

ASHFIELD HISTORICAL COMMISSION
THURSDAY, JANUARY 23, 2014
7:30 PM
AMENDED, APPROVED MINUTES

PRESENT:

Commission members Steve Gougeon, Mollie Babize, Tristan Romer, Gerard McGovern
Nancy Garvin recused herself from the discussion.

Meeting called to order 7:36 pm

PROPOSAL TO PUT WIFI ANTENNAE ON TOWN HALL STEEPLE

Chris Gray would like to provide wireless service to the center of Ashfield. The town hall is the highest point in town from which to distribute service. The goal of his project is to get Select Board approval to connect to network here, install antennas to steeple to provide connection, and provide payment to the town for that connection. He appeared before the Historical Commission to get our assessment of the visual impact on this historic structure.

The Town Hall Building Committee has reviewed the proposal and made some minor edits. All installations would be reversible, attached with straps. Nothing in the building would be changed mechanically. He needs approval from the Select Board to test various types of antennas to see which design would work best. There remain a lot of variables.

He presented renderings of a "worst case scenario" showing three 51" tall antenna attached to posts at the level of the siren and bell. Any antenna would be mounted above the bell deck. This would be a temporary measure until Wired West is able to provide service in Ashfield; the soonest he estimates that would be is four years from now. This might provide better service at a better price for those within a certain range of town center. Chris estimated the area to be served would be the majority of Main Street, the south end of Baptist Corner Road, a portion of those living on the lake, the north end of Norton Hill and South Street. Repeaters could be placed on a pole, powered by solar or wind. Each repeater would need a separate antenna on town hall; the heavy foliage in the area makes it hard to predict the range of service.

Concerns raised by the Commission included physical impact on the structure, such as rot of the posts or wind damage. Antenna would be angled down at three to four degrees, and could be strapped with spacing boards to minimize contact with and strengthen the posts. Nature of the strapping would be subject to the approval of the Building Committee.

Members of the Commission were reluctant to give a blanket approval without knowing exactly which type of antenna would be used; approval would be temporary, while alternatives are tested. Balancing the historical significance of this central town building with the needs of the community is important, but the visual impact appears minimal while the benefit could be substantial to those within range who do not already have DSL. The exact number of people who would benefit should be determined to justify the installation.

The primary concern of the Commission is to prevent damage to the structure itself. The attachment would need to be carefully considered. The Commission also noted that the

perspectives are from street level only; the visual impact might be greater from the common and adjacent hillside, where people gather for events like Fall Festival. The Commission generally approved what was shown, but that any change in the number, size, and location would need to be reviewed, as would the method of strapping.

Mollie Babize moved to support the proposal as shown, with conditions. As read to the Select Board, the motion was:

Based on the balance of the benefit to the citizens of Ashfield vs. the long-term impact to one of the central historic structures of the town, the Historical Commission approves the proposed WiFi antennas based on the following conditions:

1. that it is in keeping with the proposal to minimize the visual impact of the installations;
2. that the installation will minimize the structural impact on the building (with input from the Town Hall Building Committee);
3. that the integration of the color of the assemblies (the antenna and mounting brackets) are in keeping with the existing structure;
4. that any changes in the number, size or location of the antennas be reviewed for approval;
5. that a removal strategy should include repair to any damage done to the structure if and when the antennas are removed.

Tristan Romer seconded; the motion was approved unanimously.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Historical Commission will be held Monday, 17 February 2014.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:02 pm

Submitted by Mollie Babize