

MINUTES
Hamilton Historic District Commission/Historical Commission
December 10, 2019
Memorial Room, Hamilton Town Hall

MEMBERS PRESENT: Edwin Howard, Chair; Elizabeth Wheaton, Katherine Mittelbusher, Olivia Hyde, Kristen Weiss, and Scott Clements

MEMBERS ABSENT: Margaret Meahl

CONSULTANTS IN ATTENDANCE: Eric Dray and Gretchen Schuler

Ed Howard opened the Hamilton Historic District Commission / Historical Commission meeting at 1:09 p.m. with a quorum present. He said the Commission would be spending more time on the guidelines they have been reviewing for the last two or three meetings.

He noted Mary Green, who took out papers to be an alternate, was not present. She won't be confirmed until the next Board of Selectmen meeting, which is Dec. 16. As far as he knows, nobody else has applied. Ms. Green has been active in Town for many years.

DISCUSSION ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Mr. Howard said it is his understanding that in Massachusetts when you dig a hole on public land, there's a requirement to have it cleared by the Massachusetts Historic Commission. There is a tombstone to the left of the driveway at Town Hall that reads: Whipple. His friend Ray Whipple says there isn't a body located there; however, flags are placed there as a memorial, and Mr. Howard thinks it's appropriate to have an archaeological assessment done.

Kristen Weiss cited past experience with having to dig an archaeological pit at a site and it is something they needed to pay for. She wasn't sure if the assessments were triggered by taking public money for a historic site. Elizabeth Wheaton said she thought yes. Because the Town Hall renovation project is being funded in part through Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds, it was suggested that perhaps the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) would pay for the assessment or perhaps the Town Hall Building Committee might put it in their budget. Scott Clements said a lot of thought hasn't been given to the site yet. Mr. Howard asked Ms. Weiss to investigate archaeological assessments. She said she would contact the Massachusetts Historic Commission to find out the requirements.

Ms. Wheaton asked how the project was being funded and if it were local money. She said she thought it was the State grant that triggered the requirement but there might be a mechanism in the CPA also. The Town Hall project received CPC grant money and will also

be bonded through the Town. Mr. Howard said they can't ignore the fact that the road was laid out in 1640. The HHDC decided that even if they aren't required to do the assessment by Mass Historic, they should do it.

Ms. Wheaton suggested they ask the Town Hall Building Committee about the archaeological assessment when they meet jointly with them today at 3 p.m.

DISCUSS VICE CHAIR

Because Jack Hauck, who was Vice Chair, has left, Mr. Howard said he thought the Commission needed to appoint a new Vice Chair. He asked the Commission to think about who they might want to appoint.

CONTINUE ON DEVELOPING HISTORIC DISTRICT GUIDELINES HANDBOOK

Eric Dray and Gretchen Schuler (both present) had distributed a status report to the HHDC. They are the consultants working on a **Proposed Outline of the Hamilton Historic District Handbook** draft and are meeting with the HHDC for the purpose of gathering feedback about what to include in the guidelines.

Mr. Dray said the goal for today was to go through the rest of the specific design guidelines for elements of buildings and site improvements in the sections **IV. Alterations to Historic Buildings; V. Additions to (Historic) Buildings; VI. Alterations to Yards/Site Improvements; VII. Demolition; and VIII. New Construction**. Mr. Dray picked up where they had left off at the last meeting, which was #15 on the list under Section IV.

IV. Alterations to (Historic) Buildings

15. Siding: There are only clapboard and shingles in Town and the guideline is to replace whatever is there in kind. The challenge is that it is hard to trace back to what was original. There is an outright prohibition of newer siding products. Mr. Clements clarified that the section covers what happens if someone comes in and wants to use something other than what's there, such as brick and stone.

16. Signage: Design, scale and signage must be appropriate to the building. Signs should be located near the front entrance to the property so there aren't signs all over the place. The number of signs needs to comply with the bylaw. The guidelines can't discuss color. The HHDC members discussed that a nearby church had developed a sign based on another sign and the material used for it didn't work. Ms. Weiss asked if they could address materials in this section. Mr. Clements said the most important thing was that the sign should reflect the architectural context of the building. She thought they should include the fencing as part of the context. Mr. Clements asked if the zoning for the Historic District was all R1 or if it were mixed-use. This section covers businesses too.

17. Skylights: Not permitted.

18. Solar panels (energy-collecting devices): This is nuanced. The HHDC discussed that it wants to leave space to be progressive with energy and how it's changing and yet the idea is that the solar panels are kept out of view— not permitted on elevations fronting the public streets and the size of the panels can't dominate the roof slope and must be minimally visible. Mr. Clements said the other consideration is that if they say they can't be visible from Bay Road, they are basically prohibiting them because they have to face east, which is toward Bay Road. Mr. Howard said the deciding characteristic is that the early roofs weren't designed to be able to carry the weight of solar panels so they can really only be used in new construction that could support them. Ms. Wheaton said someone could add joists to support them and the technology could involve into something new in the future. She also brought up that someone might want to install a slate roof. Mr. Clements said there is one building in the historic district with a slate roof. The HHDC said they need more "hedging" language so it reads what "may" be allowable. Mr. Howard asked about steel and other metal roof materials. The members said that was addressed under the category of roof materials.

19. Steps, stairways and railings: The language here is to replace in kind to match the original if it can't be repaired. It may be incumbent on the HHDC to determine if something is historically significant. Mr. Dray said he will put this in the preamble also. Ms. Weiss said there is always going to be an argument for modifying material in the interest of safety. Also, Mr. Clements noted that variances may be issued for stairs not up to code. The HHDC addressed universal accessibility (ADA-compliance). Ramps on residences should be on the secondary elevation not the primary one. Mr. Clement said the building should be able to be restored to its original design so the ramp addition needs to be reversible.

20. Trim and ornamental details: Replace in kind. Ms. Wheaton said on things like the water table, they should offer some leeway to use some other newer construction materials but not name them specifically so this can be discussed on a case-by-case basis. Mr. Dray said they could use the Secretary of the Interior Standards that say to replace in kind where possible.

21. Windows: In this section Mr. Dray said he discussed the history and the technology of windows over the years with a diagram on the anatomy of a window done by Ms. Schuler. There will be sections on the replacement of historic windows, replacement of non-historic windows, removal or relocation of existing windows, etc., all tailored to the Secretary of the Interior standards to replace in kind, including materials. The HHDC doesn't allow anything other than replacements with single glazed or true divided windows. They are staying with that. Olivia Hyde brought up storm windows. These are exempted from review but they will include information about how to restore or replace a storm window. New windows may be added if they don't detract and are minimally visible from a public way.

Katherine Mittelbush asked if the guidelines would be in effect during the Town Hall restoration. Mr. Clements said yes, when the construction documents start. Ms. Schuler said a draft will go on the Town webpage as soon as it's ready and can appear there before the document is completely finalized.

22. Items not specifically listed above: This is a statement saying that the principles of the general guidelines shall be used in cases where things that don't apply.

23. Outbuildings (barns, garages, sheds): Includes language on existing outbuildings and new buildings. Existing ones are subject to the guidelines above. New outbuildings must be approved by the Commission. They must be subordinate to the main structure in location, size, structure, and detail. Mailboxes must comply with federal regulations on design and placement. Custom mailboxes are allowed but must be approved by the local Postmaster and the Commission. Mr. Clements asked if this section included fountains. Mr. Dray said not in this section. There was a discussion on zip codes in Hamilton. If your zip is 01936 it just means that you receive your mail at the Post Office. 01982 is noted as South Hamilton.

Section V. Additions to (Historic Buildings)

It is noted in this section that the guidelines aren't to keep things from changing in the Historic District but to manage how changes are made. New additions need to conform to the guidelines. Additions to the main elevation are generally prohibited; they are OK on the second elevation, but roof slopes of new additions need to be stepped down or otherwise differentiated.

Ms. Clements said he wasn't comfortable with language saying you can't copy historic details because if you tell people don't copy them, they try to make them radically different when really, what's wanted is to make the design "sympathetic to" the original but not a replication. Ms. Hyde disagreed, saying that in the Secretary of the Interior standards, it says it has to be differentiated. She wants to be able to tell the difference between the original part of the house and the addition so you don't end up with a Disneyland effect with buildings that aren't real. She thinks buildings that are built now should look like they are built now. Mr. Dray said materials might be one way to express a difference. Ms. Wheaton said this helps people to determine in the future in what a structure is built.

Mr. Clements said if you say "sympathetic to" someone can use something that fits within the context of the Historic District. Ms. Schuler said it sounded like everyone is saying the same thing, which is basically that they should change the language about "not copying historic architectural details" and make it just a bit softer and keep "make a clear delineation between the old and the new." Mr. Dray noted it could read: the use of ornamental details should be sympathetic in design but distinguished from the features of the primary building. Mr. Clements talked about the Ford property across from the Congregational Church. Something was torn down and built there that is so in keeping with the original that it doesn't jump out at you but is contextual.

Ms. Weiss suggested the word "unobtrusive," to say don't distract from the actual historic building by making the extension part of the original; however, it isn't bad for it to blend well and stay in character for the district. It was discussed that "sympathetic" implies it is different and not an exact copy. Ms. Wheaton noted they should tell residents the Commission is happy to work with them on a case-by-case basis.

The HHDC asked Mr. Dray to come up with language for additions to historic buildings that takes all their ideas into account and bring it back for further discussion.

Mr. Dray then moved on to Section VI. Alterations to Yards/ Site Improvements.

1. Grading and site work: The Commission is not allowed to review plant material and residents are allowed to have changing of the terrain, but the existing site grading should be preserved. Construction of berms or mounds to obscure a site from view is prohibited. Mr. Clements asked about fencing; Ms. Wheaton pointed out that fencing is not able to be reviewed. Mr. Clements said he would like to change that. It would require a Town Meeting vote. The HHDC discussed that color is another area they can't control, but that is temporary and easily changed. Fencing requires a building permit if it is over six feet in height.

2. Mailboxes: Previously discussed under #23 above.

3. Modern equipment: Cell towers, satellite dishes, etc., can't be in front yards and need to be screened from view.

4. Permanent recreational equipment: This section addresses such things as pools, basketball courts and swing-sets and says they can't be located on front yards and should be located to have limited visibility from a public way. Mr. Clements wanted fountains and other water features to be added to this section.

5. Subdivisions and roadways: Mr. Dray said he hasn't written guidelines for roads and doesn't know how much say the HHDC has about this. The Commission discussed unpaved roads. Mr. Clements said they don't want the historic district to have new subdivision cul-de-sacs. The Commission also discussed a need to preserve orientation. The HHDC can't review driveways; they can only review curb cuts. They discussed some specific new properties and their orientations and what might happen if certain properties are subdivided.

Ms. Schuler suggested they look at the Town's subdivision bylaws concerning road widths. They also discussed setbacks. Mr. Clements thinks that the right of way off of a shared driveway or private lane is 25 feet. In a Historic District, they can argue for having a setback consistent with other properties; however, oftentimes, the Fire Dept. determines this.

Ms. Hyde asked if the HHDC had any control over a driveway becoming a public way if the roadway was in the Historic District but the property was not. Mr. Dray said the consultants would come up with language for this section.

6. Yard lighting: Mr. Dray sought the opinions of the HHDC and read some language from other communities' guidelines. The Commission liked the guidelines used by Concord, which is that the up lighting of entire building facades is limited to a small number of buildings considered to be community landmarks (such as the Town Hall). Up lighting of things like fountains, trees, etc., is prohibited.

7. Recommendation for Exempt Site Work: Not discussed.

In the interest of time, Ms. Wheaton asked Mr. Dray to skip ahead to section VII. New construction.

1. General Principles and Goals: Mr. Dray read this section addressing that new construction should be compatible with the Historic District and be in harmony with the old but differentiated from it by the use of creative design and materials.

2. Siting: The HHDC talked about some new properties that orient toward a driveway and not to Bay Road. The Commission essentially wants everything to orient to and continue the rhythm of Bay Road. Mr. Dray said he will also have some language about secondary components not directly fronting Bay Road, such as garages. Mr. Howard said he liked the use of the word “rhythm” to Bay Road. Ms. Weiss said they might want to put “orient to Bay Road” rather than saying “orient to the street” or it could be interpreted to mean oriented to a new road or driveway.

3. Scale: The scale must be appropriate. Mr. Dray read the guidelines.

4. Design: New construction design should reflect the period when it is built and not be a replica of another period.

5. Materials: Ms. Weiss commented that some extra couching language about new materials being able to be used should be added. Mr. Clements suggested: “New replacement materials may be used in limited applications” (such as for a water table).

Mr. Dray moved to section VII. Demolition. The HHDC jokingly said they are all against it. Mr. Dray read: No demolition or partial demolition will be approved unless a review of the replacement is approved. He also read what the application for demolition must include, including a timetable for demolition, required documentation of the structure to be demolished, etc. Ms. Wheaton said the Demolition Delay Bylaw should be referenced there. Mr. Dray said no, because the Historic District is exempt from the demolition delay process and the HHDC actually has more power than the bylaw process. He suggested language that reads: The demolition delay bylaw is superseded by the HHDC.

Mr. Dray discussed the definitions of partial demolition. Ms. Wheaton said even if she takes brackets off a cornice on her home, the HHDC would review that. Therefore, anything could technically be considered demolition. She didn’t like the partial demolition language. Ms. Weiss said they should explain to people what is considered a partial demolition and what are things that belong in other categories for review.

The HHDC discussed the locations of their historical archives and that they want them to reside on the Town website.

Mr. Howard said a tricky part of the Demolition Delay Bylaw is that it only comes into play when there is more than 50% of the property being demolished and that’s difficult to measure.

Mr. Dray talked about how one can get a certificate of hardship if the person doesn't have the economic means to restore a property. The bylaw basically says if someone wants to tear something down, they have to talk with the HHDC.

Ms. Hyde asked if they could perhaps go back to having meetings in the evening. Ms. Schuler said they were just doing it in the daytime to accommodate her and Mr. Dray.

Mr. Dray said he will have the draft guidelines to them by Jan. 15. Then Mr. Howard will set up the next HHDC meeting.

Mr. Howard has his daughter working with the HHDC now for the time being as the Town is seeking a replacement for Coordinator Dorr Fox.

The Commission adjourned the meeting at 2:55 p.m.

Prepared by:

Mary Alice Cookson