

MINUTES
Hamilton Historic District Commission / Historical Commission
June 6, 2019

Members Present: Edwin Howard, Chair, Jack Hauck, Elizabeth Wheaton, Margaret Meahl, Kristen Weiss and Katherine Mittelbusher.

Staff Present: Dorr Fox

Ed Howard opened the meeting at 7:04 p.m. Jack made a statement commemorating D Day and the soldiers who stormed the beaches of Normandy. He noted that they were meeting in the Veteran's Memorial Room, which was dedicated with the intent of having this designation forever. He requested that everybody bow their head in gratitude. The people in the room recited the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

MINUTES

Jack Hauck made a motion to approve the minutes of the May 9, 2019 Commission meeting. He noted that he had made changes to the minutes. Katherine Mittelbusher seconded the motion and it was approved with five members in favor and two members abstaining. It was noted that the minutes have been shortened. Mr. Howard requested that Dorr Fox relay to the Town Manager that some board members would like to see more extensive minutes. Mr. Hauck noted that they should discuss the Open Meeting Law. Mr. Fox noted that members cannot email each other directly when discussing substantive topics. However, members only email staff on substantive matters.

DISCUSSION OF RFP FOR CONSULTANT TO PREPARE HISTORIC DISTRICT GUIDELINES

Mr. Fox explained that he had sent out the RFP to several consultants and received one response. Some of the consultants stated that they did not do historic district guidelines or were too busy for the project. Eric Dray and Gretchen Schuler were the consultants that sent in a response. Several Commission members were familiar with these consultants. Kristen Weiss made a motion to select Mr. Dray and Ms. Schuler as the consultants for the historic district guidelines. Margaret Meahl seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved.

310 LAKE DRIVE – PROPOSAL TO DEMOLISH A STRUCTURE

Andrew Krauss stated that he would like to demolish his house and construct a new house. He noted that the house had been moved on a new foundation in the 1970s and had been extensively damaged by a fire in 2002. He noted that the new house will be two stories in height and will be on a new foundation.

Elizabeth Wheaton stated that the Commission needs to determine whether the house is to be preferably preserved. Mr. Hauck noted that the house was never the residence of a famous person. Ms. Wheaton noted that there is not a uniform

streetscape and that there is a variety of structures in the vicinity of the property. Ms. Meahl inquired how the new house will match the existing houses in the neighborhood. Mr. Krauss stated that it will be a two story modular home. It was noted that there are several similar homes in the neighborhood.

Mr. Howard noted the Commission did not have jurisdiction over the replacement structure. He questioned whether they really need skylights, noting that he had repaired many skylights in the past. Mr. Krauss stated that they needed additional light in their great room.

Ms. Weiss stated that she thought that the proposed house fit into the scale of the neighborhood.

Ms. Wheaton made a motion that the house does not fall into the category of a structure that is preferably preserved. Therefore the project does not require a public hearing under the demolition delay bylaw. Mr. Hauck seconded the motion and all of the members voted in favor. Mr. Fox noted that there may be an appeal period.

PROPOSED SIGNS AT 624 BAY ROAD (CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH)

Cece Gough, of the First Congregational Church stated that they are seeking approval for directional signs to mark their parking lot. They think these signs will be helpful for groups not affiliated with the church, such as the Boy Scouts, that use their site.

Ms. Wheaton stated that the sign in front is necessary. However, there will be a lot of signs on the site. She discussed moving the sign in the rear of the property so that it is no longer visible from Bay Road. It could be located on one of the buildings.

Mr. Howard stated that he objected to the use of granite for the sign posts. He noted that one would not find such granite, with sharp cut edges, in Hamilton. He noted that foundations in Hamilton were generally made of rubble. He would like to see sign posts that relate more to the design of the fence. Ms. Gough stated that they selected the granite because the existing sign in front of the church has granite posts.

Mr. Hauck stated that the Commission has approved granite steps in the past. Ms. Weiss stated that she believes that there is a difference between granite steps and granite sign posts. She concurred that there is a need for a sign for the entrance. However, she prefers a sign that is lower in profile that is in keeping with the fence. She also suggested that the sign could be located on the other side of the entrance so that it does not conflict with the historical marker.

Ms. Mittelbusher expressed concern over the height of the signs. There was a brief discussion about locating it in a place that is more separated from the historical marker. There was also a discussion about putting a small sign on the fence post. The Commission members did not embrace this concept.

Ms. Weiss requested that the sign blend in with the design of the fence. Ms. Meahl concurred that a wooden sign was preferable. She also recommended that the sign not be as high as proposed. Ms. Gough stated that they thought they needed the height to make the sign visible.

Ms. Meahl inquired whether they looked at other houses of worship to see what signage they had. Ms. Gough stated that they had and many were using granite posts. She liked the idea to have the sign designed to be similar to the fence. Scott Johnson, representing the Church, suggested that they could raise one of the fence posts and put the sign on that fence post. Ms. Weiss noted that this would make the fence post out of proportion with the fence. The fence is historically appropriate as it is.

Ms. Weiss stated that objects that are not historic should blend in with the historic aspects of the district as much as possible. She noted that the sign could even be yellow to blend with the house. The new object should disappear by blending in, but still function as a sign. Mr. Johnson noted that they designed the sign to match the existing sign at the Church. He noted that he is hearing that it should fit in with the fence and be as simple as possible.

Mr. Fox read Scott Clement's letter on the project, expressing concern that there would be multiple signs on the property and that this could set a precedent. He prefers a sign that is better designed. He prefers that the sign be designed to fit into the objects that already there, such as the fence or the historic marker.

The applicant's withdrew their application for a Certificate, with the intention of redesigning the sign and returning to the Commission at a later date.

TOWN HALL PROJECT

Jay Butler, member of the Town Hall Building Committee and Chair of the Community Preservation Committee, gave an overview of the project. He explained that the Committee had reviewed eight different design options for the Town Hall project. There were considerations to locate the DPW office in the Town garage or put offices in the basement. It was decided that everyone should be located in the one building with no basement offices. They are now deciding between two different options. Option A retains the exterior envelope of the building and eliminates the grand staircase. Option B puts a small addition to the rear of the building and preserves the grand staircase. In order to proceed with the development of plans and come before Town Meeting in the spring to request funding for the project, they need to choose between these two options.

Mr. Butler explained that they have received the results of the survey. They have one hundred responses to the survey. Sixty percent do not care if the grand staircase is removed. Sixty percent do not care if there is an addition to the building. They will get another hundred on-line responses to the survey, but they need to pay to upgrade the system. There are additional hard copies of the survey which need to be reviewed.

He noted that eighty eight percent of respondents were fine with the placement of offices and a smaller meeting room in the upstairs auditorium. Ninety two percent were fine with the removal of the stage and its conversion to offices. Seventy nine percent wanted a meeting room in Town Hall. Seventy percent were fine with non-Town Hall activities to take place in Town Hall.

Mr. Butler stated that the Town Hall Building Committee wants the opinion of the Historic District / Historical Commission. They know the Historic District Commission has jurisdiction over the exterior of the building. Mr. Fox explained that Donna Brewer, Town Counsel, stated the Commission does not have jurisdiction over the interior of the building. It was noted that the Commission would have jurisdiction over an addition in the back.

Mr. Howard noted that local architect Doug Trees has proposed handicapped ramps in the front to make the building ADA accessible. Mr. Butler stated that the Town Hall Building Committee is determined to meet all of the accessibility standards. They know that there is a desire for all people to be able to access the building from the front. He noted that the majority of the parking will be in the rear. He noted that the elevator will be accessed from the rear. The state commission on accessibility will make the decision regarding this issue. The Commission discussed making the rear entrance the main entrance and treating it such architecturally.

Mr. Howard stated that according to a letter from Doug Trees the proposed project should meet the Secretary of the Interior's standards. Meeting these standards will qualify the project for funding, including CPC funding. The letter stated that the two proposed options are not historic restorations and make drastic changes to the interior of the building.

Mr. Butler stated that Mr. Tree's proposal would relocate forty percent of the Town Hall employees to the Patton Estate, which the committee was not in favor of. He stated that the Town Hall Building Committee was going to discuss this issue with the Board of Selectmen. Mr. Butler stated that there are concerns regarding obtaining grant funds. He explained that the Executive Director of the Community Preservation Coalition was coming to the next Hamilton Community Preservation Committee meeting to discuss what could be done with CPC money, and what could not.

There was a discussion among the Commission members noting that their jurisdiction only included the exterior of the building. The Town Hall Building Committee was requesting their input on the interior changes to the building. Mr. Butler noted that he had elevation drawings for option A but was not authorized to show them to the Commission.

Mr. Hauck stated that constructing an elevator would result in flooding and interfere with the French drain system for the building. Mr. Butler stated that the Town Hall Building Committee was aware of that.

Mr. Fox stated that he and Tim Olson had discussed the content of the letter to the Town Hall Building Committee. Mr. Olson suggested that they put together a list of the features that they wanted to retain in the building and those they thought were less important. He suggested that they weigh in on whether to retain the grand staircase, the woodwork, the auditorium and the stage. Mr. Fox noted that if the Town uses CPC funding, it is required to follow the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. However, if the Town selects to fund the project through a bond, meeting the Standards is not required. He noted that Stuart Saginor, Executive Director of the Community Preservation Coalition, is opposed to the concept of using CPC funds to pay for the exterior restoration, while using other funds to eliminate historic features on the interior.

The Commission had a brief discussion noting that they had been asked for their opinion on the options, even if they do not have jurisdiction over the interior changes.

Mr. Howard noted that two years ago he wrote an article regarding the Town Hall and the relocation of staff to the Patton Homestead. He stated that it is a major issue to determine where the staff will go during the renovation of the building. Mr. Butler stated that Patrick Reffett is in charge of this effort. Mr. Butler stated that this could include fifty people who will be relocated to 10,000 square feet of office space. There are not many office buildings of that size in Hamilton that are ADA compliant.

It was determined that the Commission would comment on the two options. It was noted that while they could have a consensus, they might not agree with each other and there might be a minority opinion.

Ms. Mittelbusher stated that while she wants to maintain the grand staircase, she questions whether she wants to say there should be an addition to the back, especially when they have jurisdiction over the addition. Ms. Weiss stated that she believes that the staircase has more value than the back of the building.

Ms. Wheaton stated that she wrote a letter that expresses her position. The letter talks about the intent of Chapter 40C which talks about preserving historic buildings. She noted that the Town Hall is open to the public. It relates to the civic and cultural history of the community. She read portions of the letter which emphasized the importance of the interior architecture of the building. The letter was handed out to the Commission. She noted that it does not include a reference to the Memorial Room and does not include the comments that were being made at the meeting.

Mr. Hauck stated that the Memorial was voted by the residents of the town to be a memorial room to veterans. Ms. Weiss questioned whether the Memorial Room could be moved to the upstairs meeting room. The plaques could be moved upstairs. Mr. Hauck stated that this could work. Ms. Weiss stated that it is important that the meeting room be created upstairs, even if the stage is lost. Mr. Butler stated

that many towns are restoring the upstairs meeting rooms in Town Hall. He noted that the Town's Owners Project Manager (OPM) is also in favor of keeping the stairs.

Ms. Meahl stated that she is also in favor of keeping the stairs. She noted that they reflect the Colonial Revival movement that was popular when the building was constructed. She noted that the Town does not have any other historic municipal buildings. She is in favor of restoring the interior of the building. She also noted that the architects could minimize the impact of the rear addition.

Mr. Hauck explained that he had written a history of the Town Hall building. He noted that he was very impressed by the stairs. He stated that at one time the stairs were very impressive. However, at this time, they are in sad shape. Also, they do not meet the building codes. He stated that the second floor was originally intended for entertainment, which was the purpose of the side entrance. He noted that the original purpose of the second floor no longer exists.

Mr. Butler stated that Topsfield has recently restored their Town Hall to its original design and built an addition to the rear. He noted that the restoration costs ten million.

Mr. Howard stated that he has heard from people that there are enough meeting places for the Town. He disagrees and believes there is a need for more meeting places, especially for groups that are not officially associated with the Town government.

Ms. Weiss stated that the original use does not preclude historic preservation. The idea is to preserve the building even if the original use no longer exists. This is why preservation involves adaptable use.

Mr. Hauck stated that the stairs take up a lot of space for little benefit. He stated that seniors who need to get to the second floor do not use the stairs. He also stated that many seniors cannot afford the tax costs of putting an addition to the rear of the building. Removing the stairs will be less expensive.

Ms. Weiss stated that in their role as the Historical Commission, their concern is historic preservation, not the cost of the project. Mr. Hauck stated that as a historian, he believes the addition to the building is wrong and comes at a high cost. Ms. Mittelbusher stated that there are several perspectives for historic preservation. Some people are purists, while others make compromises.

The Commission members had a discussion that they should vote on whether to maintain the staircase, whether the stage should be removed, whether there should be offices in the upstairs auditorium space, whether the woodwork should be preserved and whether the Veteran's Memorial Room should be moved upstairs. They also discussed whether Option A or Option B is preferable.

Several of the Commission members concurred that the upstairs meeting room should be designated the Veteran's Memorial Room and that all of the plaques and

objects in the existing Memorial Room should be moved to the upstairs meeting room. Several of the Commission members concurred that the removal of stage for the conversion of office space was acceptable.

There was discussion about Doug Trees letter. Mr. Butler noted that Mr. Trees wishes to permanently relocate many of the Town Hall staff to the Patton Estate. The Selectmen will be advising the Town Hall Building Committee regarding this issue. Ms. Weiss noted that they cannot comment on Mr. Trees design concepts since they have not been incorporated into either design option. The Commission should comment on the options before them.

Mr. Butler noted that the Commission could make a statement that they do not like either option. Ms. Weiss stated that as long as one option preserves the staircase and the majority of the upstairs auditorium, she is fine with the options. Mr. Butler noted that Stuart Saginor of the Community Preservation Coalition is coming to the next CPC meeting to discuss how CPC funds could be used for this project. He noted that Mr. Saginor stated that using CPC funds for preservation, while using non-CPC funds for gutting the interior of the building was contrary to the intent of the Community Preservation Act, it was still legal. He noted that the Town Hall Building Committee will meet the following week, with the intent of meeting with the Selectmen on June 17th. They plan to go to Town Meeting in the fall for funding the final plans. The construction project will require an override.

Five members of the Commission preferred Option B (preserving the staircase and adding a small addition to the rear of the building). One member preferred Option A (eliminating the grand staircase and not building the addition). The Commission further discussed the draft letter endorsing Option B, and preserving the grand staircase, preserving the historic woodwork where feasible, moving the Veteran's Memorial Room to the second floor meeting room and allowing the removal of the stage. Mr. Fox will add the comments from the meeting to the letter and send it out for the Commission to review.

The members discussed the next meeting date, noting that it might be determined by when the consultants can make it.

Ms. Wheaton made a motion to adjourn at 9:42 p.m. Ms. Meahl seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved.