

West Newbury

Historical Commission Meeting Minutes

Meeting date & place: 7:00 pm, December 17, 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

Phase 2 Ms. Conway said that the Massachusetts Historical Commission has been delayed with COVID in sending the final check, but this should arrive in mid-January. Letters to property owners with surveyed homes are underway. Ms. Cavanaugh has the 108 addressed envelopes, *Ms. Grammer will copy the letters and attachments on December 18, and Ms. Cavanaugh will stuff the envelopes.* Other Commission members offered to help with this.

Errors have been identified in both Phase 1 and Phase 2 forms, and the Commission has been able to get no guidance about what to do about this. *By unanimous roll call vote, the Commission decided to try to develop a West Newbury Historical Commission table of contents for each aggregated listing on the website. This will include correction of errors, plus links to instances where a surveyed property relates to a Minute History, and an explanation where an individual property is part of a larger area form. Ms. Grammer will develop a draft for Whetstone so the Commission can review and approve the approach.*

Phase 3 Ms. Conway has submitted the Phase 3 eligibility application to the Community Preservation Committee (CPC). Ms. Grammer will make 8 copies for the CPC while she makes copies for the homeowner letters. Ms. Conway noted that it is not clear how the timing will work with the MHC delays and the need to complete Town funding in time for Annual Town Meeting in the spring.

Cemeteries

Ms. Grammer reported that since Mr. Janes could not be present at the December 7 Selectmen's meeting concerning committee priorities, she spoke on behalf of the Historical Commission to say that our priorities include the Historic Sites Survey Phase 3 and getting a sign for and cleanup of the Almshouse Cemetery. She said that in correspondence with the Town Manager, he indicated a preference for *not* using CPC funds for such a small dollar amount because of the bureaucratic costs of obtaining CPC funding.

Among the choices for funding could be CPC, a line item or other mechanism in the Historical Commission budget, use of the Department of Public Works budget, a warrant article at Town Meeting describing the project. Commission members noted that the Commission brought thousands of dollars to the Town budget with sale of antique chairs and had cost savings when the celebration of Julian Steele was not held because of COVID.

Ms. Grammer noted that a serious concern is that the [Mill Pond Conservation Restriction](#), which is a legal document on file at the Essex County Registry of Deeds, makes no mention of the Almshouse Cemetery in either the text or the drawn plans of the area. She said that it is her understanding that work has begun to revise this document, and that it would be important to consider acknowledging the existence of a cemetery that had been constructed and operated by the Town, particularly since the Town is obligated to maintain this burial ground under M.G.L. Ch. 114, §17. It would be very unfortunate if picnic tables or other inappropriate activity occurred in the burial ground. This is particularly a concern in view of development under consideration for property across Poorhouse Lane. She added that the [Mill Pond Management Plan](#) requires approval from the Mill Pond Committee for any sign in the area.

Ms. Grammer said that she has been able to find almost no Town records (other than a handful of references in very old 19th century Vital Records) concerning the Almshouse cemetery, and it appears that it has been largely forgotten. She found one reference to it in a [1909 plan](#) of the Mill Pond area in Salemdeeds.com, and is not sure that the location shown in the Town Forest—as opposed to the other side of stone wall—is correct. Mr. Janes said that he knows the Almshouse Cemetery is referenced in [Susan Follansbee's book](#), but is not aware of other sources, although there should be Town records.

By unanimous roll call vote, the Commission decided that Mr. Janes will seek a meeting with the Selectmen to inquire about 1) the funding for a sign and cleanup and 2) the question of identifying the cemetery in the Mill Pond Conservation Restriction and Management Plan. The Commission also agreed to coordinate with the Mill Pond Committee, the Conservation Commission, and the Open Space Committee about this issue.

Monthly stories

Ms. Grammer said that the Almshouse story is ready to go for January, 2021, and she has just circulated draft stories for Mill Pond and the Post Office. Mr. Janes agreed that it would be a good idea to run the Mill Pond story by the Mill Pond Committee, and that he would take a close look at the story about the Post Office. Ms. Grammer said that she would like suggestions about other places.

Mr. Janes said that he believes that the library has information about Rocks Bridge—he will call them. Ms. Grammer said that even during COVID, the library has been incredibly helpful. She has obtained and scanned via photographing Annual Town Reports from 1881 forward. She will share this with the Commission.

Other business

CPC application to paint Town Hall

The Commission discussed the plan to use CPC funding to paint Town Hall. Ms. Conway identified a [potential Massachusetts Preservation Project Fund \(MPPF\) 50% matching grant](#) available for preservation of buildings on the State Registry—and Town Hall is on that list. The Historical Commission expressed interest in conserving historical CPC funds as much as possible when other grant funding is available. *By unanimous roll call vote, the Commission determined to support use of CPC funding and expressed its support for pursuit of the MPPF grant to conserve CPC funds. The Commission also agreed that it would offer its capacity in grant management (as seen with the Historic Sites Survey grants) to support the MPPF grant.*

The Commission also discussed the paint colors used on Town Hall in the past. Mr. Janes said that he know only of white. Ms. Cavanaugh said that she had seen reference to gray paint in the [Contentious Citizens](#) book. Ms. Grammer said that the [1881 Annual Town Report](#) indicated the Town bought over 400 pounds of white lead paint, with some colorant, apparently for trim, when Town Hall was extensively rebuilt and expanded.

Annual report

Ms. Grammer circulated the Historical Commission's annual report from last year (which was inadvertently not published), and asked the Commission members to make updates. *The Commission plans to finalize a report to be submitted by the mid-January deadline.*

Minutes

By unanimous call vote, the Commission approved the minutes of November 19, 2020.

Adjournment

The Commission adjourned at 7:37 p.m.

Meeting Documents

- DPW letter to Selectmen about painting Town Hall using CPC funds
- Draft CPC application for Almshouse Cemetery (including draft Almshouse story)
- Last year's Historical Commission annual report
- Draft Mill Pond story
- Draft Post Office story

Respectfully submitted,

Elisa Grammer