

Heritage Commission Public Information Meeting

February 24, 2021

Draft Minutes

Members Present: John Merkle, Chairman, Maura Fay, Treasurer, Julie Gilman, Select Board Rep., Bill Campbell, John Grueter

John Merkle, Chairman, called meeting to order at 6:30 pm via ZOOM.

This meeting is for the purpose of conducting a public informational meeting to discuss the proposed establishment of a "Neighborhood Heritage Area" in the vicinity of Park and Cass Streets. The Commission's efforts are to preserve the neighborhood's character by creating an Advisory Committee of involved citizen-residents to have administrative input with the Exeter Planning Board.

John Merkle then asked Maura to put up the screen to share with everyone. He then said that the purpose of this meeting is to familiarize the public and seek volunteers to help with the establishment of a Neighborhood Heritage Area in and around Park Street, Cass Street, Walnut, etc. This is a revision of the first meeting. Some may recognize some of the slides and others will not.

The first slide is about the Heritage Commission and it was established in 2006. This slide has a website on it that people can go on and read more about the commission.

Julie talked about the next slide. She said the Heritage Commission does for historical resources what a Conservation Commission does for natural resources. The Heritage Commission provides and assists, including proposed demolitions. They also conduct inventories of Exeter's history.

Julie talked about the next slide that asked what is considered a historical resource and why. She said if people have read the Park Street Survey that is on the Heritage Commission's website, you will see that it is titled "Historic District Survey". She explained what is included in it. This is anything that involves pre-Europeans coming to Exeter. This is buildings, parks, landscapes and any place over fifty years old and this is considered a resource to the heritage or historic atmosphere in town.

John Merkle spoke about the next slide that indicates the area of the Park Street historic area. This includes Forest Street, part of Salem Street, Locus Street, Park Street and Cass Street, Green Street, part of Main Street and also part of Epping Road. He thinks there is around 200 properties in this area. John said they will be coming back to this as they move forward with questions and answers. If everyone had a chance to look at the actual survey, each and every one of these buildings are identified individually. Julie said that there are lots of little fun facts about that area that are in the survey on the website.

Maura spoke about the next slide. She said what we are starting to talk about at this point is to pull together what is now being called a Neighborhood Heritage Area. There would be a group of people who would volunteer to become a strategic planning committee. It would be neighborhood residents primarily, but it could also be other interested parties from town. These folks would get together and review the documents is provided to us by the Historic Resources and would start drafting up a proposal

about what the Neighborhood Heritage Area would entail. This recommendation would go to the Planning Board and the Planning Board would be the deciding body, who would say yes or no to establishing this heritage area. At this point, if the Planning Board were to say yes, an official Advisory Panel would be appointed for this area. This would consist of 3 to 7 members with up to 3 alternates.

Maura talked about the next slide as well. The question was asked at the last presentation about opting in or out. The way this would work is the boundaries of the heritage area would be determined by that Advisory Committee. The goal would be to preserve and protect as much of that neighborhood as possible.

Maura said they touched a little bit on why a move like this is important. This is a really unique section of town and it does have some of the oldest homes from some of the earliest days of European settlement.

Julie said what they want to accomplish by having a Heritage Area is more residents wise in agreement with all the paperwork and regulations that come with trying to build something new or just working on a change on your place that might fall within zoning restrictions. A Heritage Area is going to be as restrictive or as loose as the Advisory Committee decide and the Planning Board approves. Julie said this is more about maintain the neighborhood feel by the people that live there.

Maura said on the next slide that the regulations will be drafted by the Advisory Committee. They will be presented to the Planning Board for approval. She said whoever is interested in being involved in this is welcome to do so.

On the next slide, Maura said this came up a little bit at the last presentation that there is not any specific tax advantage for being in the boundaries. She thinks the main advantage is that the property values get preserved in the way that they are because of living in a neighborhood such as this.

John Merkle did the next slide. He said there are two colors of print on this slide. The yellow are issues that they have already engaged or are still engaged with. The white are ones that are yet to be fulfilled. He said this is basically the process of putting together a Neighborhood Heritage Area. The Planning Board will be looking for a plan at some point for this Neighborhood Heritage Area and we are looking for people tonight who are interested and help putting it together.

John Merkle said that at this time, we would like to address questions and comments. He asked that whoever wanted to speak to state their name and street address.

Anne Surman stated that she is not in the neighborhood, but she is interested in the whole presentation and a member of the neighborhood invited her to this meeting. She said assuming that it passes and it already exists, is it advisory only. She is wondering about the level of authority. She is asking if the Planning Board has the final say. Julie said what they are trying to do with this tool that the State has developed is to engage more with the public with their connection to the town. The Planning Board only has certain things that they can have regulations over. Some of the things that may happen on a piece of property in this area would never be seen by the Planning Board.

Anne Kenny lives at 3 Walnut Street. She said she wanted to point out that this neighborhood is a community and everybody here helps everybody else. The people living here are teachers, artists, employees of Exeter. It is a rich, cultural community. She likes the idea that it is something the

commission wants to preserve. She joined tonight because she is concerned because a building was demolished and a totally new footprint was put in place and it seems considerably larger. These things stand out in the neighborhood. She appreciates that the commission wants to keep the community feel here. She said she would like to volunteer. She is hoping that the Planning Board would be open to an advisory group.

Joel Schander lives at 93 Park Street. He is speaking on behalf of the trustees of Park Street. He said they oppose the creation of this and he strongly urges his neighbors to object this proposal as well. He said they no reason to doubt the good intentions of the commission in whole. He said the commission wants a blank check for the Planning Board, not the neighborhood to appoint its own Advisory Committee. He said they have some questions for the commission and in the interest of time, he will just read them all.

1. Who did tonight's notification get mailed out to? Was it just the property owners?
2. At the October meeting, it was said that the decision would go to the town for a town vote, but the presentation tonight says that neither the town nor the neighborhood are involved.
3. Can property owners opt out of this? It is listed as a question on one of the slides tonight, but the question was not answered.
4. What is the process to dissolve an NHA? Can the neighborhood do it by a petition? Does the Planning Board or the Heritage Commission do it?
5. Does the town and or state law require the NHA Advisory Meeting be held as a public meeting?
6. During the last presentation, someone asked what if the real purpose of the NHA was to magically grant the Zoning Board or the Planning Board to say no to the at the property owners request that the town otherwise could not say no to. The answer that was given at the time was yes and he questions if this is still the Heritage's position.
7. In order to avoid any legal challenges, it seems that any town decisions related to the NHA will have to be equitably applied, but if the commission's process happens as described in the fact, it varies a little bit in the presentation tonight, the Advisory Committee will be set up before the criteria exists. Does the regulations go into effect after they create them? What is the time frame?
8. If the purpose of an NHA is a truly neighborhood specific heritage, then why isn't the Advisory Committee made up of neighborhood members like an HOA.
9. Is the Advisory Committee selected by the town rather than elected by the neighborhood?
10. What other boards or commissions will home owners have to go through to get to Zoning Board or other town agendas?

Julie then asked Joel to send his question to John Merkle so the commission can get some comprehensive answers.

Maura said she thinks they can try and cover as much as possible, but some of the questions the commission will try to answer after talking to one another.

Maura said in terms of who got the mailings, it was every property that was part of the original survey project. It did not include folks outside the boundaries.

In terms of the opt out question, there is that opportunity after the Neighborhood Advisory Committee has been established and they are talking about what the boundaries are. This would be the time when

a property owner could (if they were at the edge of the property), no, we do not want this property to be involved. The Advisory Committee would take that request into consideration.

Julie wanted to talk about the question of the meetings being public meetings. She said yes, as an Advisory Group, they would be public meetings with minutes and notices about the meeting times and places. This would be on the website and also at the Library.

Maura addressed the question of why would not the Advisory Committee be all neighborhood members. She said ideally, it would be. This is a structure that was created by the State of New Hampshire to allow towns to provide additional protection to areas of their town. It is a relatively new concept and is still being worked on. The intension of this is to preserve the feel of a neighborhood.

Fran Berman lives at 12 Locust Ave. She has lived there for 35 years and thinks it is an awesome neighborhood. She would like to know as issues arise that might not come before the Planning Board normally, how would they get triggered to go before the Advisory Board? How would anyone become aware that something was about to happen that would get the Advisory Board engaged. Julie said that was a good question and she proposed that it would come to the Planning and Building Department when a permit is being requested.

Jackie Rockel and she lives at 31 Park Street. She has about eight questions but she will send them to John Merkle instead of reading them. She loves the neighborhood but she does not want any more regulations. She does not know how you can define the overall feel of a neighborhood that has housing that spends four centuries of construction. Her home has parts that were built before 1802. She thinks that everyone who is interested in this should read the Heritage Commission Handbook that is available on the State site. She said they are being asked to sign up for undefined regulations. This Advisory Commission does not have any rules. She thinks this is the biggest problem with this overall. What she sees is neighbors getting on each other's cases. She understand the spirit of all of this. That people want things to stay the same.

Anne Kenny just has a few follow-ups after listening to everything. She did move to this neighborhood to raise her children and have them go to the schools here. The other is electing representatives from our neighborhood. She would just say that she is not in favor of that at all.

Carol Waters who lives at 15 Oak Street. She has lived in this neighborhood since 1973 and she has seen a lot of changes, all for the better. She was not sure what the Heritage Commission was but she said it has been made clear. She said she would be able to serve on a committee of some sort. She is just not sure if she is pro or con about this. She is open to listen and decide, but she is not sure this is what is needed.

Abby Payeur who lives at 8 Salem Street. She would like to circle around to the questions from Joel who lives on 93 Park Street and the woman from Locust Street. It seemed they had a lot of questions that would just give more information on what the commission has planned. She said they were asked to submit their questions to John Merkle. She asked if there was any way those questions could be available in some sort of public forum that everyone could access to get the answers.

John said what they probably need to do is meet one more formal time to generate the answers to these questions. At that point, they will get posted and be accessible.

John then asked the members if they had any comments they would like to make before we sign out. John will take the questions and he will distribute them to everyone individually. He said they will need to meet formally for this. Maura asked if this would be at the next scheduled meeting. John said yes. The next meeting is scheduled for 3/16/2021 at 12:30 pm.

With no other business or discussion, John made a motion to adjourn. John Grueter said so moved. Bill seconded. All were in favor and meeting adjourned at 8:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Herrick

Recording Secretary