

Heritage Commission

March 16, 2021

Draft Minutes

Members Present: John Merkle, Chairman, Jay Myers, Vice Chair, John Grueter, Planning Board Rep., Maura Fay, Treasurer, Bill Campbell

John Merkle, Chairman, called meeting to order at 12:30 pm via ZOOM.

Business: Approval of the February 16th and 24th meeting minutes. John asked the members if they had a chance to read the minutes and they had. There were no revisions, so Bill made a motion to approve the minutes of February 16th and the 24th. Maura seconded. All were in favor and minutes were approved.

Next John asked Maura if there was anything on the Black Heritage Pocket Park Update. Maura said they had a public presentation on February 19th and it was pretty well attended. It was presented on ZOOM and there were 26 attendees. She also said the link is available if anyone wants to watch the presentation. Maura said she thinks it was very informative. She does not think there is another meeting scheduled quite yet, but she thinks it will be coming up in the next few weeks.

John Merkle then said that he would like to continue the discussion the Neighborhood Heritage Area. He said they left the meeting on the 24th with a bunch of questions they had not answered. He said over the course of the past several weeks he has been thinking about this and he would like to pose the idea to the commission members to maybe change the focus of what they are doing right now. He would like to try and engage the public more directly. A starting point would be best for discussing about what is good about this neighborhood. He would also like to have representatives from this area do it and come back to us. From that point, he thinks they can have a better understanding of the questions at hand right now. There have been some emails popping back and forth that indicate to him that there are people out there who want to learn more about this. He thinks it is going to have to happen with them being more directly involved with it. He then asked the members how they feel about this strategy.

Maura questioned as to whether it would be possible at this point to take the folks that indicated their interest in being part of the drafting committee and give them the charge of let's draft something so there will actually be something firm that can be discussed. She does feel that a lot of the concerns can be laid until there is some drafted guidelines to really talk about. John Merkle agreed. He said a lot of the questions they were given, were almost arbitrary. He said they are looking for something to criticize.

Bill said there was a confusion to him between what we are trying to do and what a Historic District does. He thinks Maura has a good idea and thinks maybe one or two commission members should meet with a group that is interested and see what can come up as a plan or program.

John Merkle said he would like to ask the public participants how they feel about this.

Eileen Flockhart spoke and said Maura's point was well taken. She also thinks it would be helpful for everyone in the neighborhood to get a sense of maybe what other towns have experienced. She said the neighborhood has a wealth of wonderful stuff going for it. She said it should provide more neighborhood involvement in decision making. She does not see it as regulatory so much as empowering the neighborhood.

Ian Smith said he likes the idea of getting some of the community members involved in writing up a draft. He is concerned about benefit and limitations. As an individual property owner in this neighborhood, what are the benefits the community receives from this and what are the limitations?

Sarah Stray spoke and said Eileen said exactly what she was going to say. She thinks it would be really helpful, not only to get something in writing, but really bench mark what other towns have done that have already implemented this. She is very excited about this and she is willing to help.

Janelle Schander said when she first heard about this project she was really excited. She read the Neighborhood Heritage District Handbook and got really nervous. She said they just closed on the home and they picked it because of the neighborhood and the proximity of where they want to go to. She said the handbook talks about demolition, but it does get into removal of a porch or altering the size of a window, etc. She started thinking about what if they put up a fence or sky lights. She said her home has not been updated in a really long time. By them choosing to be a Stewart of it would involve them in upgrading it making it more efficient.

John Merkle said they all appreciate Janelle's comments and he does not think it was the intension to ever be regulated to the extent of the Historic District. He said there is an opportunity here for all the folks in this area to take that into consideration.

Jay spoke and thanked Janelle for her thoughtful insight. Her comments about the handbook prompted him to look at it himself. He said what she read was coming from an appendix part of the handbook and his interpretation is this is a guideline for the committee and the community to use.

Janelle spoke again and thanked Jay for his comments. She said she definitely wants to be involved and she thinks the success of this project is having the community members involved in creating exactly what this is.

Heather Sheehan spoke and said she has lived in her home for almost twenty years. They love the neighborhood and the people. Her question is really around the process. She gets that the commission is working on what would it look like and what are the pros and cons of it. She then asked, how we as a town neighborhood and Heritage Committee pass this. How does this happen. Is it a vote of the neighborhood landowners? Is it the town in its entirety?

Maura then pulled up the list and did a shared screen for all to see. The slide was "What will this process look like." John Merkle said it is just kind of a summary of the handbook in terms of what needs to be done in this part of the process to make it happen. He said the Planning Board is probably one of the key elements with this and they need to really be convinced that the neighborhood really wants to do this. They will be the ones who oversees what takes place here. They need to present a proposal to the Planning Board. In the meantime, as a neighborhood, they need to get the people in the neighborhood involved.

Janelle asked if Maura could add a step 3d to poll the neighborhood and present results on approval or what is being proposed to the committee. Maura said she can add it in.

Doug McCallum spoke and said he has had experience designing guidelines for a couple of cities. His main concern is that this group that you are in will be tempted to overreach and get involved in details that really will make it a lot harder for people to maintain and develop their property. He said there are some density issues in this area, especially on the Exeter railroad tracks where there is a four unit apartment. He thinks the problems they have are not really design guidelines. They are more issues of zoning and density. He said it will be hard for him to support this if they get down into the weeds with like do your neighbors like the design of your porch addition.

Janelle spoke again and said if they do end up getting a list of what exactly all this means and it is approved by the people in the community, it will resolve so many of her concerns.

John Merkle said he has heard from three people who want to be part of the planning committee. He will reach out to them and have them get it started.

John Merkle said she asked Julie to comment on Renee Allen's Green Minute postings. He then asked if this is something they can arrange with Exeter TV to do. Maura said she thinks so. Renee said they were doing it for any of the committees who wanted to do the Green Minute.

With no further business, John entertained a motion to adjourn. John Grueter said, so moved. Bill seconded. All were in favor and meeting was adjourned at 1:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Herrick

Recording Secretary