

## Heritage Commission Public Information Meeting

October 28, 2020

### Final Minutes

Members Present: John Merkle, Chairman, Julie Gilman, Select Board Rep., Pam Gjetlum, HDC Rep., Maura Fay, Treasurer, Jay Myers, Vice Chair, John Grueter, Planning Board, Rep., Bill Campbell

Julie started the meeting in the Neighborhood Heritage District. She first introduced the members of the board. Maura then put up the slides for everyone to see. Julie said this information meeting about a proposed Neighborhood Heritage District with Park Street, Cass Street, Forest Street, Oak Street and surrounding area. The Heritage Commission was adopted by a town vote in Exeter in 2006. It is a valuable means to manage, recognize and protect historical, cultural resources in a town wide scope. They advise and assist, including proposed demolitions. They conduct inventories of Exeter's history, educate the public, provide information and serve as a resource for revitalization efforts. People ask what is a resource to the town. It is defined by the Secretary of Interior as any building, park or landscape that has been in place for over fifty years. Why? These resources represent time periods, habits of growth and cultural value that influence the towns or states or nations developments over time. Julie explained the slide that was being shown. Julie said the biggest project they have been working on is the Winter Street Cemetery restoration. They also did a Franklin and Clifford Street survey. What they mean by a survey is they have a consultant go through the area and document the buildings or information about the buildings. Julie said that when the Great Dam was removed, they had to go through a process because they were using federal funds. They then went through the process of how they are going to keep the memory of this dam and its function and history of working with the mills. A blue sign was put up for this project near the bridge. Another thing they did was have an etched panel in the library in a window overlooking where the dam was representing what it looked like before it was removed and you can see through it to see what is there now. Julie then turned it over to Maura who said the project came about at the Heritage Commission talking about how to best preserve certain areas of town. One of the first ways of course is to know what they have. She said looking at the slide, they have some of the oldest houses in town around the Park Street common area that are still existing. She said they felt it was important to do a very in-depth survey of the neighborhood to find out what types of houses exist and the age of the neighborhood. They fortunately were able to secure a grant to get that survey done and written up. She said the document is very thorough and in depth. John Merkle said that some of the areas go back to the 1600s and older in parts than our historic districts. He said the buildings are close together and when you walk through the neighborhood, you feel very comfortable. He said most of the property was developed after the railroad came in the early 40s. It was one of the earliest areas to be developed in Exeter. He said they feel the whole neighborhood is very special and deserves some recognition. Maura said that when you do walk around the neighborhood, it gives you the

classic New England feel and it is one of the things people identify with the region. Julie said that as you read the survey, it is that this area was developed early because of the masked trees that needed to be provided for the king.

Next to speak is Jay Myers. He said as Julie, Maura and Julie have pointed out in a very fine way, the question to the answer is what is a Heritage Neighborhood District. This is an area of importance designated by the community. It overlays the zoning district of a cohesive area and it manages change in flexible ways. It gives the citizens input to the way their neighborhood may change. A Heritage Neighborhood District is important because it helps the occupants of the district preserve and revitalize character. It gives the citizens a voice.

John Grueger explained how it works. He said a community panel participates in the administrative oversight. The district is technically administered by the Planning Board. A Neighborhood Advisory Committee of up to seven people. The committee will consist of up to three to seven people and it can include one or more residents of the neighborhood. They are appointed by the Planning Board. The Planning Board will work with the applicants and advise the town. He is hoping they get several people in the neighborhood to participate.

John Merkle said they need to say that there is a difference between the Neighborhood Heritage District and a Historic District. A Historic District governs very strictly what can and cannot be done to the buildings in that district and properties. A Neighbor Heritage District does not have those strict guidelines. They make up a plan to oversee the character of their neighborhood. It does not involve detailed descriptions of what is done with doors, siding, windows and different things. It deals in a different manner in preserving the character of the neighborhood. John said what they are planning to do is engaging the property owners and this is the first part of the process and why they received the postcard in the mail for this meeting. The process is, as neighborhood folks and the Heritage Commission would help with this part. A proposal would be developed to be placed before the Planning Board. If this is accepted by the Planning Board, it prepares it for the town voters to where it makes it to the ballot and is voted on by the population of Exeter. If it passes, the Planning Board then creates a Neighborhood Advisory Committee and that is made up of hopefully local residents. The Neighborhood Advisory Committee would present final plans for the rules and procedures for the Planning Board. The next part is for questions and comments from the public. First to speak is Jeff McLynch and he lives at 16 Epping Road. He thanked the commission for featuring his home on the cover page. He would like the members of the commission to expand upon what they see as the possible pros and cons of creating the district both from the town's perspective, but also for home owners or business owners who might be in the district. Maura spoke and said that Jeff's home is one of the primary reasons they need to be creating this Heritage District. It is maybe the oldest existing home in Exeter. One of the things that is really important to her is that they do not lose houses like this. What she sees as the big benefit for the town is that they do not end up losing important historical homes like Jeff's. Julie said there are a few different grant opportunities from the state that are available to the public. One of the things the Heritage Commission has done was to designate Exeter for what is called a Certified Local Government. This makes it nationally recognized as a town that appreciates its history and protects its history. One of the advantages of it is that there are federal funds available only to Certified Local Governments. Some of the projects they have done have been free because they went through this process. Within that is an advantage to property owners to prove that the property has been documented

as important to the town's heritage. There are opportunities for members of the public who own their own property that they can find a way to help them offset the cost of their preservation plans. Jeff asked what the commission's thinking was about potential timing. Are they considering bringing this in such a way that it would be before the voters in March of 21 or at some point in the future. Julie said the process of designating a Heritage District Neighborhood with the Heritage Commission making a pitch to the Planning Board. If the Planning Board is interested, they would develop all the things on the slide to propose to the Planning Board. If the Planning Board likes it, then it will go forward to the voters. Julie said they are looking at March of 22 for this.

Next is Jackie Rockel and she lives on Park Street. She said she has spent a good deal of money working on her house over the years. She said it sounds to her that the commission is kind of asking them to sign up for being in a district where the rules don't exist yet. They are rules that have to be defined. It is really hard for her to be enthusiastic about approving something that she doesn't know what she is approving. She said she is having trouble wrapping her head around it. Julie said one of the first things is that the Planning Board would decide whether a Heritage District is something important to them. She said one of reasons for doing this is to provide more control over the development and also a way to provide for workforce housing because they are going to protect those areas. The plan would be developed by the neighborhood and then presented to the Planning Board. Part of this Heritage Neighborhood is to help the Heritage Commission when something is going to be proposed for your neighborhood, that they can come in to say this is what the Heritage District is respecting their property and the proposal may go against that, so they recommend preservation. Jackie said it just sounds fuzzier to her. She asked if there were any towns or cities around that have an example of a Heritage District and a Historical District so they could see the differences. She said they bought an old house and it was pretty much a dump. They did demolish part of it because the architects told them there was absolutely no way it could be restored. You have to let people do the right thing for the safety of themselves and their families. She said they cannot get so wrapped up in the history where people are forced to sell their property and move because they cannot afford to do the repairs that they might need to do. Julie said the idea of the demolition and being ruled you cannot do that, you must preserve it is really an extreme and again, the neighborhood can set the standards. Maura said that what a plan like this is appealing to her is that it is very flexible. It allows you to take a look at the neighborhood as a whole. The idea is not to make it restrictive, it is to have an option to preserve. It also gives people avenues to access money that they cannot currently access. Maura said there is a manual developed by the Historic Resources Division and in there it has a list of towns and cities around the country that do have a Heritage District. You can look and see what these plans say and what people have decided.

Michael Silvio spoke next and he lives on Green Street. He asked what the difference is between a contributory means to a non contributory property. Maura went back to the map to show. John Merkle said the green buildings are considered contributing. If you were to go to the actual survey, there is a list of every property surveyed. When they say these buildings are contributing, they are not contributing to one unified style. They are contributing to the quality and feel of the place they are sitting and how people react to them. The yellow ones are secondary contributing buildings and they are mostly out buildings. There are also white ones

which are either modern buildings or they are buildings that are not identified closely to the neighborhood. Most of the properties have some historical value and they are contributing into the neighborhood. Michael Silvio said he should have been clearer with his question. He said the map is pretty clear. What he meant to say is how in fact does the Heritage District the commission is proposing impact those properties that are not contributory as opposed to those who are. Maura said she understood and would the regulations developed for the district apply to those non contributing buildings. Michael said precisely and thank you.

John Merkle said it is a good question and should be discussed when the regulations are explored. Michael had a second question which is, if it gets approved and we move forward with it, are there any particular tax advantages in terms of what the town considers an assessment.

Michael had a second question which is, this gets approved and we move forward with it, are there any particular tax advantages in terms of what the town would consider an assessment due to the implied value increment that this district would have. He said let's say for example it is designated and suddenly they see a 25% increase in their homes. The town then says we are going to increase your taxes 25%. Does that protect us from that? Julie said the taxes are based on the value of your home and the assessment is based on the quality of the house and it is not the historical value of the house, This would not affect the taxation at all. Michael said earlier in the discussion they were told that this was for a Heritage District. What he sees on the map clearly says Historic District. He said it might be good to align the collaterals with exactly what the commission is doing. If it is not a Historic District and it is in fact a Heritage District the documentation should reflect that accordingly, otherwise they might get the wrong understanding. Julie said it is a good point, the definition of what it is. The Historic District has definitely defined outlines that are voted on by the whole town. A Heritage District would be voted on by the Planning Board. John Merkle said that nationally it is known as a type of area form. Heritage Districts only came into existence in 1980. Prior to that, Historic Districts existed since the 60s in NH.

Doug and Eileen Flackhart are next to speak. Eileen said knowing that the Heritage District would go before the Planning Board for their interest and approval before it could go before the town and then once voted on by the town, it would still be under the umbrella of the Planning Board. What kind of independence could they possibly have for decisions or being able to accomplish things without a very convoluted back to the Planning Board. It seems very cumbersome. John Grueger spoke for the Planning Board. He said they try not to be that way. This will be their first venture with a Heritage District. He thinks if you come into a Planning Board Meeting and have reasonable requests, it is not going to get any real resistance. Everyone wants what is best for the Town of Exeter. Julie said if the Planning Board accepts the concept that they want to develop an area of protection that is not partially or may not be at all partially regulated as a Historic District is. The input of the neighborhood would have some weight on development around them. John Merkle said this Neighborhood Heritage District that they are putting before you is like it is written based on the Town's Master Plan. Julie said part of the Master Plan is to preserve and protect the historical contexts and the heritage of the town. This is one resource that can be used that is not going to impose restrictions that the Historic District Commission reviews. It will help protect your neighborhood.

Next to speak is Joel Scholand who lives on Park Street. He said he is concerned. There seems to be some question as to what this really is about. He said that when he looks at the map, they are not the neighborhood boundaries he would draw. He has not been able to read all of the information but he was able to skim through them. He said some of the things in there do not sound like historic places. They sound like things that are going to require a lot more trips to the boards. He said it almost sounds like if you follow the guidebook to the letter, you put the commission into effect before anyone has even determined what the rules are and then the rules are generated by people who may not even live in the neighborhood. Julie wanted to speak about the map and said that when they went to the Division of Historic Resources to survey this area, the commission agreed on their particular buildings they wanted to document because a goal of the State is to also gather all of these individual surveys that different towns do so that they can compare. When a survey is done, there is a form that follows the National Register of Historic Preservation and that is what you see in the reports. There were buildings on the edges that they wanted to be included and documented as the reason why they are considered a historic resource to the town's heritage. They wanted to go out to the jail. Include the train master's house over on the west side and the park. It was quite extensive and probably bigger than the grant they received to do this. She doesn't think the contractor made any money on it. They also suggested that they need to go out to different extents because of the contributing factors of the properties that they found. Maura said when you look at the houses in general, some neighborhoods might go so far as to say, if you have six over six windows, you have to keep those windows. This would be an option, but it would be up to the advisory group that got together. Not to say that repairs can't be made, changes can't be made, it would just be done with a view to maintaining a feel of this being a historic area of town.

Next to speak is Susan Scowl who lives on Cass Street. She said there have been a lot of good questions and she has a few. What prompted this. Why did somebody decide we wanted to go down this road. Years ago, we Cass Street people were invited to several meetings to include Cass Street in the Historic District and that was voted down. She said there is a Zoning Board, which she thinks does a great job. There is also a Historic District Board which also does a great job. She doesn't really understand what this is all about. She said Cass Street voted down because they did not want to be in the Historic District and she said this was a town vote. She doesn't know what prompted this. John Merkle said they are a Certified Local Government and in order to do that, we have to maintain the fact that Exeter as a community cares very much about its historical assets. In doing that, they were awarded a grant through the Certified Local Governments Program and they did surveys. The mapping survey identified this section of town as being special. There is a whole section developed there because the railroad went by after the buildings were built. That whole section of town is unique. The folks at the Historical Resources recognized that and felt it was worthy of being surveyed and detailed and this is where this is coming from. Susan again said that Cass Street said they did not want to be part of the Historic District. She said she does not see any advantage to this and from a marketing standpoint, that is what they need to sell all the green buildings on the map. She does not see what is in it for her. She again said they went through this in a lot of detail when they wanted us. They really pushed hard for Cass Street to be part of the Historic District. When push came to shove, nobody wanted to do it because of the adding of regulations. There was a gentleman who spoke earlier who said it sounds like it is just one more thing. Now you

are going to go before the Zoning Board, Planning Board, Historic Board and now this Historic Commission. She does not get it. Maura then responded to the Zoning and the Historic District idea. Neither the Zoning Board nor the Historic District would have any regulatory abilities in what they are talking about here. This Historic District has absolutely nothing to say what happens to any of the houses outside the boundaries of the districts that exist. She said one of the reasons the commission wants to do something like this is because there are so many contributing properties in this area that they would hate to lose. Nobody is suggesting that this be a Historic District. This is not the idea at all. Julie again said the Heritage District is defined as made up by the folks that live in it. It would not be defined by the whole town. The Planning Board is the one who approves the plan that the neighborhood comes up with. The restrictions are going to be whatever, if there are restrictions, they will be made by the people.

Pam said as one who serves both on the Heritage and Historic District, the reason we wanted to make this a Heritage as opposed to a Historic District was realizing that Historic District really does have a lot of very, very picky rules. What we are trying to do is keep the idea of housing. The lady that just spoke said she lived in a historic house and loved it. If you are not in a Historic District or Heritage District and the lady across the street decides that she is going to build a great big gray apartment house in the back of my lot because I want to make more money. Guess what. There is not a thing you can do about it and this is what we would like to stop.

Jay thanked Pam and echoed that in another way too. He does not want anyone to lose sight of the big picture of what we are talking about and it is the big picture. The Heritage Commission is trying to establish some legacy areas to be able to have a voice in what happens not only now but in the future. Like he shared in the slides, change is inevitable and we will not be here forever but Exeter will be. If we can make some thoughtful discussions about this particular area then we do the town a service by creating space for future generations. Julie said it is not that they want to prevent change, they just want to let the neighborhood have a more direct and impactful say in what may change. One of the examples was a business moving in. That would be first controlled by the Zoning Board. If that was to get approved, then the Heritage District would have a denser response to what is approved. What this really does is help you to help us preserve what can happen in your defined neighborhood.

Kelly Richards spoke and wanted to acknowledge this group and put all of this hard work together. Her and her husband live at 25 Cass Street. Some of their dear neighbors have already spoken this evening. She would concur that they have spent a lot of money and put a lot of blood, sweat and tears into their property and are proud of that. She wants to speak in defense of this idea and say she appreciates the distinction between a Heritage District and a Historic District because what is being offered is flexibility and also the opportunity to leave a legacy. Maura thanked Kelly and said one of the things that Jay said ties into what she has said here. Cass Street is a gorgeous example of what property owners can do when they are able to take care of their historic homes.

Rob spoke and said that he thinks he and his wife are on the same page. He just wanted to echo a little bit of what Jackie was saying earlier just on the thought that the folks who live and breath and work in these old places do a lot to do that. He is wondering if they do become part of a Heritage District will potential home buyers in the future think there will be restrictions on

that and therefore might have a harder time selling the house. He is sympathetic to both sides as to what he is hearing and he hopes everyone understands both sides with clarity.

Bill said they are not looking to put restrictions if you want to replace a window of some sort. He told Rob he has a very beautiful home and one of the things that makes it so beautiful is the area around is very beautiful too. If that were to change, it would take away from his place.

Ester Murphy spoke next. She said everyone seems to be on the same page as to the limitations of what they can do to their homes. She said they have done a lot of work to her house in the last two years. They have a very big lot and they could put a house in their backyard but she does not want that to happen. She has lived in this house her whole life. Her fear is that if they sell the house, someone puts a house back there on the lot. She is willing to take some limitations she does not feel will prevent her from changing a window or painting her door blue. She worries about developers coming and finding a couple of houses that need work and wind up putting in an apartment building. She is willing to take some limitations on what she can do and they have a say in it.

Doug is next to speak and said a lot of the people who spoke made comments if he can read between the lines, unnecessarily threatened. He has a sense that a lot of the folks feel picked upon or I am going to be restricted. He wants to point out to them that the main purpose of this is not to restrict you but to protect you. It is to protect the investment and all have put into your properties. To the person on Cass Street, he points out that the house next door, number 15, he could buy that house and he could build a concrete and glass monstrosity on the footprint of that house without having to go through the Planning Board or the Zoning Board. To the folks on the corner of Park and Cass, he points out the incredible job that is being done diagonally across the street from you, the old tavern. He said he could buy this house, tear it down and put a huge monstrosity there and you would have no say at all as long as he did not change the footprint. It is here to protect us folks. These are fun neighborhoods to be in and children can play in the streets neighbors can get to meet neighbors and that is what he thinks they are trying to achieve and preserve here. Not take away something but to save what they have. Julie said that was very well put. There are no more hands raised so next up is for the Heritage Commission to meet November 17th. They have been meeting during the day at 12:30 pm. She would invite everyone with further questions to please contact John Merkle or any of the other commission members. The names are on the town website. If they get input before then, they can put together another one of these. She appreciates everyone's inputs and questions. They are going to go on if the neighborhood is interested and ask the Planning Board if this is something they will consider. This is the first step. The next step will be for the neighborhood to come up with its plan and then the Planning Board would consider that.

Julie thanked everyone for joining them tonight and it has been very informational on both sides and they look forward to coming back with some more ideas.

Meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Herrick  
Recording Secretary

