merrill serve as the HC representative on the TRC. Motion passed.

RSA 79-E and Town Center Opportunities:

Chairman Mitchell discussed the state-authorized temporary property tax relief program for property owners who invest in historic structures. The HC hopes that this program might present some opportunities for redevelopment and preservation of our Town Center district historic structures. Particular concern was expressed for the future of the former Town Hall, which represents an unusual architectural style for a New Hampshire Town Hall.

Goals for 2014:

Nathan submitted several possible goals for consideration by the Commission. Becky read through them and there was discussion. Given the late hour discussion will be continued at a future meeting, but it was noted that Heritage Preservation Fund money could be used to pay for a consultant to complete an "Area Form" that would inventory the Portsmouth Avenue corridor from the northern end of the Gateway zone to the Greenland town line. Documentation such as this could help in future cases such as the current telecommunications tower application at 313 Portsmouth Avenue.

Next Meeting: June 11, 2014

Adjourned: 9:15 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Nathan Merrill
Secretary/Treasurer