

West Newbury

Historical Commission Meeting Minutes

Meeting date & place: 7:00 pm, June 7, 2022, Town Offices

Members Present: Chairman Bob Janes; Bob Belmont; Jennifer Conway; Elisa Grammer; Associate Member Dot Cavanaugh. Also present: Historic Marker reform advocates Molly Hawkins, Francesca Pomeranz, Geordie Vining, and Kristine Malpica.

Proposed Revisions for Historic Markers

Those advocating revisions to historic markers concerning Indians showed the Commission full-size paper mock ups of the two replacements for the signs that have been removed.

The sign to replace the one located at Indian Hill is proposed to state:

Indian Hill is named for the Pawtucket-Pennacook Abenaki people who lived, farmed, hunted and fished here before colonization by English settlers. Most Indigenous inhabitants were displaced, and their descendants now live throughout North America.

The sign to replace the one located at Turkey Hill Road is proposed to state:

During the Anglo-Abenaki wars, the Massachusetts Bay Colony issued bounties for capturing and killing Indigenous children, women and men. In this time of conflict, French-allied Native Peoples raided this site in 1695, capturing and killing members of the Brown household.

This wording, the Commission was told, was vetted among a number of stakeholders, including native Americans. Ms. Hawkins said that she spoke with the resident living closest to the location of the Indian Hill sign, who far prefers the new language, but inquired whether the length of the sign's content could pose a safety hazard for drivers. Those present discussed the safety question, noting that the flashing sign in front of the Safety Complex—which poses a far greater distraction to drivers—has not resulted in accidents and that drivers seriously interested in the Indian Hill sign can pull over if need be. *Because replacing signs that have long been located in a particular location would not require additional permissions, it was generally agreed that the new signs should be located where the old signs had been placed.*

The Commission voted unanimously to approve proposed wording for each sign and to fund the signs using its FY 23 budget. Those working on the new signs will 1) work with the Haverhill Sign Center to have the signs made, 2) talk with the West Newbury Director of Public Works about installing the signs, and 3) in the future, work on developing additional content that can be put on the Historical Commission website and linked via a QR code on the signposts.

Historic Sites Survey Update

Ms. Conway, our local Historic Sites Survey manager, reported that she attended the Massachusetts Historical Commission's (MHC's) May 24 online kickoff session for this round of Historic Sites Surveys in the state. She said that a very major change (not developed or supported by the MHC) dictates a new process for consultant selection: a list of pre-approved consultants (and the list will have fewer of them) will be sent to participating towns and selection must be solely based on the lowest bidder. In the event of a tie, some choice is allowed. We will need to submit a draft copy of the prescribed Request for Quotations (RFQ) by June 30. *Ms. Conway has shared a draft and Commission members have committed to providing any comments ASAP so she can timely finalize this submission. She will also consult with DPW Director Wayne Amaral, who is the Town's procurement manager. We will probably send out the actual RFQ in July.*

The Commission also discussed the repeated requests of Ann Joyce, sent this time via the Museum of Old Newbury, that her home in Newburyport (which apparently had been moved from West Newbury), be included in West Newbury's Historic Sites Survey. The Historical Commission discussed this at its [August 2021 meeting](#), and concluded that it was not clear that we can include properties in other jurisdictions and that Newburyport is apparently conducting its own survey. *Ms. Conway will contact Ms. Joyce, letting her know that 1) our upcoming Phase 3 MHC-determined Request for Proposals sets the project area as limited to West Newbury: "The project area will include the town of West Newbury, Massachusetts." and 2) Newburyport's Planning Department is working on doing a Historic Sites Survey in Newburyport.*

Cemeteries

Regarding Newburyport's alteration to the dam at the Artichoke Reservoir that could potentially impact resources in West Newbury, not least the Quaker Cemetery, Ms. Grammer reported that her request for additional Massachusetts Environmental Protection Act consideration was largely ignored in the MEPA go-ahead, Newburyport has made a new filing at the West Newbury Conservation Commission to permit its proposed dam alteration, and Massachusetts dam safety regulators are also reviewing this, but have no process for public comment. Mr. Janes, who also serves as a West Newbury Water Commissioner, said that he attended a meeting about this and other water issues at the dam site and it appears that Newburyport may be starting to be willing to work with West Newbury on some water issues.

Ms. Grammer also noted that she cleaned up the Almshouse cemetery, removing regrowth of small trees that had been removed in last year's cleanup. She wondered if the Historical Commission could work with the Town to have DPW schedule annual cleanup of the Quaker and the Almshouse Cemeteries, both of which are Town-owned. Mr. Belmont asked whether the Town has enough gravesites for future use. Mr. Janes said that except for Walnut Hill, the cemeteries in Town are largely full, noting that this is an important conversation to pursue with the Selectboard. He observed that neighboring towns have cemetery commissions that address such issues, but that has not occurred in West Newbury. *It was agreed that the Commission will first pursue getting the Town to develop a program to preserve the cemeteries it owns. Ms. Grammer will talk with DPW Director Amaral about this.*

Ms. Conway also noted that this phase of the Historic Sites Survey will include all the cemeteries in Town. Ms. Cavanaugh noted that the two surveys of cemeteries had been done in the 1970s and were not of professional quality.

Mr. Janes raised the idea of seeking Community Preservation Act funding to locate actual gravesites within the Almshouse Cemetery. He noted that managers of the Bridge Street Cemetery used ground penetrating radar and located many more gravesites were not marked. *The Commission agreed to pursue this. As a first step, Mr. Janes will contact the Bridge Street individuals to learn who they used and to get an idea of cost.*

Town Records & Annual Town Report Digitization Update

Ms. Grammer provided an update regarding the project to digitize the 32 extant Annual Town Reports predating FY 1881 plus the second, previously overlooked, FY 1914 report. She said that the project is supposed to be complete, with the electronic versions added to the Library website this month, and that the Town Clerk has paid for this with FY 2022 funds from his budget. She noted several lessons learned regarding vendors 1) be sure to specifically ask that they return the originals, 2) you have to nag them to complete the work, and 3) count the pages and specify page numbers at the outset—in this case the vendor used a high 4,000 page estimate and billed the Town using that number instead of the actual count, coming to a cost over \$2,300. Ms. Grammer said that when the Town pushed back, asking that a true count be used, the vendor said they assumed all the potential funding needed to be spent. When an actual page count was used, the cost came in around \$550.

It was generally agreed that more Town documents should be digitized, and this can be an ongoing project.

Firefighter & Schools History

Mr. Belmont described his work on the history of West Newbury's Fire Department and shared an outline of the book he writing about this. *The Commission expressed interest in supporting this and in supporting a 100th anniversary celebration, once its details become more clear. The Commission also expressed support for his research into West Newbury's schools, and interest in the documents he provided on each topic.*

Monthly Minute Histories

The Commission approved the draft story about Yeoman(F) Lillian Mabel Farrington Martin as the July Minute History.

Other Business

New member

Chairman Janes noted that we have not heard from our newest member except when we reached out to her. We include her in all communications and changed the meeting date to accommodate her availability but she has never attended a meeting or communicated with the Commission

further. *The Commission agreed that Mr. Janes will attempt to get a reply from the new member and failing that, follow up with the Selectboard about reinstating Ms. Cavanaugh as a full member.*

Carr Post

Mr. Belmont inquired about the Commission's role now that the Town voted to sell Carr Post and attached historic conservation/preservation restrictions applicable in perpetuity. Mr. Janes noted that this would first require re-zoning of the Carr Post to permit commercial uses, which is by no means certain. Ms. Grammer added that the Town would also need to find a buyer. Ms. Conway and Ms. Grammer noted that the Carr Post has been extensively documented in a recent [Minute History](#) and in connection with the determination that it should be on the State Historic Sites Register—which has strict regulatory requirements about preservation. These requirements would be a starting place for drafting conservation restrictions, and the Town could negotiate other provisions once the time comes.

Minutes

The Commission voted unanimously to approve the minutes of May 3, 2022.

Adjournment

8:42 pm

Meeting Documents

- Draft RFQ for Historic Sites Survey
- Ms. Joyce's latest communication regarding inclusion of her Newburyport home in the West Newbury Historic Sites Survey
- Draft Minute History concerning Yeoman(F) Lillian Mabel Farrington Martin
- Robert Belmont's documents regarding his work on the history of West Newbury's Fire Department and Schools

Respectfully submitted,

Elisa Grammer