

West Newbury

Historical Commission Meeting Minutes

Meeting date & place: 7:00 pm, April 17, 2019, 1910 Building

Members Present: Chairman Bob Janes; Dot Cavanaugh; Jennifer Conway; Elisa Grammer.

CPC representative

The Commission voted 4-0-0 in favor of retaining Bob Janes as the Historical Commission's representative on the Community Preservation Committee.

Historic Inventory Phase 2 & Preserving Historic Structures

Chairman Janes has not heard further from the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC), which approved a Phase 2 Historic Sites Survey for the Town with a deadline for response before Town Meeting. Mr. Janes noted that this is not an uncommon problem and that we assume that all's still well with the MHC, pending 1) an affirmative Town vote and 2) our further notification to the MHC that the Town matching funds were approved. Ms. Conway reported that she is working on the Request for Proposals for the Phase 2 inventory.

The Commission noted that reaction to the Phase 1 Survey was generally positive, but some townspeople had raised concerns about recent razing of an antique home. Ms. Grammer pointed out that the Commission can't rush out to save all old buildings and that the Survey is a critical first step to prioritize structures that should be preserved. The Commission further discussed a potential demolition bylaw and a longer-term plan for a façade preservation easement program (along the lines of the proposal for a conservation easement for Brown Springs Farm) to be funded with CPA monies.

Listing of Historic Districts on the National Register of Historic Places

The Commission discussed the proposed Department of Interior rule changes that would allow a single large property owner to veto a listing—currently a majority vote of affected property owners is determinative. Ms. Grammer noted that for projects that require a federal environmental impact statement, a listing on the National Register provides some protection against, say a pipeline or other major project. Under the current rule, a majority of villagers could get the listing and protect an area. With the new rule, if a large project sponsor is a majority landowner, that landowner could prevail with its project. Ms. Grammer said that the Training Field was made a state Historic District in 1976 because of concerns about potential widening of Main Street.

The Commission agreed that it should proceed with the listing proposal, and that it could be in the interests of homeowners in potential West Newbury historic areas to support listing as a possible protection against state- or federally-approved construction projects. The Commission also agreed to report to the Town Manager that May 13 works as a date for the Historical Commission to meet with the Selectmen about this.

Julian Steele

With correction of a typo, the Commission approved sending the draft letter provided by Ms. Grammer to the Selectmen proposing a plaque in Old Town Hall honoring Julian Steele. The Commission would also be amenable to addressing this subject with the Selectmen on May 13.

Community Preservation Act (CPA) Funding

The Commission further discussed the recent determination to use CPA historical funds for a ramp for the Library. Mr. Janes stated that at the CPC he voted against this based on several concerns—is new construction an appropriate historical use; shouldn't there be a plan and basis for the proposed cost? Ms. Cavanaugh had understood that the plan was for the library to expand out with building on the patio, which is now infrequently used.

Ms. Grammer observed that members of the Finance Committee who supported a proposed Town Meeting article to cut CPA funding explained this by citing “haphazard” CPA funding. Yet it was the Finance Committee that moved the library ramp cost from the Department of Public Works budget to the CPA historical fund—all without consulting the Historical Commission. Ms. Grammer expressed her view that the solution is not to cut CPA funding, but rather to foster planning and communication among affected groups.

Historic Markers & Historic Minutes Stories

The Commission approved Ms. Grammer's proposed schedule for roll-out of monthly stories (with correction of the spelling of Enoch Noyes' name) and approved the draft story about the Training Field. The Commission also reviewed photos of the Training Field from the collection of Dot Cavanaugh.

Old Town Hall Fire Protection

In light of recent fire damage to Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, the Commission determined to investigate fire protections for Old Town Hall. *Mr. Janes will investigate this.*

Minutes

The Commission voted 4-0-0 to approve minutes of March 20, 2019

Next meeting

May 15, 2019

Adjourn

The Commission adjourned at 7:56 p.m.

Meeting Documents

- Draft Training Field historic minute story
- Draft letter to BOS & Town Manager re Julian Steele
- Proposed schedule for historic minute story roll out

Respectfully submitted,

Elisa Grammer