

## West Newbury

### Historical Commission Meeting Minutes

**Meeting date & place:** 7:00 pm, February 7 2023, Town Offices

**Members Present:** Chair Bob Janes, Elisa Grammer, Jennifer Munson, Robert Belmont, Associate Member Dot Cavanaugh.

#### **Cemeteries**

##### Quaker Cemetery

Ms. Grammer said that Lynne Taylor, a teacher at River Valley Charter School, had reached out about involving her students (about 24 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> graders) in cleanup of Town-owned cemeteries. Ms. Grammer noted that it could be complicated to do with the Quaker Cemetery, which first requires an approval at Town Meeting and then Conservation Commission approval and then contracting for services. She said that involving young people is important, though, and perhaps there's an opportunity during the annual clean up at the Almshouse Cemetery. Also, we plan to place granite blocks at the gravesites that have been located through ground penetrating radar and the students might participate in that.

*The Commission generally supported the idea of involving students in the Almshouse Cemetery work. Mr. Belmont, a retired educator, was particularly interested in working with Ms. Taylor.*

Ms. Cavanaugh noted that she had seen goats being used to clean up poison ivy and wondered if this might be considered at the Quaker Cemetery. Ms. Grammer recalled that in Washington, DC, goats were used at the [Congressional Cemetery](#). *The Commission was open to using goats if feasible. Ms. Grammer will inquire with the Conservation Agent and Department of Public Works (DPW) about this idea.*

##### Almshouse Cemetery

The Commission discussed ways of using the 4" x 4" granite blocks Ms. Munson can provide to mark the identified graves at the Almshouse Cemetery. Various ideas were suggested to provide a base that will not get lost in the ground in the pine needle cemetery floor. *Ms. Munson will explore alternatives and report back.*

Ms. Grammer reported that the Town and Essex County Greenbelt are exploring an open space land acquisition for the property across Poorhouse Lane from the Almshouse Cemetery. She noted that the Select Board had voted to approve an amendment to the Mill Pond area Conservation Restriction to recognize the cemetery (which is currently not even included in the map filed with Essex Deeds) but that has never been done. If the Town acquires the new property, that would be an opportunity for an amendment to the Conservation Restriction that could include recognition of the Almshouse Cemetery. *The Commission generally agreed to pursue this opportunity.*

#### **Historic Sites Survey Update**

Ms. Conway was unable to join the meeting, and provided this update:

For the survey updates, we did receive the invoice for phase 2 and it was processed by the Town. I will be reaching out to Merrimack Valley Planning Commission about mapping, and the next phase is not finalized until later in the spring. We had our kickoff meeting with consultant Stacy Spies and the Massachusetts Historical Commission, and we mentioned the

idea of an event to celebrate finishing up the surveys in Town, and all parties seemed interested in participating in some fashion.

Mr. Belmont suggested that as part of the celebration of completion of the Historic Sites Survey, there could be a virtual element in the form of virtual house tours. He noted that realtors do an excellent job of putting together videos of houses for sale, and suggested partnering with realtors in Town. *The Commission was supportive and Mr. Belmont will follow up.*

## **Town Hall**

### Painting

Ms. Grammer reported that the sample paints are on Town Hall to the right of the front door and so far have received positive reviews. Ms. Munson will take a look. Ms. Munson suggested a process to 1) announce and explain the painting (including website, social media, and email blast outreach) and 2) document the improvements to the Town Hall façade. Ms. Munson said that she would like to be present at the initial meeting about the painting work and to be on call if issues arise. Mr. Janes said that it is important that the paint be applied to a sound, prepared surface. *The Commission agreed with all these points and it was agreed that Ms. Munson will reach out to the Department of Public Works about this.*

### Lantern over the door & hardware

The Commission noted that at January's meeting (which included a member of the Historic District Commission) it had been agreed that the lantern above the door (added sometime after the 1960s) detracted from the architectural details and should be replaced with lighting that met safety requirements. It was also decided to defer to Ms. Munson's design expertise in this matter. *Ms. Munson will look into this and offer a proposal. She will also discuss this with DPW.* Ms. Munson noted that details are important and that the brass door hardware should be cleaned as well.

### Plantings in front of Town Hall

Ms. Grammer said that she had heard from the DPW Director that he had met with the Garden Club's Town Hall garden committee and that a compromise had been reached in which DPW would try to salvage selected plantings there now (which were damaging the historic structure and detracting from its appearance) and that the Garden Club would instead use native plants that would grow no higher than the windows. Ms. Munson was concerned that there should be a design plan suitable for the historic structure, and not plantings inserted without consideration of the building's design overall, as landscape is a critical element in historic preservation. *Ms. Munson will also discuss this with DPW.*

### Signage

Ms. Munson also discussed the signage at Town Hall, which in addition to the historic marker includes a Community Preservation Committee (CPC) sign about use of CPC funds at Town Hall and two signs for the childcare center renting the back portion of the Town Hall. The CPC sign will be removed when the project is done. Ms. Grammer said that when she suggested to the powers that be that two daycare signs seemed excessive she met with a very negative response. Ms. Grammer suggested that once the façade was painted and the problematic plantings were removed, the big daycare sign, which appears larger than allowed, is inappropriate for a historic district, and is dirty with mold and is tilting, will become glaringly obvious. At that point, something might be done about it.

*The Commission agreed to keep the Town Hall as a permanent agenda item for the foreseeable future.*

### **Firefighter & Schools History**

Mr. Belmont shared a timeline he had developed concerning the history of education in West Newbury from 1600 to 1818. He noted that this was particularly challenging because West Newbury (before and after it separated from Newbury) was something of a rural outpost. Ms. Grammer suggested looking into Puritan and Massachusetts state views and requirements for education, and recommended Joshua Coffin's history book about the Newburies.

### **Monthly Minute Histories**

*The Commission voted unanimously to approve the Monthly Minute stories about the 1919 Centennial, Plum Island Gathering, and Baseball, with corrective edits.* Ms. Grammer said that additional topics could include winter entertainment, taxidermy, the West Newbury Cadet Band, clubs, and summer theater.

Ms. Grammer said that she inquired about having the Historical Commission sell a book containing the monthly stories and was told that the Town is not structured to be in the business of selling things. She said that it seems that the easiest thing to do would be for her to set this up using the Amazon on demand publishing service (which also includes ebooks) and then find a way to sign over rights as a donation to the Historical Commission. *The Commission agreed to this approach.* In response to Mr. Belmont's question whether the proceeds would be retained for Historical Commission use or rolled back into the Town's General Fund, Ms. Grammer noted that the [Commission had voted to seek a gift account](#), which the [Select Board approved](#) at their [March 28, 2022](#) meeting. This allows the Commission to keep the gifts it receives.

### **Other Business**

### **Minutes**

*The Commission unanimously approved the minutes of January 3, 2023.*

### **Adjournment**

8:25 pm

### **Meeting Documents**

Draft Minute Histories about the 1919 Centennial, Baseball & Plum Island Gathering

Respectfully submitted,

Elisa Grammer