

Heritage Commission

July 21, 2020

Final Minutes

Members Present: John Merkle, Chairman, Jay Myers, Vice Chair, Pam Gjetum, Maura Fay, Treasurer, , Julie Gilman, Select Board Rep, John Grueter, Planning Board Rep

Call Meeting To Order: John Merkle, Chairman, called meeting to order at 1:00 pm via ZOOM.

Business: June 16th Minutes. The members have not received the June Minutes so John stated that they would be tabled until next month.

Next is the Black Heritage Pocket Park. Maura said she was contacted by Renay Allen not long ago and she has an author and she has written a book about Exeter's black history. An idea that she has was to create a small park in town to honor a couple of black people from Exeter, specifically the Halls. Jude was a revolutionary soldier and the family lived in Exeter. They have a tragic history because three of their sons were kidnapped and sold into slavery from Exeter. Her thought was to create a pocket park within Swasey and she has laid out a plan of where that could be located and what it would look like. This not only would acknowledge Jude Hall's existence, but a contribution to the community of Exeter. In general, Exeter's black history and as a way to recognize and pay tribute to the part of the history of this town that goes unrecognized. Another idea Maura had with this is if the Heritage Commission would consider in addition to potentially supporting this park idea, another marker down on Swasey at the entrance of Park Street. She thinks this is pretty close to the location of where historically the black neighborhood of Exeter was. She would like the commission to consider putting together a little something about what they know about that area of town and who lived there. She thinks Pam and Barbara could bring a lot of information to us. This is sort of a dual proposal. The group that Renay is pulling together will probably be meeting for the first time in the next week or so. Julie wanted to give a little update from the Select Board. This was presented to them and they had recommended that she come here and of course the Swasey Park Trustees. Julie said she would definitely like to hear from the trustees but she would also like to hear the opinions of this body too. She thinks it is a great idea, but not sure if the location is going to work out. Pam said that she mentioned that to the young lady herself. This is Swasey Parkway. It is Hamron Swasey's place. She thinks the idea of a little pocket park to acknowledge what used to be called New Guinea in Exeter might be an excellent idea. She just does not want to take a bite out of Swasey Park. Jay asked Pam to explain where New Guinea is. It really isn't a place. The blacks just would congregate on the north side of which is now Swasey Parkway. Julie said Green Street and Pam said yes. Pam said that Green Street was called Katie's Lane because there was a black lady named Katie that lived there. She was the one who sold sweets and snacks to everybody in town. Pam said maybe putting it right on the

end of Park Street, but she does not know. Julie said she was thinking about the gas works area because that already has a memorial in the ground. The proposal for this Pocket Park did a great job of describing wanting to have several benches and also a memorial stone set into the ground and not like a cemetery stone. She doesn't know how it would work out at gas works little park because that is not a prominent position as it would be in Swasey Parkway. John Grueter said there is a small park or bench area as you drive in off of Water Street. He was wondering if this would work. He said it looks like it needs some attention and maybe they could kill two birds with one stone. Julie said that is not a bad idea. John Merkle then asked where the property could be located on Park Street if that was the chosen place. Who owns the land. Julie said the parkway trustees. Julie then asked Maura if she was talking more along Water Street as opposed to the parkway. Maura said what she was thinking was two different things. She knows that Rene is in the process of talking to the Swasey Trustees about the potential of using that corner. She doesn't think they have to weigh in on location at this minute until Rene gets a sense of what the trustees are willing to talk about. Her thought is that no matter where the Pocket Park ends up, consider putting a historical marker at the entrance to Swasey from Water Street, right at the end of Park Street where it stops. There is a side lot that comes down onto Swasey. Julie asked Maura if she was recommending right at the end of the parkway at Water Street towards the DPW. Maura said that is the area that Renee has highlighted. In her mind, it is an unused little piece of the park and people do not seem to notice that it is there. There is no bench or anything to use as a seating area. If the Swasey Trustees are agreeable to something like that, it is a nice little area that could be spruced up a bit. If they are not, she is sure there is another little spot they could find. John Merkle said he thinks this is a great idea. Maura asked the commission if they were comfortable with her being the representative for this group that Renee is pulling together. All were in agreement.

Next on the agenda is the continued discussion on Park/Cass Streets Heritage District. John Merkle said he can start out by saying that he talked with Dave yesterday and as far as getting before the Planning Board, it is not going to happen before October or November. They are so far backlogged. John said that he will meet with Dave at some point within a week or two and go over what the commission has organized. He is going to give him a copy of the handbook. Dave was not aware The Planning Board's need to be involved with a Heritage District. John said that the commission wanted to initially get the blessing from the Planning Board before they engaged the public. He thinks now they should engage the public first. Julie said she thinks this is a good idea because then they would have the temperature for it because it is quite an extensive document. To have the buy in from the residents that would be affected by it would be good evidence to bring to the Planning Board. John Merkle asked if they are coming back to the postcard now and then to decide how to engage the public. Julie asked if they could talk a little more about what happens with a Heritage District. She looks at a lot of restrictions. Pam said she is glad Julie said that because when she tried to read it, her selling point was that it would be smaller and easier than a regular HDC and now she thinks it looks worse. Julie said they could trim out the things they do not want to apply. She said rather than start the postcard with the whole neighborhood invited, if they can get together with a few of the more prominent neighborhood residents. Just to throw it out there or they need more discussion about how much of the district regulations they want to have in the final product. Maura stated that when

she read through some of the recommendations in the booklet, a lot of it sounded like it was voluntary so those were ideas Heritage Districts could include. The idea being that the board administers it they would be the ones who would decide which elements they felt should be included. Julie said it is still regulatory and that is why the Planning Board gets involved. She is not sure the Planning Board would want to take on another thing and she is feeling uncomfortable that they would have success. John Merkle then said, so what are we saying here. Julie said she would like to do it, but not as a regulation. Base a neighborhood district on what should be considered, but the organization of that body may be in reverse. It would be most residents with a Planning Board Rep and HDC and or Heritage and not to be a Planning Board issue. Maura stated that her concern about an approach that this is when is not regulatory and is it even pursuing. She thinks the whole concept of creating a Heritage District is that there would be some teeth behind it and if somebody did want to alter their house in a way that was completely out of line with the neighborhood, they would feel that there would be a way to prevent that. Julie said that was a good point. John Merkle said that perhaps they should get a handful of neighbors involved before they go any further to see what their thoughts are. Maura said given the general concept, whether there is any interest at all. Julie said that one of the advantages of this is people get scared about what the HDC can do and where their rules apply. Maura said for her when she envisions this heritage area, she feels like the specific properties she would love to make sure never get destroyed. During her lifetime so far, people living in these houses have cared to preserve them and keep them relatively intact. John Merkle said his way of looking at this and what he would advocate they do is give the Planning Board just the opportunity to make the final decision. In other words, the way he reads it is that they almost get to the end point and the Planning Board is actually going to put together based on the HC recommendations, the Neighborhood Advisory Committee. He said they need to take as much responsibility as possible away from the Planning Board when putting all of this together for them. They just have to make the decision. Julie agrees with this. Jay said he has a question and he thinks John addressed this in an earlier meeting that the success rate of a Heritage District is rather low. His question is if there are models of success, can they contact those groups and get a better understanding of what was successful. He said they are going down a path that he thinks is important and he would like to see it come to completion the way they are proposing. John Merkle said to answer his question directly, he does not know of any in NH. He said Bedford got pretty close to it, but he thinks they just ended up doing a Historic District instead. There are a couple of other communities that got to the point where it was not ready to be put on the town warrant and then they were not able to make all of the decisions. He looked on line a week ago and Cambridge, Mass. has one, but it is not Exeter. He said that Nadine from DHR would be willing to help and Jennifer also. If they really decide to pursue this, they may need to hire someone to help. Julie said that would be good to know before November so it can be a budget consideration. John Merkle then asked, what comes first here?" Pam said she thinks a neighborhood meeting. John Merkle said he thinks they need to get a couple of bodies from Cass Street and Park Street other than himself. The easiest thing to do would be to ask Maura to pick people out because she worked with them before. However, he does not think that would be a good idea here because they have been before the Planning Board many times for another project. John then asked how the commission is going

to do this. Will they meet in a room or do it by ZOOM. Julie said so they all could hear it, they could invite them to a ZOOM meeting and that way you can engage the interest. Pam said they could go back to the postcards because the people would have to know what they are being invited to. Jay said it is good to get people that they know, but there would be a benefit to having somebody they do not know. This would eliminate some of the bias in what they are trying to cover. Those people that we know are likely to be biased for us and we would like to hear voices from people who don't know much about the Heritage Commission. Jay said they could do a powerpoint presentation at a ZOOM meeting. They could show slides, maps and other information and have a discussion afterwards. Julie agreed that they should pick people who have not heard anything about it. Bob from Exeter TV spoke and said if the commission was thinking of doing a ZOOM, they would set up the ZOOM and the people can just register on there with their names and everything will come in. There is a capacity of up to 100. He definitely thinks there is enough capacity and it is automatic approval for the registration. You can ask custom questions and put other questions in making them required or not required. You can export all that data to a spreadsheet so you can have it afterwards. They could also stream it so people who are not there can watch it later if they want to learn more about what the project is all about. It is not too hard to set one of these up, it is just scheduling. Julie said it would be one of the regular scheduled Heritage Commission Meetings. Julie then asked if they could put the RSVP on the agenda like they do for Select Board and other meetings. Bob said if they actually want people to show up, he thinks they need to go above and beyond that. If they set up the webinar and there would be a link that people can RSVP to, but beyond that, they need to find out a way of how to contact people. They could put the URL on the postcard or where to find the URL. Ideally, they need to get the registration URL in front of those people to let them know you are doing a webinar. A lot of people do not even see when they are on the town website for the meetings. Julie said this is the idea of how she would like to see it work. She said they are going to put this on the postcard and if they want to set up a URL for people to sign in, they can put that on the powerpoint or ask people to just RSVP and then send them the link. Bob jumped in again and said if the commission is doing this as their normal meeting, they will not be able to do the RSVP because the meeting has to be open to the public and there is no RSVP they can click into the link and you do not get any registration. You could turn it on but it could be viewed as eliminating access to the meeting. You could just do in the normal meeting and advertise to attend the meeting and they come in as attendees and they can talk just like at normal meetings, or they could do a whole separate webinar. Julie said it is probably easier to just put the meeting date and time and reservation on it so anybody can come. Bob said if the commission did the separate webinar, they could not have a quorum in there because it would have to be a meeting and posted like everything else.

John wants to summarize things now. They are going back to a two sided card that is going to invite people to come to a ZOOM meeting and they will have a powerpoint presentation available for the public and people who attend that meeting. The commission will then ask them to join them. He thinks this is probably the way they should do it to develop the foundation if they are interested. Pam said that it sounds good. John Merkle then asked, when do we do this. Pam said that Julie was going to speak to Barbara today when she goes to the town office. Julie said that Barbara does not need to be involved at all if the commission is doing a regular

meeting and asking people to join via the website. Pam said that Bob is here and he knows what to do also. Bob said pick a date where there is not going to be another government meeting, it makes it a lot easier for them. Julie then said they will have to figure out how long it is going to take to put together the powerpoint. She said she is not sure when the town office will be open for real meetings without the ZOOM aspect of it, so it is going to take a couple of tries of the powerpoint show and they have a couple of months to do this. Jay said that he thinks if they want to schedule one with the best chance of attendance, it would be September. He also thinks a ten minute powerpoint presentation would be good. The idea is to create more discussion than anything and what interest they can get to generate from them. Ultimately, it is going to be their leadership. John Merkle then asked what the commission does in the interim. Pam said they let Julie figure out the schedule and we let Jay get to work on the presentation. John Merkle asked what is the advantage of doing this. Julie said that is the selling point. Not just what it is, but first and then why. Pam asked John if he wanted to tell the commission about the Hampton Road viewing. He said they met up on Friday, four of them, John Grueter then asked if the commission was voting on this because he had to leave at 2 pm. John Merkle said no, they have already voted on it and they did not see anything historic about the building that was going to hurt Exeter. They also took notice on High Street the yellow house is not being attended to. This is owned by the hospital.

John Merkle then asked the commission members how they liked this time slot. Pam said she loves it. Julie said the only concern she has is will there really be participation from the residents. Julie said she prefers the day time ones because they are easier to schedule because you can be anywhere. All were in agreement that the meeting in August would be at this same time.

John asked if there was any other business and Julie said the IOKA marquee. John said he had watched the meeting. Julie said that he must know the outcome as well as everybody else at this point. The application was approved with the condition that the marquee remain. It anticipates them going to the Zoning Board as that was implied because they were asked to provide what the next step would be for them. She said she will find out when it gets scheduled. The Zoning Board meets at the same time as this commission if it is a night time meeting. John asked if the commission had to step in on this at all. Julie thought so because it is an impertinence to the building and that is one of the considerations for the commission. It is not just the HDC to make a recommendation. Pam said she thinks it has gone past the point where they can step in. They should have been there as the HC back two months ago.

With no further business, John put in a motion to adjourn. Julie seconded. All were in favor and the meeting adjourned at 2:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Herrick
Recording Secretary