

**STURBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION**  
*MINUTES*  
**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2016**

Ms. Search called the meeting of the Historical Commission to order at 6:00 PM.

The following members were present:

**Present:** Sandra Fallon  
Barbara Search, Chair  
Bill Smith  
Richard Volpe, Vice-Chair

**Also Present:** Jean M. Bubon, Town Planner

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the demolition permit requested for the structure at 362 Main Street (commonly known as Bentley's Pub) and to determine if that structure is a "Significant Building" as defined in Section 2.31 of the Demolition Delay Bylaw of the Town of Sturbridge.

Ms. Search began the meeting by explaining the requirements of the Demolition Delay Bylaw and the conduct of the meeting. She read the definition of Significant Building from the bylaw as follows:

**Significant Building** – Any building within the town which is in whole or in part 100 years or more old and which has been determined by the Commission or its designee to be significant based on any of the following criteria:

- ✓ The Building is listed on, or is within an area listed on, the National Register of Historic Places; or
- ✓ The Building has been found eligible for the National Register of Historic Places; or
- ✓ The Building is importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the Town or the Commonwealth; or
- ✓ The Building is historically or architecturally important (in terms of period, style method of building construction or association with a recognized architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings.

Ms. Search then asked the members if they would like to offer their thoughts on how this definition may or may not apply to this building.

Mr. Volpe stated that he thought the building was significant, especially in terms of the fourth point. He did believe the building was both architecturally and culturally important since this was a gathering area for people from all over during the agricultural period. He

also thought this was perhaps the only such Exhibition Hall still in existence in the State; which also lent significance to the structure.

Ms. Fallon indicated that she thought the building was architecturally significant and it is a unique architectural piece.

Mr. Smith believed the building was significant from an architectural standpoint. He noted there had been minor modifications over time, but it did not impact the structure's significance.

Ms. Search stated that the building was constructed in about 1868. Prior to that the Agricultural Society paid to build a second floor on the Town Hall for its use, but soon outgrew that space and constructed the Exhibition Hall. The Fair was a major attraction at that time and contributed to the development of the community as people used the Worcester Stafford Turnpike, the Baypath and Route 131 to come to the Fair. When people visited they came to know the lakes and the area and it encouraged settlement and development to happen here. The trolley was in existence and the Fair helped to enhance the transportation system.

Ms. Search also noted that this was an imposing, large structure. The building was also not owned by just one family; this was the hub of the common people where they could gather, learn and share. She thought this was a culturally iconic structure. She certainly thought this building was culturally significant and would perhaps qualify for uniqueness of architecture.

Ms. Search then asked if anyone from the public would like to be heard.

Marilyn Diesi of 489 Main Street indicated that there was a lot written about the Fair and the Exhibition Hall in Brian Burns Book – Pictorial Sturbridge. The book covers the period from about 1888-1937 and discusses a variety of uses there including the Fair, races, balloon landings and a midway. She thought it was significant that this building was the only thing left of the fairgrounds and that it was important to keep.

Bob Briere of 50 Arnold Road showed the Commission members a variety of photographs of what once was at the site. Uses range from a Ride In Theater, to horse racing, to Indian Motorcycle racing. He indicated that the newspaper article in the Worcester Telegram and Gazette quoted someone from CVS stating that the building was not significant because it had been destroyed by fire; he said that was false. There was a fire but it did not destroy the building. He indicated that there were similar buildings at the Woodstock Fair and Stafford Springs. He did believe the building qualified to be on the Register since it was 148 years old and remain largely with the same use. He encouraged the Commission to take steps to get the building listed. He would like to see the building preserved and used; perhaps as a stagecoach museum.

Marie Daley of 407 Shephard Road stated that she thought the building that was a gateway to the town should be saved.

Lousie Zajac of 128 Leadmine Lane indicated that she has traveled extensively and history is something that is preserved everywhere. The Town should be doing the same.

Mr. Volpe said that there are diaries of people that used to go to the Fairgrounds that can be found on line; it was truly a gathering place.

**Decision:**

Mr. Volpe made a motion find that the structure located at 362 Main Street, Sturbridge is a significant structure as defined within the Demolition Delay Bylaw Section 2.31 because it is a building that is important associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the Town or the Commonwealth. This building is the Exhibition Hall that was used by the South Worcester Agricultural Society from 1868 to 1940 and was part of the Sturbridge Fairgrounds and is therefore associated with the cultural history of the Town of Sturbridge.

Sandra Fallon seconded the motion. A vote was taken and passed 4-0.

**Next Steps:**

Sandra Fallon made a motion to schedule a Public Hearing for the purpose of determining if the building is preferably preserved as defined in Section 2.31 of the Demolition Delay Bylaw on Thursday, March 10<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 pm at Town Hall in Veteran's Memorial Hall and to notify parties as required.

Richard Volpe seconded the motion. A vote was taken and passed 4-0.

Richard Volpe made a motion to authorize the Chair to sign the notifications to the Building Inspector and to the applicant.

Sandra Fallon seconded the motion. A vote was taken and passed 4-0.

On a motion made by Sandra Fallon, seconded by Richard Volpe and voted 4-0 the meeting adjourned at 6:35 pm.