

Exeter Heritage Commission

Wheelwright Room

Exeter Town Office

December 14, 2011

Call Meeting to Order

Members present: *Peter Smith, Peter Michaud, Mary Dupré, Planning Board rep. Kathy, Corson, Historic District rep. Ron Schutz, Selectman rep. Julie Gilman and John Merkle, Chairman.*

Chairman John Merkle called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm in the Wheelwright Room at the Exeter Town Office.

- **Approval of minutes**

Mr. Merkle asked that a correction be made to the paragraph referencing the Winter St. Cemetery. Mr. Michaud agreed and suggested the sentence read: *It is however in their hands for review to determine if eligible for the **State and National Register of Historic Places**.* With no other changes noted, the Chair asked for a motion to approve the draft minutes as amended. Mr. Schutz so move: seconded by Mr. Smith. Vote: unanimous with Ms. Corson abstaining.

- **Follow up discussion on the Great Dam Removal feasibility study**

The Heritage Commission has been granted consulting party status in the Section 106 review process for the feasibility study/impact analysis for the removal of the Exeter River Great Dam. This permits the Heritage Commission to submit input of organizations and individuals who have knowledge and interest in the dam and nearby cultural/historic resources for this study. Mr. Merkle has been in contact with Lionel Ingram, Chairman of the River Study Committee and the role of the Heritage group in the feasibility study. Mr. Merkle felt at some point a public hearing will be held but nothing is imminent right now. The Historical District Commission has also received a letter of invitation to be a consulting party.

- **Discussion and recommendation for Web Site revisions for Heritage Commission**

The Commission was asked for adjustments/changes to Heritage Commission page for the new Town web site currently in the planning process. Mr. Schutz noted the links presently appearing on the Heritage Commission page of web site. Discussion followed on what links should remain, are the present links active, what could be deleted, new inclusions and in what format. It was suggested the present links be revisited to verify they are active links. Possible additions to include more historic pictures of properties in Town not just the downtown, perhaps scrolling photos, photos of current projects and important properties with uncertain futures. Also include an overview the demolition review process with guidelines and an overview of form based codes. Mr. Michaud suggested having the National Register Survey forms available as a PDF document that could be downloaded from the Park Service web site. Ms. Corson suggested less might be best as the discussion turned to overlapping links/topics addressed on Historic District Commission site. Mr. Michaud made additional suggestions of including National and State agencies and organizations that might want to be included: could be grouped under Tools for Preservation Organizations.

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Mr. Schutz will forward on to the members the summary of the discussion. Ms. Gilman will forward format onto the Selectmen currently heading the re-design project

- **Request for project review, Section 106 process, Norris Brook Culvert Replacement**

The Commission was asked by New Hampshire Division of Historical resources (NHDHR) to comment on the culvert replacement at Norris Brook. In clarifying what is being sought Mr. Michaud noted the DHR is looking for thoughts on the replacement; any concerns we might have and possible adverse effects.

Mr. Merkle circulated copies of photos of the existing structures. There are two culverts to be replaced: one through Swasey parkway and one through Water St. (corner of Water and Summer St.). Referring to the photos of the granite underlying base walls on Swasey Parkway its state of deterioration is evident. Plans are to install a granite culvert wider than the present structure to provide for a better flow and with an open bottom to allow for fish migration. The engineer's report spoke of a bottom of rounded river stone: discussion followed on the construction method. In reviewing the details and pathways for construction, it was agreed there was no adverse effects. Mr. Michaud felt an electronic response would be sufficient noting the discussion and conclusion.

- **Status of Certified Local Government grants for town wide mapping survey**

Ms. Gilman stated she had made some changes to the draft but it has not been submitted. Mr. Michaud noted it is now requested the consultant and members of the Heritage Commission attend a mandatory meeting in Concord at the DHR with the survey coordinator before the project actually begins. It was suggested to include this requirement in the draft proposal. Discussion followed on determining dates for completion for the different phases of the proposal. Noting the date for submitting the final report to NH Division of Historic resources is the end of September 2012, the suggested time line was: distribute RFP beginning of January for review with a respond date of January 31. For the consultant: the final draft to come back to Commission for review to be August 1 and submittal by September 14. To date, the Town has not received a formal letter of acceptance but Mr. Michaud felt the Commission should still move forward with the proposal.

- **Winter Street Cemetery**

Mr. Merkle re-stated that the Winter Street cemetery was deemed eligible for both National and State Register of Historic Places. Mr. Michaud added the Town needs to sign a letter of permission for the listing. He suggested requesting the contact person at NHDHR to send us the letter the Town would sign agreeing to the listing. After signing, it would then go back to the DHR resource council for evaluation and listing.

- **Demolition request updates**

It was noted since the last meeting that a small house on Summer St. had been taken down. Also, a structure near to Churchill's on the Exeter Road was demolished. The Summer St. dwelling was deemed as having no integrity where the structure on Exeter Road was altered to have no historical integrity. There were no other demolition requests to review.

An earlier discussion in the meeting focused on a Portsmouth Avenue property that received a permit but has not proceeded with any action. It was unclear when the permit expires but Ms.

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Corson felt the Building Inspector should be made aware of the possibility of an approaching deadline and advise the owner of such.

Ms. Gilman was ready to discuss the vacate Getty Station on Court St. As far as she can determine in researching deeds it has been owned by an oil company since 1958. Mr. Michaud added in discussing the property with some of his colleagues it was determined it was a distinct gasoline station-type that was once prevalent but now a rarity and it exhibits a high level of integrity. As the oil companies move ahead with redesigning, demolishing and rebuilding stations they do lack integrity and there are very few examples of what was. Surprisingly it might be eligible for the National Register under criterion C or possibly criterion A. He is aware the Town has specific needs for the site. However if the Town does acquire the property, it would be within the Commission purview to do some research, some photography and document the building before it is demolished to have that record for future use. Discussion turned to if there would be any interest from other groups, museums or individuals in acquiring the building and moving it. Mr. Michaud said an RFP could be prepared asking what the bidder would be doing with building, how and when it would be removed and a bidding fee with the caveat the best preservation plan would be weighed equally with the price being offered. There were various creative alternatives proposed for getting the building moved and into private or public ownership. Mr. Michaud said whatever way it goes, it would be good to get the plywood off the windows and document it: that is what the Commission does.

There will be two public hearing scheduled for January, but before that, Ms. Gilman will bring up the topic to the BOS of exploring alternatives to get the building moved into private or public ownership. Just the discussion of the alternatives at the hearings will most definitely bring attention to what the Commission does. She will send out some notices of inquiry before the public meeting.

- **Properties at risk**

Discussion turned to the project at 81 High Street, the former Eventide Home, and where it was in the review process. In reviewing the elevation plans, members had comments on proposed exterior changes but felt it was for the HDC to make those comments when the project goes before them at their January meeting. At this time there are several issues that have not been addressed: parking and the use and proposed changes to the barn/carriage house. Mr. Smith said he had photo shots of every floor inside and out. At this time there has been no alteration to the interior in main house but the brick addition has been cleaned out.

- **Update on adopting Form Based Codes**

Ms. Corson reported she and the Town Planner did attend the webinar at the Rockingham Planning Commission and although she found it interesting it appeared to be more for city planning than town planning.

Ms. Gilman stated there was agreement to focus on Portsmouth Ave, but have not really decided what it is they want to accomplish; still in the exploratory phase. Ms. Corson felt a big concern is what the town is proposing to do when they do their water and sewer, paving and drainage project. In response to a funding question, it is a Town maintenance project and also a CIP project and a warrant article and will be on the March ballot. Ms. Corson noted the

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proposed design noting it would prohibit or restrict bicycle traffic in that area (around the Exeter Cycle shop). If DOT is at all involved, the issue of bike paths is always raised. Ms. Gilman felt the need for a dedicated discussion with DPW on the project. Various alternatives to the proposed turning lanes were discussed.

There seems to be an increasing interest in the adoption of the Form Based Codes (FBC) and the subcommittee will resume meetings in the coming year and anticipate a positive outcome in the next year. The Portsmouth Ave. project seemed to be an excellent starting point.

- **Other business**

Going back to how the Town shares information, Mr. Merkle asked if the Town has considered shared files. Ms. Gilman responded it had but public access was a concern and information isn't always in the same format i.e. GIS systems don't coordinate between Planning Dept. and DPW. Mr. Merkle felt it would be an advantage as often files are too large to forward in emails. There is a Town IT Committee and she will bring it up especially with the web site design process going on.

Ms. Gilman stated the HC will be getting a request for a project review for the baggage building (at the Train Station). Basically the plan is to renovate the interior but some work may be done to the exterior. She asked for comments/opinions on the addition (to the restaurant) as it is presently (referring to photos of the existing building). Discussion focused on the picture window. It was not part of original structure but leave it; the damage has been done. Because there are Federal funds involved Mr. Michaud outlined the review process that will take place with Federal and State agencies. The Rockingham Planning Commission is also actively involved in this project.

She also noted with remaining funds in the HC budget it would be desirable to get all the photos together, especially of the demolition done this past year get processed and organized into files. Businesses doing do photos that meet guidelines set by Park Service were discussed.

Mr. Michaud asked to give a brief update on the Ioka Theater and its plans to move forward. The intent is to hold at least two informational meetings in the next month for the public to learn what needs to be done to the building and obtain feedback on what the public would like to see offered; to honor what it was built for. Because the non-profit spearheading the renovation has not finalized all the organizational formalities, the HC was asked of their willingness to partner with the group to host the meetings at the Town Hall. Discussion followed on the appropriateness of a Town subcommittee undertaking such an event and perhaps the Selectmen should be so advised. Feeling it was within the scope of the Commission, Mr. Schutz made the motion to say the Heritage Commission agreed to hold a joint public meeting with the Exeter Theater Co. to discuss the future of the project: seconded by Ms. Dupré. The motion carried with Mr. Michaud abstaining.

Ms. Gilman motioned to adjourn: seconded by Mr. Michaud. Vote: unanimous
Meeting adjourned at 8:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Ginny Raub, Recording Secretary