

WHDC Meeting
February 18, 2016

Members present: Gretchen Schuler (presiding), Margery Baston, Alice Boelter, Marji Ford, Kathie Steinberg

Others: Woody Baston, Mike Lowery, Susan and Bill Wagner, Dana and Matt Cooper, Edmund Price, Mark Neuman

Public Comment: There was none.

31 Cochituate Road - George Smith House -- Follow up on displays.

Gretchen spoke to a couple of people she knows professionally about displays within an Historic District (HD). The people to whom she spoke said that the backdrop might be considered a structure; however, they still would not review or consider it. A lawyer and preservationist also said that he would not make an issue of the mannequin displays.

Gretchen suggested that maybe we could find balance with this issue of the displays. If there were breaks -- when the displays were not up -- Gretchen could photograph the building. She made the point that the HDC is supposed to be preserving buildings in the HD and the view from the public way. Part of the HDC function is to protect the public view. Gretchen appealed to everyone involved to be sensitive to all of the issues.

Gretchen asked for input from the Commission. We were asked if this was in our jurisdiction. (Gretchen made the point later that signs are very much in the HDC's jurisdiction; but mannequins are not.) Marji pointed out that the Commission is here for a reason and for the public enjoyment of the historic buildings in the District. Alice said that the buildings in the Old Town Center represented buildings from roughly the 1830s -- this grouping represented a rural village. She pointed out that it is unlike anything around the Boston area with the exception of perhaps the Lexington green. She asked if Dr. Cooper might have an interest in Wayland's early history. Alice thought it would be great if he could somehow help with the recognition and valuing of the Wayland Center Historic District's architectural past.

The discussion was opened up to those present. Sue Wagner said that she spoke with full respect for the HDC's legal (jurisdictional) concerns. However, she then referred to the HDC pages on the town website where it states that the HDC's purpose is to "preserve and protect" the architectural history of the HD. She said she failed to see how the Red Sox or Star Wars related to this purpose. She couldn't see how the displays were appropriate. She also mentioned that the backdrop had fallen down; and she pointed out that when such things happen they pose safety issues that need to be taken into consideration.

Mark Newman said that his children loved to see the displays in the Town Center. This gave him the opportunity to talk a little about local history and the town center to his kids.

Matt Cooper referred to the first article by Mike Lowery on the subject of the displays. Matt felt he was being attacked.

Mark Lowery asked if Matt had seen his follow-up article, which was something of an apology. Mike admitted that he felt humbled after last month's HDC meeting. He hadn't listened to everyone prior to his first article. He also felt that everyone had the right to their own idea of art. Mike said he would try to approach these things differently in the future.

Ted Price asked if the HDC was going to regulate the displays.

Marji made the point that signage is much regulated, and particularly in the HD.

Bill Wagner submitted a paper in which he quoted MGL (Mass General Law) 93-29. "*Cities and towns may regulate and restrict billboards, signs, and other devices within their respective limits by ordinance or by law...Travelers freedom from annoyance was permissive grounds for regulation.*" Bill then spoke about the need to preserve the history of the Old Town Center. He felt the displays were offensive and inappropriate. He felt this was a case of government not working well.

Ted Price countered that this is government at its best.

Gretchen asked if there was a need for a "sense of the meeting". Kathie thought going forward the HDC would be happy to guide Dr. Cooper in what it considered appropriate for the HD. She likened seeing the displays in the HD to turning on the car radio to discover it was tuned into a different station than expected – one that she at first found somewhat jarring. Margery made the point that everyone had had the opportunity to comment on the issue of displays in the HD; and the HDC could not regulate the mannequins– so we should leave it there. Gretchen admitted that if the backdrop were still up, she felt that the HDC could not regulate, just as the HDC does not regulate holiday decorations.

Design Review Guidelines -- gutters and downspouts and lighting. The Commission had time only for refining the wording on gutters, downspouts and lighting. Gretchen is hoping that the HDC can hold a hearing on the completed Guidelines sometime before summer. There could be a glossary at the end of the Guidelines and also some "fun facts."

Minutes of January 21 were approved as amended (5-0-0). The minutes of November 19, 2015 were approved (4-1-0) with Kathie abstaining. The minutes of October 15, 2015 were approved. (5-0-0)

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm
Respectfully submitted,
Margery Baston