

Heritage Commission

September 21, 2021

Final Minutes

Members Present: Jay Myers, Chairman, Pam Gjettum, Bill Campbell, John Merkle, Vice Chair, Julie Gilman, Select Board Rep.

Janelle Saunders from the neighborhood was present.

Call Meeting To Order: Jay Myers, Chairman called meeting to order at 7 pm in the Wheelwright Room of the Exeter Town Hall Building.

Jay stated that he wanted to take care of any HC Business before moving on to the discussion of the Neighborhood Heritage Area.

First business is the approval of the June 16, 2021 meeting minutes. After reviewing and a few changes made, Bill made a motion to approve the minutes as amended. Pam seconded. All were in favor and the minutes were approved.

Next is the approval of the HC Demolition Meeting on 8/31/2021. After reviewing and making a few changes, Bill made a motion to approve the minutes as amended. Julie seconded. All were in favor and minutes approved.

Jay said there is a public hearing scheduled for 7 Wadleigh Street but not sure what his schedule looks like. He asked the commission if there were any proposals for a date. Barbara gave him four dates and they are 9/28, 9/30, 10/6 and 10/7. Jay said 9/30 is not good for him or Maura. The commission decided on 10/6 at 7 pm and it will be a hybrid public meeting for 7 Wadleigh Street.

Jay stated there is a site review for 25 Spruce Street that needs to be scheduled. He contacted the property owner/builder and he is very flexible. This building is a two story. Pam said she drove by and Spruce Street has all these pretty little houses and there is this one box and it is a falling down box. She does not think anyone is really going to be upset. John said he went by to and ran into one of the owners. It has been on and off occupied for the past several years and it has not been well maintained. It is actually two buildings that were moved back in the 30s to form one house. Jay said he drove by as well and has a visual of it. He then asked if there was a day and time that works to go and visit it. Julie said it has to be made public that they will be visiting the site. The members decided on Thursday 9/23 at 9 am. Jay will reach out to Mike and let him know of the date and time for the visit.

Jay said he put on the agenda updates from representatives for Select Board, Planning Board, Planning Commission and Historic District Commission. He thought it would be good to get some reports on what is happening in various areas.

Julie said the Select Board has not had anything come up really that would need the Heritage Commission's input. She has kept them up to date on what the commission is doing. She said one of the things that might fall under here is the CLG Grant. She said an email went out to everyone about a ZOOM meeting with the Division of Historical Resources. This meeting is on 9/24. Julie said it is about how they are changing their grant process and she does not know what that means. Bringing up the CLG Grants, budget season is upon us and the Town Planner had to have a number to put in and last year we had \$1,000 and we didn't end up using it. She just threw a couple of ideas out to him. She suggested to survey another area town from the plan development. This is one that will not need any matching funds. The other was an idea for getting a book showing styles of homes and it gives examples from the different periods. She thinks it would be very helpful to have one that shows examples from the town as opposed to from around the country. Julie said her goal is to make this a tool for getting new volunteers getting comfortable so they know what we are talking about. This one would fall under the category where we would be matching funds. Jay said he likes the idea of the book resource.

The next topic is the Neighborhood Heritage Area. Jay said he has some things to share from August. He got a letter from Tom who lives at 37 Park Street and he does not want his property to be part of the survey. Jay said he did call Tom and he left a message because he was curious about his reason, but he never got a call back. Jay said he thinks they are looking at making some decisions on how to move forward on this.

John asked if this has to go before the town for a vote. Julie said if the Planning Board says to go ahead and do this, then it will go to the town vote.

John said it is destined to be doomed because the people who are opting out now and they opt out again legally.

Julie stated that she has been feeling more and more of a lack of enthusiasm and John said he shares that. She said it is from the feedback they are getting. Julie said they do not know from John Grueter if the Planning Board is even interested.

Jay said his impressions from previous conversations with John, he felt there would be support for it. He is not sure if he was expressing an opinion or a forecast, but that was a green light for us to go what we thought was the best route to go with the process. Jay said he agrees with Julie and feels the momentum is going backwards instead of forward.

Julie said the other thing is that they have heard more from people who don't want to be in it than they have from people who want to be in it. Pam said you will always get that.

Bill said he would like to hear what Maura thinks on this. He said some of the people at the last public meeting wanted it. He does not want to drag them through it, but on the other hand, they should be pushing rather than us pulling. He thinks they need to move on it and that is where the enthusiasm goes down. Pam said there is one more meeting on October 6<sup>th</sup> and we will see if people come to that. She feels that 7 Wadleigh Street is going to be a harder sell than 10 Wadleigh Street.

Jay passed out a draft about demolition that Maura had made. Bill asked if this comes from Maura's take on the group she is working with. Jay said that is his understanding. He cannot comment on how much correspondence she has had with the group or the group with her.

Janelle Saunders said she and Joel were on the original committee that helped with the survey of the papers. Once the results were in, they never met again. Once 93 Park Street was taken off of that, it was encouraged those in the committee be people who were within the boundaries and Joel and I were no longer on the committee at that point. As far as she knows, they have not met.

Bill asked what Maura wanted them to do with this draft. Jay said he thinks it is an initiative that has grown out of what I have shared so far when it comes to conversations either she has had or organized committee meetings with the neighborhood.

Bill said he thinks they need to fish or cut bait. He is all for it, if they are all for it. Julie said she would like to present to the Planning Board this whole thing as the Heritage Commission.

John said he has a little different attitude about this. He has been in his building 46 years and he does not believe he owns it. He is a Stewart for it. He said if he wanted to opt out, he does not think that he should be able to opt out. He thinks the town is eventually going to vote on this and there will be two sides. The ones that want to do it and those that don't. They are going to have to debate it publically both ways and the town is going to vote on it eventually. He said if they feel this should not be chewed apart as it has been, they should go to the Planning Board as it was originally designed and present their arguments knowing there is going to be opposition from both sides. Bill asked if the people go to the Planning Board or do we go to them? John said we as the Heritage Commission are putting this together so we should do it.

Jay said he thought there were two routes to this. It was something organically that would grow out of the neighborhood and they organize themselves, or as we have done, some preliminary work like the survey and we have a lot of information to share and we sort of plant the seed and have it grow. He said he thought like Bill, that it had to come from the neighborhood and not from us.

John said he thinks it has to come from the town. We are looking at this as a historical asset, this whole neighborhood and this is what we are supposed to be doing.

Julie said the question is are we ready to adopt this and go forward to the Planning Board. She said she thinks they need to let the Planning Board know what it is and what will be talked about.

Pam said they need more enthusiasm on the ground before they do anything.

Janelle said it would be really good and maybe you can pull up the role of what the Heritage Commission is. Is it telling people what they can and can't do in their homes or is it educating the public on the historical value and heritage in their area and what is there. She felt like this NHA was really pushed. It wasn't organically grown and she felt like there were a lot of other things that could have educated all of us on ways to preserve the area, but the NHA was the main thing that was pushed. She said she has learned a lot in the meantime and has done a ton of research. She and her husband have just invested in the neighborhood in February and this has consumed a ton of their time. She said they specifically made sure it was not a Historical District when they bought it and that would have affected them buying it. The reason they like the neighborhood is because it is pretty and she adores the people in her neighborhood. She worries that an NHA over time would very much change the demographic of her neighborhood. The home that she bought has not been touched since the 50s and there is a ton of restoration that needs to be done. If it is in an NHA or Historic District, to her that makes the money signs she see climb quite a bit higher. She applauds what the commission is trying to do.

Bill said he looks at it in two ways. One is that he likes to preserve old homes. The second thing is those homes are old but also of a particular economic level that allows a middle class person to get into those. It is partly the oldness of that area that has allowed people to come in. If what happens with these two that we are already looking at are torn down, they are not going to sell them back to a middle class person. They would not be able to afford it because it is going to go up a little. If this continues through the neighborhood, the neighborhood will change.

John said that if Janelle's house was on the National Register of Historical Places, you could tear it down. The Town of Exeter has nothing to stop you from doing that. All of these can and cannot do things that she and Joel have been leary of, most of them should go away. It is the feeling of the people in that building right now, that they should not feel threatened. They should feel comfortable going through with this knowing that they can't make the change. John said he would rip all of those up and see this neighborhood as it is and don't put anything on it.

Jay asked if what John is saying is that all the stuff in the manual, the guide, get rid of it. John said don't have anything to do with individual houses. Deal more with landscaping and sidewalks. Jay said by not throwing in the towel, we are talking about defining this and John said it is a Neighborhood Heritage Area. Jay said it is in the public domain as it is and the survey has been done, the boundaries have been defined and we have educated folks that this is an important area.

Julie said she agrees with this. We do not want this to feel restrictive. John said to try and get this through town and they are going to say oh they are making another Historic District. If you don't have any regulations governing the things, there is no argument.

John said to Janelle that he would rather have her on board and not being afraid of us. Janelle said she is really not afraid. She invested in her neighborhood and she does not just see it as her house. She has invested in the school for her children, her property taxes are supporting that and she likes the walkability of being able to walk to town. She has a laundry list of things that need to be done to make this house work for her family. She is worried that if she wants to update something, it can get nitpicky. If she has a plan to better suite her family, which might mean an addition or it might mean taking down some crazy 12 foot thing that was added on and making it more usable. She already has quite a few, just with the Planning Board alone, rules and regulations that she has to flow within. She mentioned the cosmetic look of the outside and she does not anticipate there being any issues, it makes her nervous because it is something that they could come up with and then it could change. This is when the rules will become solid. It is putting a lot of faith in something that is not defined.

John said then they should take it away. Jay asked, are you talking about the definitions and the details, and John said yes.

Julie said as part of being recognized as a Heritage Area, can actually help with other processes in the town. The Select Board heard from a group of residents from Washington Street who want to make improvements for slowing down traffic. Washington Street actually is on the list for new sidewalks and road improvements but not until 2026. The question for them was wait five years or put a Warrant Article on a Petition for Citizens Petition on a Warrant for money to make improvements. This is where a neighborhood Area could come in handy because we need sidewalks on x,y,z streets.

John said he might be thinking a little too radical, but he sees the ultimate committee that gets appointed by the Planning Board is doing just what Julie said. It is advocating for this whole group. That is what their job is.

Bill said he does not see how this committee gets defined and what it does if you strip it all away. Julie said it is still a Neighborhood Heritage Area. Bill then asked if they just meet on whatever they think is important. John said it says that they will determine what they deem important and it gets presented to the Planning Board.

Julie said one of the goals of this really is to get notification. This commission has had little attention and part of it that we have not been able to be on TV because there is not enough TV staff. We don't have any support staff to help us get on the website.

John said to Janelle that he trusts her in doing the right thing, but there are nonresident owners in some of these buildings and they have more than one family in the house and they don't care. It comes down to money for them. A lot of the concern from us is having to address that. The way this system works, we don't even get a chance to do that until they have already gotten their answers and all that stuff. It is already taken care of.

Janelle said her biggest issue was a lot of the cosmetic things were brought up at the beginning and it made it tough if they were going to do any sort of fixing of the addition on their home.

Pam said if we just do demolition and did not go into the window treatments or doors, people might be happier? Janelle said she thinks they would be less worried.

John said they could even possibly take the position that the HDC has the power to ask what is going to go back if it is taken down and it gives the neighborhood a chance to say ok or we don't like that.

Julie said we do not have that authority as this commission.

Jay said the actions on this are to define it and keep the area as originally defined and move forward with the concept of this draft of defining demolition. Jay said this has to come from the neighborhood to the Planning Board. Pam said either we or John who is already on it. Julie said it would be the commission that would go to the Planning Board.

Jay asked as a committee, do they table this for the next meeting and John said he thinks they have to talk to Maura about what was talked about tonight.

John asked if the commission was going to have another meeting on this and Jay said yes, they should have a meeting focused just on this.

John said he thinks this is turning it around because the ones on the fence right now will probably join back in again because they will have the ability to control what gets rebuilt.

Janelle said, let's get a definition about what the quality means. It really needs to be clear and there is the chance that it could change. The committee they talk about in the handbook is not necessarily people from the neighborhood so something has to be put in there that they are from the neighborhood.

Bill suggested this be added to the next meeting's agenda as a fish or cut bait issue.

The members decided to change the meeting night to Wednesdays and the next meeting will be on 10/20/21.

With no further business, Bill made a motion to adjourn. Pam seconded. All were in favor and meeting adjourned at 8:40pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Herrick

Recording Secretary