

West Newbury

Historical Commission Meeting Minutes

Meeting date & place: 7:00 pm, December 6, 2022, Town Offices

Members Present: Chair Bob Janes, Jennifer Conway, Jennifer Munson, Elisa Grammer.

Historic Sites Survey Update

Ms. Conway reported that the Historic Sites Survey is on track. Phase 2 of our third survey will end on December 28, at which point the consultants will provide pictures and two sample forms. She said the consultants have not provided the final list of properties and should soon. After discussion, they have settled on a lesser number of houses to accommodate the extra work of the cemeteries. She noted that she did receive permission for the consultants to go on the property at 95 Indian Hill Street, but some homeowners declined for various reasons. Ms. Conway said that the paperwork is in good shape, but the contract will be revised to reduce the amount to be spent from \$30K to the smaller amount bid by the contractors. Ms. Conway said that she did make clear that the Town is looking for individual forms for each property.

Ms. Conway will contact the Town Manager about funding for the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission mapping of Phase 3 properties.

Cemeteries

Almshouse Cemetery scan

Mr. Janes shared copies of the map provided by the consultant who conducted ground penetrating radar at the Almshouse Cemetery. Although the map specifically identified 7 graves, the consultant believes that at least 12 gravesites are present. A shaded area on the map likely has more graves, but roots and rocks made the results inconclusive. A stone, that could identify a grave, was found very near two trees at the corner of the cemetery directly opposite the entrance.

Cleanup

Mr. Janes and Ms. Grammer described the meeting the Historical Commission had with the Select Board about developing an ongoing Town program to maintain the two Town cemeteries. The Board voted to approve the program and its budget (developed with the Department of Public Works) and the proposed Conservation Commission application for the Quaker Cemetery.

Ms. Grammer said that because the heavy work like removal of downed trees should be done when the ground is frozen to minimize or avoid soil disturbance, this expense comes at a problematic time in terms of funding authorization—the next Town Meeting for funding authorization will not be until May, when winter is over. The Historical Commission could ask the Finance Committee for a Reserve Fund Transfer, but usually that is reserved for unanticipated or emergency events. It may be difficult to argue that cleanup of a cemetery dating from the mid-19th century fits either condition. She noted that it seems unlikely to find room in existing FY2022 budgets for this project, which will require about \$800-2,000/yr for normal maintenance and \$4,000 for the major initial Quaker Cemetery clean up.

Ms. Grammer also noted that any work removing poison ivy, or any other vegetation at the Quaker Cemetery, adjacent to the Artichoke Reservoir, requires Conservation Commission (ConCom) approval. Current FY2022 budgets can cover the roughly \$150 for public notice in the newspaper as part of the ConCom process. But because the ConCom approval requires renewal every 3 years, the Select Board correctly suggested that the ConCom application should not be filed until shortly before work commences.

Another factor, Ms. Grammer said, is the offer from Bill Goss of the Newburyport Eco Angels Bike Group (who had read about this in the newspaper) to help clean up the cemeteries. Mr. Janes said that West Newbury Health Agent Paul Seigny also volunteered. While volunteers could not deal with heavy work like cutting and moving large downed trees, they could remove vines, bushes, saplings, and the like. That could occur in the spring before the poison ivy was in full bloom. Of course, any work at the Quaker Cemetery—even minor work—requires ConCom’s prior approval.

The Commission agreed that Ms. Grammer will reach out to Mr. Goss to see what the bike group might be interested in doing, and when.

Firefighter & Schools History

There was no update from Mr. Belmont, who did not join the meeting. Mr. Janes noted that he had found some discrepancies and the Commission agreed that it is very important to ensure that any product of the Commission is accurate. Ms. Grammer noted that in addition to the Follansbee/Wild book, Audrey Lane’s *Contentious Citizens* has a good deal of information about the schools. It was agreed that citations should be included, as well as the sources for images.

Town Hall paint color scheme

Ms. Munson provided an overview of her professional proposals for a paint scheme for Town Hall. She proposed using white for the bulk of the building, which fits with the contemporary surroundings.

To highlight architectural resources, the trim would be painted black. Highlighting the trim in this fashion is consistent with photos of the paint scheme applied in the 1880s when Town Hall was substantially extended and the façade was remodeled. The second option differs from the first in that it has more highlighting to outline the triangular pediment and the trim at the sides of the building. Aside from the main block of the façade, the rest of the building would be painted white, including the trim.

Ms. Munson also said that the plastic green shutters and the plantings in front detract from the building. The Commission agreed that the building currently looks like a large, odd house instead of an important historic municipal structure—and the shutters and plantings contribute to this problem. New plantings could be smaller and in planters. The black and white scheme provides a strong and bold statement that is true to the building’s past and reflects contemporary surroundings.

The Commission voted unanimously to support the second option, with removal of the shutters and the plantings.

Ms. Munson will get paint samples for the Benjamin Moore paints she recommends. Ms. Grammer suggested that when the painting is ready to go, the Commission might reach out to Jen Solis of the *Newbury Daily News* to explain what is being done and why. Ms. Munson may be able to work on this.

Monthly Minute Histories

Ms. Grammer said that she would like to start in January with the story about Town Meeting, to be followed by the story about the steamer Merrimac. *The Commission voted unanimously to approve these two stories.*

Ms. Grammer said that she recently found more digitized historical information in the library and ran it through optical character reading software to make it word-searchable. She will be working Librarian Corinn Flaherty to investigate ways of making digital historical files more widely available. One such item was a *Scribner's* story about Town Meeting, supposedly based on West Newbury. The library has the original painting of one sketch in the *Scribner's* story on display. Ms. Grammer said that she is looking into stories about the 1919 centennial celebration, the West Newbury Cadet Band, and the Town's annual excursion to Plum Island.

Annual Commission Report for Town Annual Report

The Commission voted unanimously to approve the draft FY 2022 Annual Report of the Commission

Other Business

Minutes

By 2-0-2 vote the Commission approved the minutes of November 1, 2022, Mr. Janes and Ms. Conway, not present at that meeting, abstaining.

Adjournment

8:08 pm

Meeting Documents

Town Hall color scheme proposal

Draft Historical Commission Annual Report

Draft Minutes Histories about Town Meeting and the steamer Merrimac

Respectfully submitted,

Elisa Grammer