

Heritage Commission  
November 17, 2021  
Final Minutes

Members Present: Jay Myers, Chairman, Pam Gjettum, Maura Fay, Bill Campbell, John Merkle, Vice Chair

Call Meeting To Order: Jay Myers, Chairman, called meeting to order at 7:00 pm in the Wheelwright Room of the Exeter Town Office Building.

First on the agenda are the October 19th minutes. After review and some changes, Bill made a motion to accept the minutes as amended. Maura seconded. All were in favor and minutes approved. Pam abstained because she was not at the last meeting.

Jay wanted it noted that they have two public members, Kelly Richards from Cass Street and Janelle Schanders from Park Street.

Jay said he just wanted to give a brief update on the exchange he had this week with Florence Ruffner who approached him about getting support for the plaque that the Exeter branch of the DAR were applying to the national office to receive. She talked with Greg from Parks & Rec and he said we should weigh in on it. Jay said he drafted a letter and got it in before their application and asked to be updated when they hear from the national office.

Next on the agenda is an update on the recent demolition meeting at 43 Front Street which is the Baptist Church and we are asking for a public hearing before anything further happens.

John said we talked about how it was going to make a significant change in the appearance of the building and it would have some impact on the historic nature of it. We wanted to do a public meeting so the public would have an opportunity to speak.

Next is the discussion on the status of the proposed Neighborhood Heritage Area. Jay said there has not been any decision made one way or the other just yet as to what to do. He said the last thing they talked about was the area and there was a survey.

Maura said she sent copies of the survey to the members. She said there seems to be enough interest from a limited section of the neighborhood focusing on demolition and the scale of new construction in keeping with neighbor's houses. She said it made sense to limit it to that little outline of homes where the owners had indicated restrictions

of demolition. With the original survey that went out, she included all of the potential elements that the Division of Historic Resources allowed for. As a result, it may be that some folks took a brief look at it and kind of said no to everything and there may be other areas that might be involved if it was just demolition.

Maura said she took a deeper look into the materials from DHR about how to establish a Heritage Neighborhood Area. She said the way it is structured is for us to make an official request to be on the Planning Board agenda to propose the ordinance. There are two parts. There is an ordinance the Planning Board adopts which then establishes the Advisory Committee who then create what is called the neighborhood plan. Maura says she hesitates to do any more work on this until the Planning Board adopts it because if the Planning Board says no, there is no point in doing any more work.

Bill then asked if they were ready to go to the Planning Board. Maura said that she thinks they probably are. She also said they would have to finalize a document to present to the Planning Board which she has but it is only 80% complete. She will send a copy of this out to the members.

Maura then said that she thinks a letter should be sent by Jay to the Planning Board telling them that they want to talk about this.

Pam then asked the two public attendees if there was anything they wanted to add or something particular they want or do not want in this letter.

Kelly Richards said what she has experienced thus far with the process and concerns she has expressed to both John and Maura. She had the barn on Cass Street which she took down and have replaced. She said they felt intimidated with the process. She said they did not feel it was a collavergence process. She said they were made to feel like it was out of their hands and they would be told whether or not they could take it down. She said it was not the right tone because it sounds like you are trying to develop something that is good for the people who want to be a part of it. She said her personal experience with it was not great. She said once they got the survey and responded to it and she saw the results of the survey, it was clear that most of the responses to the survey were not in favor overall. She said, we on Cass Street and some folks on Park Street saw themselves kind of looped into this even though they had indicated they had reservations. She said her major concern is that she wants people to be in favor of the choices that are made and go into it with eyes wide open and understand what they are agreeing to rather than you're included in it if you don't disagree. She said it felt as if this was the way it was being steered.

Her concern is some people will unknowingly be included in this area and have limitations put on their properties without realizing that is what is happening.

John said he does not think the Planning Board would allow it to happen unless there is a strong support for it.

Kelly said she does see merit in what the commission is trying to cultivate here, she just wants to make sure people have their eyes wide open and they understand what they are participating in and are fully engaged in it.

Maura said one of the challenges is that the whole idea was to ask people what they were interested in and not to dictate. She is not sure why it came across as we are doing all of these things and they are being dictated. She is a little confused as to where the confusion came from originally.

Kelly said when she saw the results of the survey she said there was not a lot of interest and yet, you are kind of pushing forward with it because you had a vision and are trying to pursue a more narrow vision. In looking at the results of the survey, it looked like most people were not inclined to do those things.

Maura said that was true and valuable information.

Kelly said the other point for her was there were around 200 homes that were included in the survey and maybe half of them responded or less.

Janelle Schanders said if you are going to turn around and present something to the board that is going to include all of those people, that is a big deal. She said we had talked about this at the meeting she was in before. Maybe things have been cemented a little bit better to what the scope of this is, resurveying the area formally by sending a letter from the committee to them. She thinks it will be heard better.

Jay said, now that we have presented the big picture and we have some data and information and you have listened to the conversation and whittled this down to demolitions, new construction. On principle it sounds like you are in agreement in terms of the principle is this something you can get behind.

Janelle said it is much different then originally presented.

Jay said there was a lot of information there and we did our best to present the big picture to get some feedback. He said there were two rounds of public feedback and a survey. Jay said he appreciates their feedback.

Kelly said when she first heard about it, she was excited and went to the first meeting and sat beside her husband and she was for it and he was against it. She said she got concerned the deeper they got into it and from the conversations she has had with her immediate neighbors is of the same feel. She likes the fact the commission has a sharper focus.

Janelle said even if she is ok with it now, she does not feel comfortable saying that my neighbor is or that everybody is. She said it comes to a question that has been shot down multiple times and she cannot understand why it cannot be an area with a voluntary opt in.

Maura then said that she would take exception to this that it has been shot down multiple times because it has not even been presented as an official concept yet. Janelle then said no, it is the idea of it being voluntary in discussions here.

Maura said part of the issue is that we have owners in homes now who do not want to be part of it and then we get to the second or third owner from them who then chooses to demolish their house. It feels to me like for those of us who are stewarding these older properties, it should not all be in my hands to decide perpetuity. She doesn't know if it is possible to have every person be delighted about it, but she hopes every person can at least feel comfortable that it is in efforts to preserve a sense of community. She then said that maybe an opt in should be something that should be considered.

Pam said she does not think an opt in/out area would work.

John said one of the commission's tasks is to survey our area and given the opportunity to do that, we recognized that section of town is more historical than a lot of the historic districts in the town. We submitted an application to the Division of Historical Resources through the certified local government program to do a survey on the neighborhood. We did not see the individual houses as being opt in or opt out, we looked at the whole neighborhood. When the survey was put together, it took into account that Park Street goes back to the 1600s and we saw it as a neighborhood. John said he has lived on Park Street for 46 years and he said he doesn't care if we do not do it because I am going to take care of my house just like you are taking care of yours. He said he also knows that there are out of towners who own property here that don't have any kind of concern at all except what they are getting out of it financially. The survey was done as a tool to help everyone in the neighborhood to maybe do something to protect themselves. This is all we were looking to do. We do not want control over anybody's property.

Kelly wants to know if the commission's point is that there would be some kind of coercion like if you determined that Cass Street is not included here and there were five families that were in favor of it and five families that were not that somehow because they live on Cass Street, they would lose some rights?

Janelle said you would lose the right to demolish your house, not that I want to demolish mine, but you would. Or you could leave it up to a committee.

Pam said they would come before us as the Heritage Committee and then we would be the bad guys and say, no, you can't.

John said we could not do that. We would recommend that the demolition could not be done.

Kelly said she thinks in the end, a new letter with a more focused approach of what we are trying to preserve and protect that is delivered to all the potential families where everyone has the opportunity to revisit the idea.

Kelly said she thinks some people felt like someone was stepping on their toes and trying to tell them what they can and cannot do with your property.

Bill said he does not see this neighborhood committee having the power to say, no you cannot demolish your house. He sees it as a committee that is going to make recommendations.

Jay said it has been just about a year ago that we held our first meeting about this and sent out the postcard for an invitation for a virtual meeting. He also said they have come a long way time wise with an idea. He said it was a couple of years in the making to get to the survey.

Jay then proposed that he and Maura work on a draft letter and put into action this discussion and the decisions of reaching out to the original scope of the neighborhood with the intent of soliciting feedback on the definition of what we are talking about when it comes to demolition and some of the ordinance language. After the feedback, take something to the Planning Board for further progress.

Maura said she thinks she and Jay should work on the letter for the next meeting for discussion and approval by the committee.

Janelle told the commission that Joel had emailed the Heritage Commission but she is not positive that he offered a certain amount of money towards the mailings if that would be helpful. The members said that would be very helpful. She will have him get in touch with the commission.

Jay said this was very generous and thanked her.

Bill said it was helpful having the two public attendees here tonight. Kelly said she appreciates the commission's hard work and willingness to fine tune the project because she does see value in it.

Jay said there were no updates from the Select Board because Julie was not present and none from the Planning Board because John was neither. Also the HDC which Pam said was having their meeting tomorrow night and the discussion will be High Street.

With no further business, Jay asked for a motion to adjourn and Bill said so. Meeting was adjourned at 8:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Elizabeth Herrick  
Recording Secretary