

West Newbury

Historical Commission Meeting Minutes

Meeting date & place: 7:00 pm, October 13, 2020 Via Remote Participation--GoToMeeting

Members Present Remotely: Chairman Bob Janes; Jennifer Conway; Dot Cavanaugh; Elisa Grammer via GoToMeeting.

At the outset, Chairman Janes read the following statement: "Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitation on the number of people that may gather in one place, this meeting of the West Newbury Historical Commission will be conducted via remote participation to the greatest extent possible."

Historic Sites Survey

Ms. Conway and Mr. Janes reported that they have not seen final approval and a final reimbursement from the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) for the Phase 2 survey. *Ms. Conway will call MHC to check the status.*

Ms. Conway reported that the Phase 2 Survey in hard copy is available in the G.A.R. Library.

Ms. Grammer noted that the [Historic Sites Survey webpage](#) on the Town website has been revised to include information from the Phase 2 Survey. This is the only single place where someone can readily find a surveyed property sorted by address. She also added a [page](#) describing the Maple Street Historic Area. She said that in reviewing the Maple Street area information, she found that the Phase 2 Survey [overview information](#) offered more accessible detail about the history of the Maple Street area overall and its development due to proximity to Post Office Square than did the [Maple Street area form](#). *By unanimous roll call vote, the Commission approved the changes to the website.*

It was generally agreed that the Commission should have a Phase 2 roll out including an update to the first page of the Historical Commission website, website announcements, and an email blast for the Town to send out. Ms. Conway agreed to work on drafting this.

Letters to homeowners including Survey excerpts and other information have been prepared using MS Word mailmerge, along with a spreadsheet showing who gets what attachments in each envelope. Ms. Grammer said that she spoke with Bethany Goroff Dorau, who is a West Newbury resident and historian who works at Historic New England. Ms. Goroff Dorau is pleased that our letter references historic easements managed by Historic New England. Send out of the letter will require extensive printing, collating, and mailing. *It was agreed that we may need to wait with the send out in view of the extensive work in Town Offices on managing voting this year.*

Mr. Janes reported that he received information from MHC about another round of grants for what would be a Phase 3 Survey in West Newbury. Ms. Grammer noted that 1) it may be worth inquiring

if part of West Newbury's matching grant contribution could come from volunteer work hours—grant management, organizing and uploading data on the website, and managing the send out of homeowner letters takes very significant amounts of work; and 2) we may have a very special opportunity for the next survey concerning Ms. Goroff Doreau's house on Poore's Lane, which has remained in the family, largely intact, for centuries.

Ms. Conway noted that she has been disappointed to be unable to find the grant application for West Newbury's Phase 2 Survey. Ms. Grammer wondered if Jean Nelson, formerly the Administrator for the Town Community Preservation Committee (CPC), had prepared that grant application. The CPC deadline for projects planned for inclusion in Spring Town Meeting is the first few days in January, so it makes sense to aim to be ready by the end of December, 2020.

The Commission generally agreed that the Historic Sites Surveys have been valuable in educating townspeople about the Town's historic resources and preserving information about structures that may make way to other development.

Historic Marker

The Commission noted that Mr. Janes had participated in a [video about Julian Steele](#), which is now on YouTube. Ms. Conway and Ms. Grammer, who had viewed the video, commended Mr. Janes for this work. *By unanimous roll call vote the Commission authorized uploading a link to the video on the Commission website, and making announcements about it.*

Ms. Grammer reported that she has taken the same information about the [Town's Historic Markers](#) as is on the Commission website and put it on the [Historic Marker Database](#) on the worldwide web.

The Commission generally agreed to consider additional historical markers sometime in the coming years.

Cemeteries

Ms. Grammer said that it's clear that the Town owns the Quaker Cemetery and that under state law, it has an obligation to passively maintain a cemetery over 100 years old with 10 or more graves. She noted that at a Capital Improvements Committee meeting, the Town Manager said that the Town owns no cemeteries. She sent the information about the Town's ownership of and obligations toward the Quaker Cemetery to the Town Manager and Director Department of Public Works, but has not heard further from them. Ms. Grammer added that a concern that Newburyport might raise the dam (thus flooding the Quaker Cemetery) to protect the Artichoke Reservoir from Merrimack floodwaters has been allayed for now. Newburyport is applying to the Town Conservation Commission to make revisions to the Artichoke spillway in order to be able to erect a temporary barrier, to be used only in the event of a flood emergency.

Mr. Janes added that the Town should be responsible for the Alms House Cemetery at Mill Pond. Its exact location and number of graves is unclear at this time. *The Historical Commission members agreed to conduct a field trip to look and Ms. Grammer will conduct research in online Town records about this.*

Ms. Grammer reported that she has heard from West Newbury resident John McGrath on the topic of cemeteries. Mr. McGrath and others have become very involved in the maintenance and improvement of the Bridge Street Cemetery. Mr. McGrath said that the Walnut Hill Cemetery could use fixing up. Mr. McGrath opined that the Town should not assume responsibility for cemetery maintenance, notwithstanding statutory provisions. He said that the Historical Commission should find volunteers to do this.

Monthly stories

By unanimous roll call vote, the Commission approved the Monthly Minute story for November about Brigadier General James Brickett, as may be edited or corrected. Pursuant to Ms. Cavanaugh's suggestion, the topic for December will be Ben Perley Poore. Ms. Grammer added that she has done research (but has not begun a draft) about E Moody Boynton. Next year's stories could be about people and places. *The Commission agreed to help develop topics for the stories.*

Book of stories

Ms. Grammer noted that the Commission has considered publishing the Monthly Historic Minute stories in a book, possibly with help from a grant from the Cultural Council. State law (MGL Ch 40 Sec 8D) provides that the Commission may enter into contracts on its own, acquire historical property, and "may accept gifts, contributions and bequests of funds from individuals, foundations and from federal, state or other governmental bodies for the purpose of furthering the commission's program; may make and sign any agreements and may do and perform any and all acts which may be necessary or desirable to carry out the purposes of this section"—without turning proceeds over the Town's General Fund (as was done with proceeds from the Commission's chair sale). At present, it appears that no mechanism in Town accounting would support a separate fund for the Historical Commission, and if this were to proceed, it would likely need to be discussed with the Town Manager and Selectmen.

Ms. Cavanaugh and other Commission expressed support for the idea of a separate fund, particularly since Commission expenses have been going up with mailings and other costs. Ms. Grammer expressed interest in commissioning other kinds of surveys, in view of the rapid change the Town is experiencing.

Other business

Annual Report Ms. Grammer said that the Historical Commission's Annual Report had not made it into the Town Report. She investigated and concluded that it fell through the cracks. She noted that the Commission can rework and update the existing document for use in the coming year's report. This time we should try to submit it in January and email it to everyone we can think of on staff in Town Offices.

Stone walls Ms. Grammer said that the photo of the homestead included with the Brickett story for November shows remarkable stone walls, yet the Town's stone walls may be lost to development. She noted that plans for the proposed large development on Coffin Street indicate they will take out a long stone wall. At a minimum, the Town might be able to record the walls before they disappear.

Minutes

By 3-0-1 roll call vote (Ms. Cavanaugh, not present, abstaining), the Commission approved the minutes of August 12, 2020.

Adjournment

The Commission adjourned at 7:45p.m.

Meeting Documents

Information about Quaker Cemetery

Draft Brickett story

Respectfully submitted,

Elisa Grammer

DRAFT