

MINUTES OF THE UPTON HISTORICAL COMMISSION
June 19, 2012

In attendance were Chairman Barbara Burke, Jonathan Meagher, George Patterson, Russell Wood, Cathy Taylor, Maureen Byrne, and Howard Glassman. Becky Wetzel, Doug Harris (of the Narragansett Indian Nation) and Paul Robinson (former Rhode Island state archaeologist) were also in attendance.

The meeting was called to order at 7:10pm at the police station.

Treasurer's Report (Barbara)

Expense Acct.: \$556.09 (Barbara purchased office supplies in the amount of 351.98 and spent \$48 on the post office box among other general expenses in the past month.)

Gift Acct.: \$3214.00

Chamber Archaeology Report

Cathy reported that the archaeologist's report on the chamber is nearing completion. JMA wants to include the recent OSL dating results in its report.

Heritage Park Update

Cathy reported that the sixteen blueberry bushes planted at the park opening in April are still doing well. She would like to send e-mails thanking those individuals who provided their e-mail addresses to the Commission out of interest in the park and willingness to help in the future. Barbara suggested that Cissy Henderson should also be involved in any landscaping work.

Barbara reported that the DPW estimated that it would cost \$1600 to have trees near the proposed shed location. Rufin Van Bossuyt cut down the necessary trees at no cost after speaking to Barbara.

Barbara will be working on an estimate for the total value of the labor donated for all of the work associated with Upton Heritage Park up to this point.

Heritage Day

Heritage Day is September 29. Barbara would like the Commission to offer tours of the Chamber in conjunction with the festivities.

Eagle Scout Project Update

The Eagle Scout project has been approved by the local board and is going to the regional board for approval.

Doug Harris (Preservationist for Ceremonial Landscapes, Narragansetts)

Doug thanked the Commission for its work in protecting the Chamber. He reiterated his belief that the Chamber is of Native American origin. Doug, working with Ted Timrick (a filmmaker who works with the Smithsonian Institution), would like to put together a film on the Chamber.

Doug referenced the FCC's determination of eligibility for a Discontinuous Historic District for the Pratt Hill property in conjunction with the Chamber property and expressed his belief that there are other significant Native American sites in Upton. He noted that, by federal law, the only entity that can declare a stone landscape to be Indian is an Indian nation. He would like to map other possible ceremonial stone landscapes in the town and beyond. He wants there to be an acknowledgement of Native American ceremonial landscapes so that they may be protected, and he noted that a town ordinance could protect possible ceremonial stone landscapes in town.

Doug said that the Narragansetts purchased the Pratt Hill property with compensation from the destruction of a ceremonial stone landscape in Connecticut. The Narragansetts will be inviting scientists in to help them understand Pratt Hill. In the mapping of the purchased property, Doug reported that more than one hundred additional stone groupings were discovered. Further study, Doug hopes, will help the Narragansetts to understand what the Pratt Hill property was used for. Doug also suggested that perhaps the water that collects in the Pearson Chamber was an original feature of the property, possibly a device for increasing the visibility of the Pratt Hill landscape from the perspective of the Chamber.

Doug also discussed the Town of Wendell, Massachusetts' "monk's caves." A representative of the Mohegan Tribe suggests that "monk" is actually an Anglocized version of an abbreviation for a Native American word for wolf. The Narragansetts are currently working with the Town of Wendell to investigate the landscape there.

Maureen mentioned to Doug that there are apparent grinding stones on private property on Prospect Street.

George asked if there was any chance that the cairns that were destroyed on Pratt Hill can be rebuilt. Doug responded that rebuilding would likely not be possible or entirely desirable because, in the Native American tradition, the significance of the site cannot be recaptured.

Barbara asked Doug what needs to be done to begin to accomplish his vision for Upton. Doug said he would like to work together with the people of Upton to find the way.

Jon asked Doug what, specifically, he would like to see the Commission do. Doug responded that he would like the Commission to consider an ordinance to protect ceremonial stone landscapes. He said a mapping process would have to take place first and noted that the Narragansetts will be teaching a course at their long house about how mapping could be accomplished. He would like members of the Commission to come and learn this National Register-sanctioned mapping procedure. Once the Commission has done the mapping, a representative from the tribal office would look over the data and confirm which stone groupings might be part of ceremonial landscapes. Doug would like to see stone landscapes identified and give property owners the opportunity to see that they are protected.

Cathy noted that Upton State Forest land is currently being mapped. Cathy also passed out copies of the FCC declaration regarding the proposed Discontinuous Historic District. Cathy proposed that she and representatives of the Narragansetts and other interested parties work on a National Register nomination for the proposed Discontinuous Historic District that encompasses the Pratt Hill and Upton Heritage Park properties. Cathy proposed to have the National Register nomination submitted by sometime in the fall. Doug suggested that it would be best to get it in as far in advance of the November elections as possible since Paul Loether, the current National Register chairman, is supportive.

Jon asked whether the Town of Upton would have to approve of the submission of the discontinuous district nomination since one of the involved properties is a town property and who would give the approval on behalf of the town. Barbara is looking into the matter.

Cathy brought up the possibility that a National Register designation might help the Commission to obtain grants for the investigation or improvement of the property in the future.

There was some discussion amongst the members of the Commission as to what should be included in the National Register nomination form. Cathy suggested it be expanded beyond just the Pratt Hill and Heritage Park sites. Jon and Barbara suggested that it would be best to start small and not broaden it out to other sites.

Mass. Archaeological Society

Cathy, who has recently become a member of the Mass. Archaeological Society, passed around copies of an article in the Mass. Archaeological Society's newsletter about the proposed Discontinuous National Register Historic District in Upton.

Commission Reorganization

Since one member of the Commission was absent, the reorganization of the Commission was postponed until the July meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:32 pm.

