

Heritage Commission

January 19, 2022

Final Minutes

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

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.

New Business: Public Hearings: First is the review and approval of the December 15, 2021 Demolition Hearing minutes. After review and some changes, Bill made a motion to approve the minutes as amended. Pam seconded. All were in favor and minutes approved.

Next is the review and approval of the December 15, 2021 meeting minutes. After reviewing with no changes, Pam made a motion to approve the minutes. Bill seconded. All were in favor and minutes approved.

Jay then spoke about the 2021 financial report that he submitted to the Select Board for the annual report. He said he did it this week and had John Merkle review it and John gave his favor to it. Jay said he just wanted the commission to be aware of what was submitted. Jay said he also wants to bring into the agenda, Maura as the Financial Officer, to get an idea of what our budget is. Each month bring this to the table so when we have any need for decision making related to finances, we will have an idea of what there is.

Julie then said that typically in the budget we have money for the Recording Secretary and grant matching. Some of this is proposed by the Town Manager unless we say otherwise. This year the Heritage Commission proposed number is \$893, which is the same as last year and the year before. It gives us a little bit of money, but not a lot. In our Heritage Fund, we have a little over \$5,000. This can be used for grant matching or sending out information to people.

Julie then stated that the Historic District Commission is considering the property at 8 Gilman Lane and she volunteered to get a consultant because of the discussion of the dating and the history of the building. Julie said she offered to find someone who is a specialist because members of the public were really adamant they know more about the structure, as far as the dating of the structure. Julie said she did find someone but she does not know his price but she is asking the commission if they would be amenable to this. The HDC does have a little bit of money left, but if we could make up the rest of it through the Heritage Fund would be good. Julie is hoping it will not be more than \$2,000 because it only took him an hour and a half to go through the building and he will be writing a small short report and this will be a power point at tomorrow night's HDC Meeting.

Maura then made a motion to allow up to \$2,000 to be used from the Heritage Fund to cover the cost of property inspection of 8 Gilman Lane. John seconded. Jay then asked if there was any further discussion on this and Julie told the commission the specialist's name is Stephen Mallory and he is Preservationist and he is from Kensington, NH. All were in favor and motion approved.

Next on the agenda is the discussion of the Demolition Review Committee report on 280 Epping Road. John said that they did not see any historical value to the property. Jay asked who went and it was John, Pam and Bill. Jay then asked for a motion to accept the Demolition Board's discussion and Bill said so moved. Julie seconded. All were in favor and motion carries.

The next item is the next steps for the Neighborhood Heritage Area. Jay asked for decisions on the next steps which dates back to the November meeting when Maura had done some work and presented some information, a draft of a letter which was tabled for the December meeting because Maura was not available at the time.

Julie said that she is becoming less and less confident. She finds it to be a hurdle with the information we have been getting and the area is getting smaller and smaller of people who want to participate. Most are concerned about that it calls for a demolition review, as does this commission.

Pam said that she feels like we are trying to push this and she thinks it should be originating in the neighborhood as opposed to being laid down upon it.

Bill said he agrees with Pam. He said he thought it was a great idea and it still is a great idea, but if you don't have the support of the group, it won't work.

Julie said this commission only has recommendation authority and cannot prevent something from being demolished and she thinks part of what the Heritage Neighborhood does is give people the opportunity to say, this shall not be demolished and the Planning Board has to listen to that.

Maura stated that she thinks Julie is right and the major distinction is that if a Neighborhood Heritage Area were to be established, it would have more authority. Bill then asked if they have the authority to stop it and Maura said yes, that is the theory if the Planning Board adopts it with language that is strong enough.

Maura said she thinks as this project has moved along, she agrees that it does not feel like there was support for it that there use several years ago. She feels like it would be wonderful to do and she still has the same concerns that she has always had about houses in the neighborhood being demolished and we are already seeing that happen. Maura said her only thought was is it worthwhile for us to do that last mailing. She wonder if it would be helpful for us to see on paper if we were able to get responses back from a letter saying Yes or No. This might not be worth the effort if we do not have enough folks in the neighborhood willing to take on running that Advisory Board.

Julie said that was one of the other distinguishing features of the Heritage Neighborhood as opposed to the Heritage Commission is that it delineated people with occupations that need to be on the board, like an engineer and architect.

Bill asked if a Neighborhood Heritage Commission would have the authority to ask about what is going up in its place if a home is torn down.

Maura said that it could but from the responses we received from the original survey, the census seems to be that people were mostly concerned with demolition. She thinks the new constructing element has to be compatible with the neighborhood.

Pam said she thinks it would be nice to have some numbers so we could say 44% of the people in the neighborhood approve, but we will probably get a 10% answer.

Maura said that is her concern. If we send out a letter with a postcard that people need to fill out and return, what would be considered a decent response rate?

John said there is Cass Street and they are all totally against it and this is a key piece that should be there. John said they will not respond.

Maura said that she does not know that they won't respond. She thinks her idea was send the letter. Have the postcard with return address and a box to check yes or no. If that is all the people have to do and they are strongly opposed to it, hopefully they will check the box and toss it in the mail.

Bill said even if you send out 70 of these letters and only 35 respond, you can consider the other 35 are not interested. Take the 35 that you took in and 10 of those people said yes and 25 said no, you would have something to work with.

Maura agrees and said it would be nice to have something in black and white to point to if someone were to say whatever happened to this.

John said we will need it for the Planning Board because they are going to want to know what the numbers are to support it.

Jay then asked if the postcard was the best way to do this or maybe using Survey Monkey or something on line where the postcard has a web link.

Maura said the reason she wanted to do this was because one of the things she heard during the survey process was that people were very concerned that it only went out by email and we did not have contact information for everybody and it needed to be an official that each household got contacted for sure by mail. Maura said the concern with a survey money is we do want to limit people's responses to those who live in the neighborhood.

Jay said it seems like the discussion is gravitating towards the letter and postcard and then asked what the questions would be on the postcard. Maura said there would only be one

question. Are you in favor of the proposed language in the letter you received or are you opposed to it? Jay said there are certain streets here and wanted to know if they could ask what street they live on. Maura said she thinks that would be good.

Julie said one of the other things that is important is to be able to describe the difference between the group that would get started figuring out what the plan would be coming from the neighborhood and then the official board that makes the decisions. This seemed to confuse people and it is sort of the same thing.

Maura said she thinks they can be the same group in the end. Until the regulations are established, everyone has to first hammer out what they are and then if those people are willing to continue on as Advisory Board members.

Julie said so what she is hearing is a letter of explanation one more time and a postcard.

John asked if the regulations have gone away with the exception of the demolition. Maura said right and there are two elements. There is the demolition of existing and then for new construction there is the building shall be spaced in such a manner.

Jay said he recalled when Joel and Janelle had visited our meeting, Joel proposed financial support for this mailing and asked if anybody recalled that.

Maura got a text from Janelle and she said they would contribute \$200. Jay and the rest of the commission members asked Maura to thank her very much.

Jay said there are a couple of action items on this. We will evaluate the cost. We have the letter drafted and we need to draft the postcard for the vote. Jay said a question that is left out there is, if this moves forward, we have to think about the duplicity of what our role is in demolition review and that process and how that is going to fit with the Neighborhood Heritage Area Advisory Board.

Julie said that one of the things that could work out is when they do their demolition review, we do ours at the same time and give our advice.

Next on the agenda are just some reports from various committees and boards that participate. Jay asked Julie who is the rep for the Planning Board if there is anything the commission needs to know about. Julie said the budget is approved for the coming session. Before the town does anything like sell, demolish or give away, just about every commission has to weigh in on it as to whether the building is vital to the administration to the town.

Pam said there is a big HDC meeting tomorrow with three huge things. One is 8 Gilman Lane which the Academy really wants to demolish. The Baptist Church is coming up and then there is a building downtown 173-179 Water Street to change the entrances.

John asked if there was anything going on with the loka because there is a dumpster outside again. Jay said that he has seen people come and go. Bill said he asked Doug Eastman and was told they are working on it.

Jay said in other business, we had a public comment and this has to do with a person who lives at 60 Main Street was notified of a Zoning Variance application for 46 Main Street, which abuts the property. This individual is wondering if this is a matter in which the Heritage Commission would weigh in on. Jay was not aware of anything and neither was any other commission member.

Julie said we are here to serve the public. If somebody is concerned about this and they want to know more information about it without just relying on the Historical Society, they can come to us for an opinion.

Jay then asked if there is any response from the HC to this individual's question. Pam said we could say that we have not been informed about this and we should be informed if the building is to be torn down.

Julie said she thinks the commission's part is to review the buildings even if we know it is going to be demolished. The public can come to us and ask our opinion about a buildings history.

John said that he thinks we need to be careful. The commission has the potential of hurting someone's property value. It is one thing to get the building permit for a demolition because that is cut and dry and we are doing our job. We do not know any of the facts behind any of this right now. Jay said this person just wanted the commission to respond to their comment or to engage in a dialogue for information. Jay said he will attempt to reach out and this will be more informational and this is what the Heritage Commission will do and then advise to engage with the Zoning Board. John said we need some ground to stand on before we engage. John then said that Jay can just lay out the procedure and what we do because he does not see anything wrong with that.

With no further business, Jay made a motion to adjourn. Pam said so moved and meeting was adjourned at 8:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Herrick

Recording Secretary

