

West Newbury

Historical Commission Meeting Minutes

Meeting date & place: 7:00 pm, July 11, 2023, Town Offices, 2d floor

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

Others Present: Historic District Commission Chair Jill Hudson and member Allison Hardy; West Newbury Garden Club President Lori Boudrow.

Town Hall

Ms. Munson gave an overview of the Town Hall painting job, which is progressing well. She shared an updated schematic:



She said that the front door should be a black gloss and that the fascia boards at the top of the sides of the building should be painted black. Also, she said, two coats of paint should be applied. In response to Mr. Janes' query, she explained that the windows look solid black because there is paint on the glass panes that will be peeled off before the job is done.

Ms. Munson said that she has been working with Brian Richard of the Department of Public Works (DPW) on Town Hall's exterior and they agreed to restore the wooden step at the door (which has been cleaned and sanded) with a protective coat of polyurethane. She reported that Mr. Richard has done a wonderful job restoring the stage inside Town Hall. She also said that Mr. Richard plans to build a deck over and otherwise improve the crumbling concrete steps at the side of the building. Ms. Hardy and Ms. Hudson noted that the wood step at the front door will need refurbishing every few years and this should be on a schedule for DPW to do. Ms. Hardy recommended a [Southerland Welles Tung Oil](#) product for the steps.

Ms. Munson noted that the old storm windows at the front of the building are very unattractive and Mr. Richard was considering removing them and using interior storm windows. Ms. Hardy, whose expertise includes window restoration, said that exterior storm windows protect the antique windows from weather and road damage, while interior storm windows tend to trap moisture and can help destroy the windows. She recommended using new black exterior storm windows, which are not terribly expensive and can have a

low-E coating to help protect the building's interior. She recommended [Coastal Industries](#) in Haverhill for this.

Ms. Munson said that as many wires as possible have been removed from Town Hall—the remaining ones are necessary. She is researching a light over the door and is considering something simple under the Italianate entry canopy feature. Cleaning the front door hardware was discussed; it was noted that the hinges have been painted over in black.

With regard to landscaping, Ms. Munson said that Mr. Richard will be installing a gravel bed 24" out from the front of the structure to ensure that air and light reach the building to avoid damage and rot caused by plantings. In response to Ms. Boudrow's inquiry, Ms. Munson said that any planting should be low and should ensure that the architectural highlights, specifically the X features under the windows and the vertical pilasters at the sides remain visible. Plantings should be no more than 2' high at maturity—3' is too high. Ms. Grammer noted that if any bushes would be used, native [lowbush blueberries](#) grow only to about 2' and are particularly pretty in fall.

Ms. Grammer said that when the painting was complete, she would take a photo of Town Hall and use that to replace the photo now on West Newbury's [Wikipedia page](#).

Training Field

Ms. Grammer said that she had been looking at older photos of the Training Field taken before the bushes near the monuments had grown so large. She said that when they were planted in 1969, they were a small row of short bushes complementing the memorials, but now they are huge, tend to obscure the monuments, and take up an enormous amount of space on the Training Field. Ms. Boudrow and others said that it would not be feasible at this point to trim the bushes to a reasonable size. Members of the Historical Commission were inclined to have the bushes removed.

Ms. Hudson and Ms. Hardy, whose Historic District Commission has jurisdiction over this matter, agreed and will take the matter to the full Historic District Commission for a formal decision. Mr. Janes recommended consulting with Rick Thurlow, who has extensive landscaping experience due to his years of work at his family's Cherry Hill Nursery, about the removal process. *Next steps will be the Historic District Commission's vote on the question and if it is determined to remove the bushes, consultation with Mr. Thurlow and the Town Manager about doing the removal.* The Garden Club would be consulted about potential replacement plantings, and Ms. Boudrow noted that the Garden Club has master gardeners who could assist, but does not have the funds to pay for replacement plantings.

Ms. Grammer reported that when she had driven by the Training Field one morning, she had seen someone with a metal detector on the Training Field and had contacted the Town Manager to see if the Town has any policy or rules respecting metal detecting on Town property. She said that she found one other Massachusetts Town that has bylaws concerning this subject. Ms. Munson and Ms. Conway observed that it not appropriate to have people collecting historic artifacts from Town property as souvenirs, and the others agreed. Mr. Belmont inquired where Town artifacts are kept (many are in the library) and suggested that Carr Post would be a good repository for such items. Ms. Grammer noted that people should not be metal detecting in Town-owned cemeteries, either. She suggested signage at the Training Field and perhaps a Select Board policy about this. *Ms. Hudson will add this to her list to discuss with the Town Manager.*

The group also discussed the Liberty Tree, which had been at the southeastern corner of the Training Field, near a granite bench. The tree—an elm—had died and was removed last year, but its plaque remains. The thought had been to let a volunteer oak take its place. Ms. Munson, who had designed and steered Elm Park in Groveland to completion, said that disease-resistant elms have been developed, and such an elm would be a good replacement, since elms once so prevalent are now relatively rare. *The Historic District Committee will look into this.*

Indigenous Peoples

Members of the Commission had reviewed Ms. Munson's proposed addition to the website's summary of Town history, which would address Indigenous peoples in the area before the arrival of colonists, and commended her work. *The Commission voted unanimously to approve inclusion of her additional paragraphs (the more extended version) in the [About Our Town](#) page on the Town website.* Next steps are preparing a revised .pdf of the content including Ms. Munson's work and asking Rebecca Ambra, Executive Assistant in the Town Manager's office, to post it on the website.

Historic Sites Survey

Ms. Conway said that the consultants have provided draft forms but are behind schedule and she has not heard from the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) about updated timeframes. Ms. Conway is working with the Assessor's Office to get the Merrimack Valley Planning Council to map the surveyed properties and is working on all the grant paperwork needed for a final report. She said that over 25 properties will be nominated as candidates for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. She believes that the project will wrap up in about a month.

Ms. Conway said that several potential additional historic districts beyond the Training Field have been identified in the course of the Historic Sites Survey (and are on the Historical Commission's website) and more may be identified in this last round. Ms. Hudson said that a resident has communicated with her, expressing interest in a Way to the River history district.

The processes for state and federal listings were discussed. Ms. Conway noted that the MHC had wanted to wait with the additional districts until all stages of the survey had been completed. A goal is to have a celebration of completion of the survey as well as the upgrades to Town Hall. This could include participation by MHC, which could then explain the potential districts and the processes for listing. It was thought that obtaining listed status may be easier if it was done in a group of properties in a district.

Cemeteries

Ms. Grammer said that the Conservation Commission just signed off on a Negative Determination of Applicability for cleanup of the Quaker Cemetery, which will permit clean up work at that site. A wrinkle is that we will need to find and describe a way to dispose of invasive plants so that they don't spread elsewhere. Next steps are to go through the Town procurement process. Ms. Grammer also noted that she had cleaned up the saplings and poison ivy at the Almshouse Cemetery, a job that is easier to do if the property is routinely kept up.

Mr. Janes shared his work in going through the cemeteries in Town, collecting information and photos of gravestones, and putting together information about noteworthy people interred in the cemeteries. He described his visit to the privately-owned Crane Neck cemetery, in which some 75 people are buried. He will also be looking into the carvings and their meaning. Ms. Conway said that the most recent historic sites

survey has extensive information about the cemeteries including information about the carvings. She will email that to Mr. Janes.

Firefighter & Schools

Mr. Belmont, who developed a very successful young historian program with grade schoolers at the River Valley Charter School, said he is planning to work on a program with high school students. He plans to work with Pentucket teacher Keith Sherman and find ways to weave together information about the cemeteries, properties on the historic sites survey, and historic characters in Town, posing questions and encouraging young historians.

Historic Preservation + Affordable Housing

No update

Monthly Minute Histories

Ms. Grammer said that she is still working on the book that will be a collection of minute histories. She said that she will be adding a couple of stories that had not been posted to the website, one about the Crane Pond Wildlife Management Area and another about the poet and social activist Julia Noyes Stickney (1830-1910). She said that she plans to visit the Peabody Essex Museum library to look at a book about Noyes Stickney and to look for historic documents about West Newbury.

Other Business

FY 2024 Historical Commission Officers

The Commission voted unanimously to retain Bob Janes as Chair and CPC representative, and Elisa Grammer as clerk for the next fiscal year.

Town Clerk's Office Proposed Use of CPC Funds for Archives

Ms. Grammer reported that the Town Clerk's office is making strides in organizing Town records and archives and developing a better records management and storage system. Proposed projects include obtaining archival quality folders and bins for record storage, wide scale record digitization, and/or renovating the basement storage room "Dungeon" into a climate controlled archive room. *The Commission unanimously voted to invite the Assistant Clerk to a meeting to discuss these ideas.*

Minutes

The Commission approved the minutes of June 13, 2023 by unanimous vote.

Adjournment

8:51 pm

Meeting Documents

Draft paragraphs for *About Our Town* webpage revisions to include Indigenous people

Schematic of Town Hall painting

Email from Assistant Town Clerk about CPC archives proposal

Email from Linda Schaeffer about the Garden Club plantings at Town Hall

Respectfully submitted,

Elisa Grammer