

ASHFIELD HISTORICAL COMMISSION
THURSDAY, JULY 26, 2012
7:30 PM

PRESENT:

Steve Gougeon, Mollie Babize, Nancy Garvin,
(Tristan Romer, Gerard McGovern not in attendance.)

MINUTES

...of June 28, 2012 were approved.

DEMOLITION DELAY BYLAW

The Commission discussed both the advantages and the concerns of adopting a demolition delay bylaw in Ashfield. Historic buildings are located throughout town, with a magnificent concentration in town center, and they establish a unique identity and character to Ashfield of which citizens are justly proud. Many are associated with significant persons, or with events that are part of our 240+ year history. Losing a building such as the Ashfield House to demolition would leave a huge hole on Main Street and in our community character. A demolition delay bylaw would give the community time to find alternatives to demolition, or at least provide the Commission with some say in what a new structure might look like.

Such a bylaw could apply to any significant building based on age (more than 50 years), whether it is on the National Register of Historic Places or within a historic district, or is important because of architectural style, or is associated with historic persons or events.

There are those who believe such a bylaw would infringe on private property rights. The cost incurred in delay of demolition, not to mention the cost of stabilizing and rehabilitating an old building, could be a hardship on the owner. Designating just the Ashfield Plain Historic District could be perceived as unjustly targeting those residents of the center of town.

The Commission decided to look further into the issue. Chris Skelly of the Massachusetts Historical Commission provided a sample bylaw and a map showing those 128 communities in Massachusetts who have adopted such a regulation. Of those, 109 are east of Worcester. In Franklin County, only Greenfield and Leverett have adopted Demolition Delay bylaws. The Commission will pursue the following questions, and consult further with Chris Skelly to see how other communities have handled the concerns and objections to such a bylaw.

- It is notable that Deerfield doesn't have such a bylaw; what protection (other than direct ownership of buildings) does Historic Deerfield have?
- Has Leverett used their bylaw? If so, how did the FRCOG building inspector and their Historical Commission handle it?
- Do towns who have adopted it apply it just to a historic district, or town-wide? What are the advantages/ disadvantages of each approach?
- What skills would the members of the Historical Commission need to fairly apply this bylaw? What would it take to facilitate decisions on what gets demolished, what gets preserved? And how would Commission members determine what would replace a building, if demolished?
- Would the presence of a demolition delay bylaw have made a difference in the outcome of Sanderson Academy?
- The Commission also noted that the existing inventory of historic buildings, completed in 1986, needs to be updated. Many more buildings would now potentially qualify.
- Is this a municipal or a zoning bylaw? Assuming it is zoning, what is the process for adopting it: do we present it for discussion to the Planning Board, then take it to a (special) town meeting? Would require a two-thirds vote.
- Who is responsible for the cost to landowner? Are there implications for resale?
- What towns have voted against this, and what were their reasons?

Commission members will look into these questions, and Steve will contact Chris Skelly to see if he can meet with us to discuss this further.

MILL SITE ON 116

Nancy reported on a meeting earlier this month with Jacob Engineering and MA DOT at the historic mill site near Bullitt Road, where work will be done to stabilize the embankment to the South River. The mill foundations still do not appear on any map. They have engaged a contractor who is expected to begin work as soon as possible, in order to be finished by September. They were investigating the stream itself to see if an endangered fish was in fact present. Nancy will contact abutter Peter Wiitanan to ask if he will put snow fencing around the mill foundations.

She has discovered some additional mill sites that are not on our inventory, and would like to ask Chris Skelly what the process for listing them is.

WALKING TOUR

Nancy has been working on updating the information, correcting and rewriting as needed, and included a few additional homes that seem significant. She will complete the text, then get it to other members of the Commission to review and edit if necessary. There is a question of audience: is this for Ashfield residents who might be more interested in the lineage of owners, or out-of-towners who would want a more abbreviated tour? Mollie suggested getting new photographs of some of the places, including those not previously included. Can this be ready for distribution by Fall Festival?

FALL FESTIVAL

Discussion about a display for Fall Festival was put off until the August meeting, at which point Mollie will bring in the panels displayed previously and the members will discuss what this exhibit should feature. The September meeting will be dedicated to assembling the display. Nancy suggested moving our table from its previous location next to the information booth to next door to the Historical Society (instead of the Ag. Commission booth). It would be good to find a tent of some sort in case of bad weather.

NEXT MEETING

The next regular meeting will be Thursday, August 23rd, at 7:30 pm.

Meeting adjourned at 8:55 pm

Respectfully submitted by Mollie Babize